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SUBVERSIVES

THE FBI'S
WAR ON

STUDENT

RADICALS,

AND REAGAN'S
RISE TO
POWER

SETH ROSENFELD

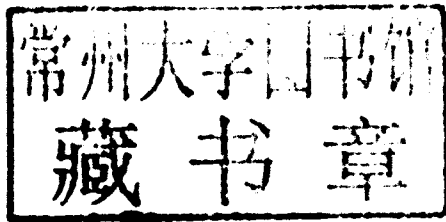
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"Encyclopedic and compelling." —*The New Yorker*

PICADOR

Subversives

The FBI's War on Student Radicals,
and Reagan's Rise to Power



Seth Rosenfeld

Picador

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

New York

For my teachers

For my parents

For Heidi

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition as follows:

Rosenfeld, Seth, 1956–

Subversives : the FBI's war on student radicals, and Reagan's rise to power / Seth Rosenfeld.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-374-25700-2

1. Student movements—California—Berkeley—History. 2. College students—Political activity—California—Berkeley—History. 3. University of California, Berkeley—Students—History. 4. Reagan, Ronald. 5. Subversive activities—California—Berkeley—History. 6. United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation. 7. California—Politics and government—1951– I. Title.

LD760 .R67 2012

378.L'9810979467—dc23

2011041204

Picador ISBN 978-1-250-03338-3

Picador books may be purchased for educational, business, or promotional use. For information on bulk purchases, please contact Macmillan Corporate and Premium Sales Department at 1-800-221-7945, extension 5442, or write specialmarkets@macmillan.com.

First published in the United States by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

First Picador Edition: August 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SETH ROSENFELD was for many years an investigative reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, where his article about the FBI and the Free Speech Movement won seven national awards, including the Eugene S. Pulliam First Amendment Award from the Society of Professional Journalists, the Freedom of Information Award from Investigative Reporters and Editors, the Edward Willis Scripps Award for Distinguished Service to the First Amendment, from the Scripps Howard Foundation; the Iris Molotsky Award for Excellence in Coverage of Higher Education from the American Association of University Professors, the James Aronson Award from Hunter College of the City College of New York, the Joseph L. Brechner Freedom of Information Award from the University of Florida, and a special citation from Harvard University's Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting. Rosenfeld has also received a Mencken Award from the Free Press Association for exposing police misconduct, and a George Polk Award for articles revealing Dow Corning Corporation's cover-up of manufacturing defects in silicone gel breast implants. He holds a BA in journalism from UC Berkeley, where he began his career at the *Daily Californian* student newspaper. His freelance articles have been published in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Harper's*. He lives in San Francisco.

Additional Praise for *Subversives*

- “A masterpiece of historical reconstruction and narrative propulsion.”
—*Bookforum*
- “An important book about a key turning point in twentieth-century America.”
—*The Boston Globe*
- “A brilliant and eye-opening account of the era.”
—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
- “Stunning revelations.”
—NPR’s *On the Media*
- “The story the FBI didn’t want told.”
—*Guernica*
- “A scathing, convincingly detailed, and evocative indictment.”
—*Booklist* (starred review)
- “Vivid and unsettling.”
—*The New Orleans Times-Picayune*
- “Sad, sordid, and unsettling.”
—*The Cleveland Plain Dealer*
- “Fiercely reported.”
—*New York* magazine
- “Rosenfeld has an agenda in this book of patience and passion: setting straight a previously hidden—and consequential—record. . . . Chilling.”
—*The Christian Science Monitor*
- “A new and encompassing perspective . . . Well-paced and wide-ranging.”
—*San Francisco Chronicle*
- “Moves along with vigor, enlivened by deft portraits of major and minor characters and the many battles, literal and figurative, they fought.”
—*The Daily Beast*
- “Kaleidoscopic . . . masterfully researched.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- “Narrative nonfiction at its best.”
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

The most beautiful thing in the world is the freedom of speech. -Mario Savio, quoting Diogenes

The university is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas. -Clark Kerr

