

The Evolution of Political Theory in Berkeley in a Climate of Experiment and Secession

Emily Hauptmann, *Western Michigan University*

The portraits of the Berkeley School presented by other contributors to this symposium foreground the intellectual and political commitments its members shared. My focus, however, is less on these shared commitments and more on the institutional climate at Berkeley in the 1950s and 1960s that prompted them to take shape. For both the department and the university, this was a time of rapid growth, unusually favorable to the creation of new things.¹ Political theorists at Berkeley had rare opportunities to define themselves as a group and in relation to political science during this time. Their first attempts at self-definition tried to claim a central place for political theory in political science in alliance with those crafting theoretical approaches to international relations, comparative politics, public administration, and political behavior. When these attempts ran aground, some turned to creating a space for themselves and like-minded colleagues outside the political science department. Most notably, Sheldon Wolin and John Schaar, along with several junior colleagues, launched a 1967 effort to secede from the political science department to form a separate department of political theory. Although he did not support Wolin and Schaar's effort, Norman Jacobson also pulled away from the political science department for a few years in the mid-1960s.² What some now call the Berkeley School emerged from the experimental eclecticism and secessionist spirit of this turbulent period. In this article, I sketch elements of the institutional environment at Berkeley in the 1950s and 1960s that nourished each mood. I then discuss the imagined space for the study of political theory at the heart of a proposal for a separate department of political theory and what it adds to our understanding of the Berkeley School.

When Berkeley political theorists had their first opportunities to define themselves intellectually, they affirmed their connection to political science rather than a wish to separate from it. Several substantial Rockefeller Foundation grants to the department provided the earliest institutional and financial occasion for doing so. In 1956 and then again in 1961, Rockefeller awarded two \$200,000 grants to the department to support "political theory and theoretical aspects of international relations," mainly to provide release time for research and writing for younger faculty.³ The first of these grants gave those who taught political theory at Berkeley in the mid-1950s (i.e., Eugene Burdick, Norman Jacobson, and Sheldon Wolin) an early impetus to articulate what "political theory" was in a

way that made sense to them, their colleagues, the administration, and the foundation.⁴ Being involved in deciding what fell inside or outside of the bounds of "political theory," as well as applying for the grant funds, first spurred theorists at Berkeley to think about the type of group they might be.⁵

As both Wolin and Jacobson would later recall, the sense of what "political theory" meant during this time was eclectic or diffuse—so much so that it was allied with rather than opposed to early studies of political behavior. For example, Burdick, who taught political theory at Berkeley from the early 1950s until his death in 1965, coedited an early collection of essays on voting behavior.⁶ Jacobson expressed support for what would become *The American Voter* project and especially for one of its authors, his former Berkeley colleague, Warren Miller.⁷ For his part, Miller (1988) later recalled that both Jacobson and Wolin had belonged to his small intellectual circle during his brief time at Berkeley.⁸ Wolin recalled endorsing the hiring of another scholar of political behavior, Herbert McClosky, in 1960 after Miller's departure (Wolin 2005). Schaar, who joined the faculty in the late 1950s, coauthored several articles with McClosky (e.g., McClosky and Schaar 1965). Michael Rogin (hired in 1963) was initially understood by his colleagues to be a scholar of political behavior as well. The sharp critique of behaviorism that many now see as a defining feature of the Berkeley School, therefore, did not take shape until the late 1960s. In the 1950s and early 1960s, interests in "theory" and "political behavior" were not at odds but rather jointly affirmed by many ambitious younger scholars who appeared to be thoroughly at home in Berkeley's political science department.

So, what happened? How did the optimistic eclecticism of the late 1950s and early 1960s give way to the spirit of secession so quickly? For as short a piece as this one, "political conflict and its reverberations through a rapidly changing university" is probably the best answer. As those who we now call Berkeley political theorists were drawn to take positions on the Free Speech Movement (FSM) and then the Antiwar and Reconstitution Movements, their ideas took new democratic and oppositional turns.⁹ Moreover, their sense of whether Berkeley's political science department was the best place for what they wanted to do changed as well.