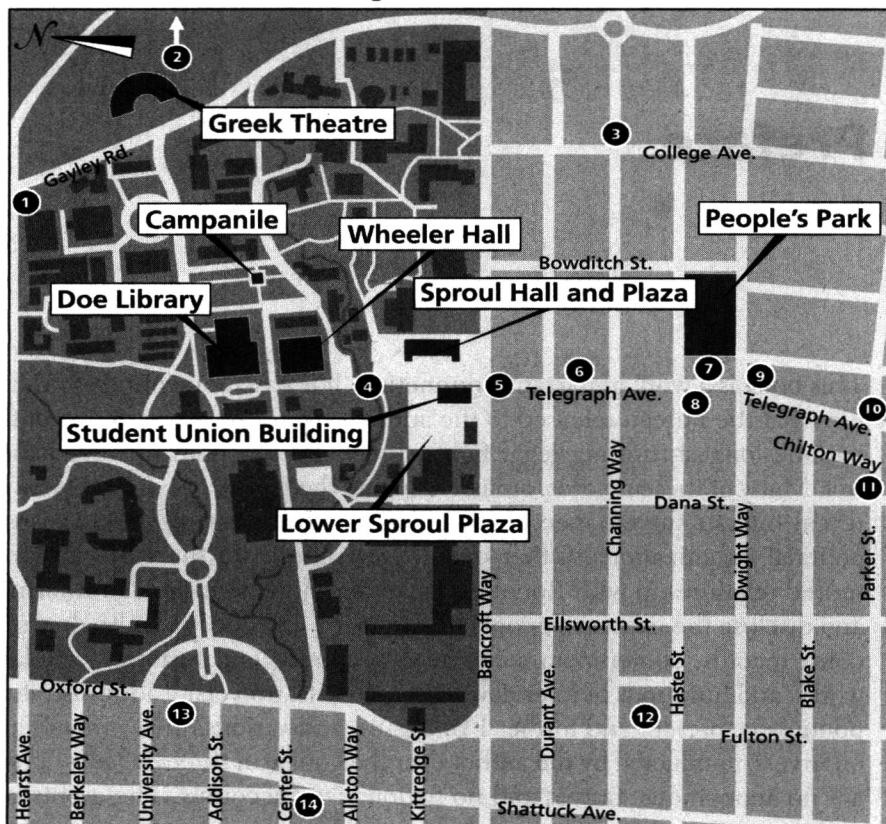
Obey the prescribed rules or pack up and get out. -Ronald Reagan

This presents the bureau with an opportunity . . . -J. Edgar Hoover

Preface

This book is a work of narrative nonfiction. It is based on confidential FBI files that the bureau released to the author only as the result of one of the nation's longest-running legal fights under the Freedom of Information Act. Many of these records, amassed during the tenure of J. Edgar Hoover, reveal bureau surveillance of law-abiding citizens and efforts to disrupt political organizations. Other documents illuminate the FBI's long obscured relationship with Ronald Reagan and his activities as an informer, and disclose the names of people he informed on. The book also draws on court records, contemporaneous news accounts, oral histories, scholarly works, and hundreds of interviews with activists, university administrators, politicians, present and former FBI agents, and various other officials and observers, conducted by the author over the course of three decades. There are no anonymous sources and no fictionalized accounts. The events and dialogue recounted herein are taken directly from this record.

Berkeley in the 1960s



- 1 Founders' Rock
- 2 Radiation Laboratory
- 3 Fraternity Row
- 4 Sather Gate
- 5 Bancroft Strip
- 6 Robbie's Cafeteria, 2379 Telegraph Ave.
- 7 Caffe Mediterraneo, 2475 Telegraph Ave.
- 8 Cody's Books, 2454 Telegraph Ave.
- 9 Granma's Bookstore, 2509 Telegraph Ave.
- 10 Burning police car, May 15, 1969
- 11 William Rundle, Jr., shot May 15, 1969
- 12 Vietnam Day Committee headquarters, 2407 Fulton St.
- 13 University Hall, office of UC president Clark Kerr
- 14 FBI Berkeley resident agency, 2150 Shattuck Ave.

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Subversives

Prologue: A Meeting at the Governor's Mansion

Curtis O. Lynum, the special agent in charge of the FBI's San Francisco field office, rang the bell by the front door of the governor's mansion in Sacramento. By his side stood Glenn A. Harter, who was his top domestic security agent. They had been summoned by the new governor, Ronald Reagan.

Waiting on the portico of the century-old grand Victorian that gray Monday morning in January 1967, Lynum felt some trepidation. He admired Reagan and had looked forward to meeting him, but secrecy was crucial. He was carrying confidential information about the student protests that were disrupting the University of California's Berkeley campus and making headlines across the country. He had intelligence about Mario Savio, who had been a leader of the Free Speech Movement and was Berkeley's most notorious campus agitator, and Clark Kerr, the president of the university.

Reagan had been sworn into office just two weeks earlier, and within days contacted the FBI and requested help with "the Berkeley situation." Lynum got the call at the San Francisco field office. He immediately notified J. Edgar Hoover at headquarters and recommended against meeting with Reagan—the controversy at the university was just too politically sensitive—but the director personally ordered him to go ahead. The Boss had taken a special interest in the rising conservative star who had vowed to clean up the "mess" at Berkeley.

During a fiercely contested gubernatorial campaign, Reagan had seized on the problem of campus unrest and it had become his hottest issue. Back when he was in school at Eureka College, in Illinois, he had joined in a student strike, and even helped lead it, but these Berkeley protests were different. He was disgusted with the sit-ins, the strikes, and the pickets put on by the Free Speech Movement, and the drugs and sex at the dance held by the Vietnam Day Committee in a campus gymnasium to

promote antiwar protests. He declared that “beatniks, radicals, and filthy speech advocates” were proof of a “morality and decency gap” at the center of the state’s Democratic Party. His message resonated: he won votes from citizens who saw the turbulence at Berkeley as a symbol of all that was ailing their country, an America facing threats from enemies abroad and rising taxes, racial strife, and generational conflict at home. Reagan defeated the incumbent Democrat, Edmund G. “Pat” Brown, in a landslide that left the state’s Democratic Party a wreck and instantly made Reagan a national political figure.

Hoover welcomed Reagan’s victory. For years, he had been frustrated by what classified FBI reports called “subversive” activities at the University of California’s flagship campus. Berkeley had been the kind of institution that exemplified the best of American values: Here was a public university that offered a tuition-free education rivaling those offered by Harvard, Princeton, or Yale; employed a constellation of Nobel laureates; and held many millions of dollars in government research contracts. But even as the university was helping the nation win World War II by overseeing the development of the atomic bomb, Hoover’s agents were investigating Berkeley students and professors suspected of spying for the Soviet Union. In the Cold War atmosphere of the late forties and early fifties, the director’s concern about the school had grown when scores of faculty members refused to sign a special loyalty oath for university employees. So far, the sixties were turning out to pose an even greater challenge to authority, with the campus generating one provocation after another—that “vicious” essay question about the FBI, the protest against the House Un-American Activities Committee at San Francisco City Hall, the Free Speech Movement, the troop train protests. The old Communist Party had been bad enough, but now there was the New Left, the hippies, the Black Panthers, and Allen Ginsberg. Hoover and Clyde Tolson, his second in command at the bureau and his most intimate companion, saw Berkeley as the vortex of a youth movement fueled by “free love,” drugs, and a general disrespect for authority spreading all too quickly to other campuses. Stepping up its efforts there, the bureau mounted the most extensive covert operations the FBI is known to have undertaken in any college community.

Those secret operations—and their far-ranging impact politically and culturally—are a central concern of this book.

The FBI has long denied investigating the university as an institution, and that much is true. But a legal challenge brought by this book’s author pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, over the course of twenty-

seven years, forced the bureau to release more than 300,000 pages of its confidential records concerning individuals, organizations, and events on and around the campus during the Cold War, from the 1940s through the 1970s. This is the most complete record of FBI activities at any college ever released. The documents reveal that FBI agents amassed dossiers on hundreds of students and professors and on members of the Board of Regents; established informers within student groups, the faculty, and the highest levels of the university's administration; and gathered intelligence from wiretaps, mail openings, and searches of Berkeley homes and offices in the dead of night.

In court papers, the FBI maintained that its activities were lawful and intended to protect civil order and national security. But the records show bureau officials used intelligence gleaned from these clandestine operations not only to enforce the law, or to prevent violence, or to protect national security. As a federal appeals court ruled in ordering the release of the records, the bureau's activities came to focus on political rather than law enforcement aims. And as U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel found, "The records in this case go [to] the very essence of what the government was up to during a turbulent, historic period of time."

In response to this author's prior reporting, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III acknowledged that the bureau's surveillance and harassment of professors and students at the university during the Cold War was inappropriate. "Such investigations are wrong and anti-democratic, and past examples are a stain on the FBI's greater tradition of observing and protecting the freedom of Americans to exercise their First Amendment rights," Mueller declared. "Any repeat of such abuses will substantially reduce public confidence in the FBI and therefore undercut our ability to combat crime and protect our country against terrorism and espionage. For these reasons, I will tolerate no such undertakings in today's FBI."

FBI documents show that bureau officials misled a president by sending the White House information the bureau knew to be false; mounted a covert campaign to manipulate public opinion about campus events and embarrass university officials; collaborated with the head of the CIA to harass students; ran a secret program to fire professors whose political views were deemed unacceptable; and made common cause with Hugh Burns, the head of the state senate's un-American activities committee, instead of investigating allegations from organized crime sources in his home district of Fresno that he had taken payoffs and secretly owned a brothel.