After more than a decade of rapid growth, questions about what type of an institution Berkeley should be were raised with increasing urgency during the course of the 1960s. Among the many answers offered, the recommendation that it

continue on its current course to becoming a “multiversity” was particularly contentious. The idea, popularized by University of California President Clark Kerr in the early 1960s, compared the postwar research university to a large, diverse city; the days of universities as tightly knit communities, Kerr argued, were over (Kerr 1963/1982). To the political theorists who criticized it, however, the multiversity drifted away from any sense of educational purpose as it moved toward serving the state and corporate interests that fueled its growth. Students (especially undergraduates), they argued, were overlooked and impoverished in this new academic city. Smaller communities were the best

university, greater student participation and decentralization.¹² Such new ventures must have seemed encouraging to the political theorists who found themselves increasingly at odds with many of their former allies in the political science department. Collectively, they seemed to promise that the multiversity might cede a little space to approaches at odds with its defining ethos.

Other aspects of the institutional environment at Berkeley in the 1960s, however, were decidedly less hospitable to secessionist experiments. For instance, several proposed plans for reorganizing the political science department sought to increase

To the political theorists who criticized it, however, the multiversity drifted away from any sense of educational purpose as it moved toward serving the state and corporate interests that fueled its growth.

environments for education; only there was it possible to combine the teaching of tradition with a spirit of experimentation and respect for students (Wolin and Schaar 1967, 69–72/1970).

There were some notable attempts to form such small scholarly communities at odds with the multiversity’s ethic. Berkeley in the 1960s was teeming with educational experiments and ideas for reorganizing academic structures, a few of which almost certainly influenced how particular theorists imagined creating new spaces for what they wanted to do. The small Experimental College was one of the earliest, beginning only a year after the FSM of the mid-1960s.¹⁰ Its organizer, the philosopher Joseph Tussman, constructed a “great books” curriculum around the theme of “cultures in crisis.” Such a curriculum, Tussman argued, best equipped students to take up their “political vocation” as democratic citizens (Trow 1998, 2, 9; Tussman 1969). Although Tussman discouraged students from discussing their political activities in class, the deliberately small size of the Experimental College, as well as its self-conscious refusal to assign grades, set it apart from the multiversity that the FSM had so pointedly criticized. Not only was Jacobson briefly among its faculty (Trow 1998, 83–129; 427, appendix A); Schaar and Wolin also were beginning to articulate commitments similar to Tussman’s “great books” curriculum as well as to his aim that students be educated for their “political vocation” (Wolin 1969; Wolin and Schaar 1967/1970).

In the next few years, other initiatives aimed to advance the FSM’s challenge to university paternalism by granting students more control over many areas of university life, including curricula, administration and governance. For example, a report of a special committee of the Academic Senate, charged with exploring how the university could continue to grow without sacrificing “the traditions of humane learning,” prompted the creation of the Board of Educational Development that allowed faculty and students (with the support of faculty sponsors) to propose topical new courses.¹¹ A more ambitious initiative, the Study Commission on University Governance composed of faculty and students, met throughout 1967; it ultimately recommended a “radical redirection” of the

administrative control, not faculty autonomy. As early as 1964, an administrator noted that the political science department was suffering from “too much democracy” and that some reorganization to contain this might be in order.¹³ Some faculty favored creating a new, smaller College of Social Sciences headed by a powerful dean who would also be a prominent social scientist; and an administrator suggested dividing the department into three groups of fields, each to be led by a vice chair. (This plan put political theory and political behavior in the same group).¹⁴ Although none of these plans to increase administrative control over the faculty came to fruition, they indicate that some planned reorganizations sought to contain the fractiousness of the department rather than give it free rein.