Hoover had been trying to stifle dissent at Berkeley for years. But Governor Brown, the liberal Democrat elected in 1958 and again in 1962, had

been unresponsive to Hoover's concerns about the university. Worse yet, he had betrayed Hoover's trust when the bureau sought to work with him covertly against the Free Speech Movement. In Reagan, however, the FBI director finally had an ally. Like Hoover, Reagan saw the Berkeley campus as a breeding ground for radicalism, where ungrateful students and insubordinate faculty used state resources to engage in anti-American protests. In their eyes, Savio was a "ringleader," and Kerr was, at the least, unwilling or unable to take control, and maybe a dangerous subversive himself.

Agents Lynum and Harter were surprised when the official who greeted them at the door of the governor's mansion told them Reagan would receive them upstairs in his bedroom. As they climbed the winding stairway to the master suite, Lynum hoped Reagan had picked the unusual meeting place for the sake of discretion. Lynum had warned Hoover that if reporters discovered the FBI was secretly helping Reagan stifle campus protests, it would embarrass the bureau—something Hoover hated more than anything else.

Discretion was not the only reason Reagan had chosen the unusual meeting place. As the two FBI men were admitted to the governor's bedchamber they found him propped up with pillows in a four-poster bed, suffering from a bad case of the flu. Reagan wore red pajamas, a muffler around his throat, and a robe. The covers were piled with stacks of official documents, and all around the bed stood Reagan's aides in suits and ties.

Lynum introduced himself and Harter, congratulated Reagan on his election, and held out his business card. The governor took the white rectangle, thanked them for coming, and got to the point: Reagan said he was "damned mad" that campus officials had allowed the demonstrations to continue. At one recent protest, students had even burned him in effigy. Pulling his robe closer, he said he intended to "straighten out" the university and was hoping the FBI could tell him what he was up against.

Lynum hesitated. Then, apologetically, he reminded Reagan that Hoover had agreed to the meeting on the condition that it would be just with Reagan and Lieutenant Governor Robert Finch. Lynum did not say so, but the director was concerned that other witnesses might expose the bureau's involvement.

The governor coughed and looked around the room at his aides. "Well, you heard him, boys," he said. "We'll follow the FBI's rules." Once they were gone, Lynum swore Reagan to secrecy, as Hoover had instructed, and during the next forty-five minutes the agents briefed him about the trouble at Berkeley.

Lynum had plenty of information to share. The FBI's files on Mario Savio, the brilliant philosophy student who was the spokesman for the Free Speech Movement, were especially detailed. Savio had a debilitating stutter when speaking to people in small groups, but when standing before a crowd and condemning the administration's latest injustice he spoke with divine fire. His words had inspired students to stage what was the largest campus protest in American history. Newspapers and magazines depicted him as the archetypal "angry young man," and it was true that he embodied a student movement fueled by anger at injustice, impatience for change, and a burning desire for personal freedom. Hoover ordered his agents to gather intelligence they could use to ruin his reputation or otherwise "neutralize" him, impatiently ordering them to expedite their efforts.

Hoover's agents had also compiled a bulging dossier on the man Savio saw as his enemy: Clark Kerr. As campus dissent mounted, Hoover came to blame the university president more than anyone else for not putting an end to it. Kerr had led UC to new academic heights, and he had played a key role in establishing the system that guaranteed all Californians access to higher education, a model adopted nationally and internationally. But in Hoover's eyes, Kerr confused academic freedom with academic license, coddled Communist faculty members, and failed to crack down on "young punks" like Savio. Hoover directed his agents to undermine the esteemed educator in myriad ways. He wanted Kerr removed from his post as university president. As he bluntly put it in a memo to his top aides, Kerr was "no good."

Reagan listened intently to Lynum's presentation, but he wanted more—much more. He asked for additional information on Kerr, for reports on liberal members of the Board of Regents who might oppose his policies, and for intelligence reports about any upcoming student protests. Just the week before, he had proposed charging tuition for the first time in the university's history, setting off a new wave of protests up and down the state. He told Lynum he feared subversives and liberals would attempt to misrepresent his effort to establish fiscal responsibility, and that he hoped the FBI would share information about any upcoming demonstrations against him, whether on campus or at his press conferences. It was Reagan's fear, according to Lynum's subsequent report, "that some of his press conferences could be stacked with 'left wingers' who might make an attempt to embarrass him and the state government."

Lynum said he understood his concerns, but following Hoover's instructions he made no promises. Then he and Harter wished the ailing