One secessionist plan, however, did succeed in this environment. In 1969, a number of public-administration faculty achieved a long-standing aim to leave political science to form their own Graduate School of Public Affairs (GSPA), despite the objections of many faculty both inside and outside of the department.¹⁵ In several ways, the success of this plan undermined the attempt to form a department of political theory. Not only were these two secessionist efforts unfolding at the same time; Aaron Wildavsky, the leader of one, also played a central part in quashing the other. As chair of the political science department from 1966 to 1969, Wildavsky strongly opposed the 1967 attempt to form a department of political theory (Wildavsky 1992, 88; Wolin 1992; Wolin 2005).¹⁶ Wildavsky then left the department less than two years later for the new school of public affairs, along with a number of his colleagues in public administration. He served as the GSPA’s first dean, a position he held until 1977 (Wildavsky obituary, *In Memoriam*, UCDA).

The archived papers of the university’s upper administration suggest that plans to form this school had been in the works for nearly a decade and that administrators supported them over the objections of several faculty committees. Already in 1960, some political science faculty circulated a proposal to establish a master’s in public administration

program; during the next seven years, as some of these faculty worked particularly with Berkeley’s vice chancellor, the proposal expanded into a plan for a stand-alone professional school.¹⁷ Several faculty committees rejected that proposal in the spring of 1967, citing concerns about the proposed school’s curriculum, the large number of faculty required to staff it, and fueling the perception that Berkeley was growing too quickly.¹⁸

How an intellectual community understands what its members know and do deeply informs its ideas about the institutional spaces in which they are most likely to thrive.

The vice chancellor overrode these objections, however, and the school was formally approved by the regents of the university at the end of 1967. It opened in 1969.

I have focused on the founding of Berkeley’s GSPA not only because it overlapped with the attempt to form a new department of political theory but also because these two efforts represent such starkly contrasting responses to the “multiversity.” On the one hand, faculty advocates for the GSPA emphasized how their proposed school would strengthen the university’s ties to the state. Such a professional school, they argued, would attract students who already held government positions, along with the tuition revenue and prestige they and their government-agency employers promised.¹⁹ By contrast, those who argued for the creation of a separate department of political theory promised the multiversity little beyond possibly alleviating some conflict within the political science department by dividing it up.

Still, this little-known attempt to create a department of political theory marks an important if brief chapter in the history of the Berkeley School even though it did not succeed. But reconstructing what happened in any detail is difficult. For one, the episode left a faint documentary trail; a draft proposal from the summer of 1967 is my most substantial source for how its architects imagined this new space for political theory.²⁰ And many who took part in it also did not wish to discuss it at length.²¹ Nevertheless, with the notable exception of Jacobson, at least four political theory faculty and many graduate students designed or supported this effort at the time.²²

How an intellectual community understands what its members know and do deeply informs its ideas about the institutional spaces in which they are most likely to thrive. Those Berkeley theorists who sought to create a better institutional space for political theory outside of the political science department, therefore, also were thinking about how they saw themselves becoming a more distinct intellectual community. The space they imagined was, for one, interdisciplinary.²³ The proposed undergraduate and graduate programs required substantial coursework in other departments, including history, philosophy, political science, sociology, and anthropology. Faculty from departments other than political science also were recruited to join; among those who were prepared to do so were Peter Dale Scott (English) and Philip Selznick (Sociology) (Scott 2005; Wolin 2005). The department of political

theory also was imagined as a space devoted to small-scale instruction—small seminars for undergraduate majors and graduate students, individually designed programs of study for graduate students. At times, the outlined academic programs that accompanied the proposal emphasized strictly defined points of academic focus. For instance, first-year graduate students were to be examined on a small number of books

determined by faculty (G 2); undergraduate majors were to take an introductory seminar to political theory focused on “one significant work of political theory” (U 1).²⁴ However, along with such narrowly specified points of focus, the draft programs also stressed students’ responsibility for crafting their own individualized programs of study and appearing before their teachers as scholars in their own right.²⁵ Only a small, tightly knit intellectual community—the proposal implies—could hope to realize such contrasting intellectual imperatives.²⁶

Other contributors to this symposium comment more extensively than I have done here on the core ideas and tenets that they believe characterized the Berkeley School. As I have suggested, however, there are important connections between the defining ideas of a group and how it imagines a good institutional space in which to develop them. Reflecting on how a department of political theory was envisioned as an academic space—along with all that prompted this secessionist vision—adds to our retrospective picture of a “Berkeley School.”

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517000610>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I presented an earlier version of this paper at a 2014 workshop on the postwar social sciences at the London School of Economics. Erik Freye, Dean Mathiowetz and an anonymous reviewer gave this version careful readings; I hope I’ve done their suggestions justice. I thank the Rockefeller Archive Center for permission to cite from their collections. ■

NOTES

1. In 1951, the political science department had 25 faculty members (15 of whom were full-time); by 1966, it had 50. For 1951, see Report of the Chairman, Department of Political Science to the President for the Academic Years 1948–49, 1949–50, 1950–51, Records of the UC Berkeley Political Science Department. For 1966, see Joseph E. Black, 11.9.66. RAC, RF, R.G. 1.2, Series 200S, Box 568, folder 4860.
2. Jacobson briefly joined the faculty of a small, new college within Berkeley and took a partial leave from the department to work as a psychotherapist at Berkeley’s Student Health Center from 1965 to 1970 (Jacobson 1999).
3. UCA, OCR, Box 38, folder 30, Rockefeller Grant for Research in “Political Theory and the Theoretical Aspects of International Relations.” See also the Rockefeller Foundation’s records of its grant to Berkeley. RAC, RF, R.G. 1.2, Series 200S, Box 567, folders 4855–4858, and Box 568, folders 4859–4860.

4. The Rockefeller Foundation also drew Jacobson into other field-defining groups, such as a 1950s Social Science Research Council (SSRC) committee charged with awarding research grants in “legal and political philosophy” to advanced graduate students and younger faculty (Hauptmann 2006, 645–6).
5. Abbott discusses a similar development (1999, 34–79), noting that a conception of the Chicago school of sociology first gelled in the 1950s when the department engaged in a Ford Foundation–funded “self-study.”
6. See Burdick and Brodbeck (1959). He was also a fellow at the new Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences in Menlo Park in 1954–55.
7. Miller taught at Berkeley from 1954 to 1956. For Jacobson’s endorsement of a broad conception of political theory, see Minutes of 1954 SSRC Conference cited in Hauptmann (2006, 646). For his support for Warren Miller specifically and survey research more generally, see Jacobson to Kenneth W. Thompson, Division of Social Sciences, Rockefeller Foundation, 9.27.57. RAC, RF, R.G. 1.2, Series 200S, Box 583, folder 4993.
8. I thank Herb Weisberg for directing me to this reference.
9. The descriptions of Berkeley political science courses written by students from 1964 to 1968 document the increasingly deep political divisions in the department. See UCA, SLATE, 1964–1968. Bilorusky (1972) provides a thorough account of the Reconstitution movement, a comprehensive effort that unfolded during several months in 1970 to reconceive the structure and purpose of UC Berkeley.
10. The Experimental College admitted its first class of 150 undergraduates in 1965; it remained open through 1969. Students who took part in the College remember being discouraged from discussing the FSM in their classes and warned not to miss class to take part in on-campus protests (Trow 1998, 48, 68, 331, 348).
11. Letter to department chairs, 4.26.65. In UCA, SCE (the Muscatine Report), 1965–66, Box 1, Correspondence Folder. The Board of Educational Development (BED) was established in 1966. Norman Jacobson designed one of the two courses taught in the political science department. Entitled “Film: Towards the Expression of an Idea of Freedom,” it was offered in the fall of 1968. See UCA, BED, Box 2, folders 4 and 5.
12. “The Culture of the University: Governance and Education.” January 15, 1968. Wolin was a member of the Study Commission.
13. UCA, OCR, Box 78, folder 35, Social Science Council, “A Proposal for the Establishment of College of Social Sciences at Berkeley,” 6.11.64; Dean Fretter’s notes on “Proposal,” 7.7.64.
14. UCA, OCR, Box 76, folder 5, Political Science, 1962–1966; Dean Fretter’s notes re: Chairmanship of Political Science, 3.22.65; Dean Fretter’s notes re: Conference with Department of Political Science, 4.5.65.
15. The school still exists, although it is now called the Graduate School of Public Policy.
16. Wildavsky (1992, 88) alluded briefly to these events: “What proved to be impossible, at least for me, was keeping departmental conflicts wholly apart from campus-wide disputes....The cost was the departure of two distinguished political theorists [i.e., Schaar and Wolin], a great loss, which I counted then and count now as a failure.” I thank Jim Wiley for directing me to this article.
17. UCA, OPR, Box 85, folder 12, Departments of Instruction: Political Science: Berkeley, “Proposal for a new program in Public Administration leading to the degree of Master of Public Administration,” Political Science faculty, 5.9.1960; Professors of Political Science to Vice Chancellor Connick, 11.2.66.
18. UCA, OPR, Box 85, folder 12, Departments of Instruction: Political Science: Berkeley, Academic Senate Committee on Educational Policy Report, 2.22.67; Graduate Council to Vice Chancellor Connick, 4.21.67.
19. These points are made in Professors of Political Science to Vice Chancellor Connick, 11.2.66. See note 16 for full citation.
20. This 14-page undated draft proposal is titled, “Proposal for a Department of Political Theory.” Series 6, box 14, folder 6 (UC Berkeley Study Commission on University Governance), Reinhard Bendix Papers, GIEC. I thank Robert Adcock for discovering this proposal and sending me a copy. I also thank Brian Keough of Special Collections at SUNY for helping me navigate the new arrangement of the Bendix Papers. The proposal can be viewed by following the supplementary material link.
21. The proposed department is mentioned in oral histories and personal communications with some of the faculty and students involved (cited throughout); retrospective references to the failed proposal in some published works (e.g., Sarf 2002, 157–60); and documents from the next few years (e.g., the 1969 “Political Science and Berkeley: An Invitation to a Discussion” and “Dear Prospective Student,” an undated letter from the Graduate Association of Students of Politics [GASP]) (JEC, UCA). The most substantial is the 14-page proposal cited in note #20 here.
22. Although it was led by Schaar and Wolin, recently hired faculty members Hanna Pitkin (hired in 1966) and Michael Rogin (hired in 1963) also participated. For Pitkin’s pointed rejection of the notion of a “Berkeley School,” see Mathiwetz (2016, 285).
23. The name for the proposed department varies among sources. Sometimes it is called “political and social theory”; other times, simply “political theory.” Peter Dale Scott, a professor of English literature who supported the secession, remarked that planning to call the proposed department “political theory” especially rankled other faculty in political science. “Department of Weird Alternatives,” Scott said ironically, would have been an acceptable name; anything with “political” or “politics,” however, was not (Scott 2005). Jack Citrin (2005), who had been a graduate student in political science at Berkeley in the 1960s and later joined the faculty, remarked that some members of the department may have disliked the idea of the proposed department calling itself “political theory” because the name implied that everyone else in political science was atheoretical.
24. The proposal is divided into three parts. The first eight pages make the case for why political theory and political science should be academically separate units. These are followed by two- and four-page overviews of the proposed undergraduate and graduate programs in a department of political theory. I preface page citations from these with “U” and “G.”
25. Most notably, the requirement that third-year graduate students give “two public lectures” in the course of the academic year—lectures that “faculty will consider it a duty to attend.” “Proposal for a Department of Political Theory,” G 3–4, series 6, box 14, folder 6, Bendix Papers, GIEC.
26. “The object of the oral [i.e., the exam given to first-year graduate students] is not to test the student’s mastery of a few books, but to see how he copes with theoretical subjects, and to get a sense of his intellectual style and ability.” GIEC, series 6, box 14, folder 6, “Proposal for a Department of Political Theory,” G 2, series 6, box 14, folder 6, Bendix Papers, GIEC.

REFERENCES

Archival Collections

GIEC: German Intellectual Émigrés Collection, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, The University at Albany, State University of New York.

RAC: Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

RF: Rockefeller Foundation Records.

UCA: University of California Archives, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

BED: Board of Educational Development Records

JEC: *Journal of Educational Change* Records

OCR: Office of the Chancellor Records

OPR: Office of the President Records

SCE: Select Committee on Education Records (the Muscatine Report), 1965–66

SLATE: SLATE Supplements to the General Catalogue, 1964–1968

UCDA: University of California History Digital Archive (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/uchistory>).

Published Works, Oral Histories, and Personal Communications

Abbott, Andrew. 1999. *Department & Discipline: Chicago Sociology at One Hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bilorusky, John A. 1972. *Reconstitution at Berkeley: The Quest for Self-Determination*. PhD Dissertation. Berkeley: University of California.

Burdick, Eugene and Arthur J. Brodbeck (eds.). 1959. *American Voting Behavior*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Citrin, Jack. 2005. Conversation with the author. July 27. Berkeley, CA.

“The Culture of the University: Governance and Education.” 1968. Report of the Study Commission on University Governance. University of California, Berkeley. January 15. From the Personal Papers of Jeff Lustig.

Hauptmann, Emily. 2006. “From Opposition to Accommodation: How Rockefeller Foundation Grants Redefined Relations between Political Theory and Social Science in the 1950s.” *American Political Science Review* 100 (4): 643–9.

Jacobson, Norman. 1999, 2000. *Tape-recorded interviews by the author*. Reno, NV, November 6 and January 4. *American Political Science Association Oral History Archive*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Library.

Kerr, Clark. 1963/1982. *The Uses of the University*, 3rd edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mathiwetz, Dean (ed.) 2016. *Hanna Fenichel Pitkin: Politics, Justice, Action*. New York: Routledge Innovators in Political Thought.

Profession Symposium: *The “Berkeley School” of Political Theory*

- McClosky, Herbert and John H. Schaar. 1965. “Psychological Dimensions of Anomy.” *American Sociological Review* 30: 14–40.
- Miller, Warren E. 1988. *Tape-recorded interview by Heinz Eulau. Scottsdale, AZ, February 11. American Political Science Association Oral History Archive.* Lexington: University of Kentucky Library.
- “Political Science at Berkeley: An Invitation to a Discussion.” 1969. No author. From the personal papers of Jeff Lustig.
- Sarf, Hal. 2002. *Masters and Disciples.* Berkeley, CA: Center for Humanities and Contemporary Culture & Regent Press.
- Scott, Peter Dale. 2005. Telephone conversation with the author. August 19.
- Trow, Katherine Bernhardt. 1998. *Habits of Mind: The Experimental College Program at Berkeley.* Berkeley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies Press.
- Tussman, Joseph. 1969. *Experiment at Berkeley.* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wildavsky, Aaron. 1992. “On Being a Department Chair.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 25: 83–9.
- Wolin, Sheldon S. 1969. “Political Theory as a Vocation.” *American Political Science Review* 63: 1062–82.
- . 1992. Tape-recorded interview by Nicholas Xenos. Whitethorn, CA, July 10–11. American Political Science Association Oral History Archive. Lexington: University of Kentucky Library.
- . 2005. Telephone conversation with the author. August 4.
- Wolin, Sheldon S. and John H. Schaar. 1967/1970. “The University Revolution.” Reprinted in *The Berkeley Rebellion and Beyond: Essays on Politics and Education in the Technological Society.* New York: The New York Review of Books, distributed by Random House.