



Jo Freeman. *At Berkeley in the Sixties: The Education of an Activist, 1961-1965.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. xv + 358 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34283-6; \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21622-9.

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When Free Speech Was Young

On October 1, 1964, students at the University of California, Berkeley, sequestered the police car sent to remove civil rights activist Jack Weinberg, who was arrested for defying restrictions on political expression on campus. Today, as celebrations mark the fortieth anniversary of the Free Speech Movement (FSM), scholars and participants continue to debate and contest its meaning.[1] Was the FSM a final skirmish of the Cold War? Did it signal the liberalization of the educational system? Was it a prefigurative process that augured the radical student and antiwar movements? Or can the FSM be viewed as a facet of the civil rights movement, as Mario Savio's most famous speech declared?

Jo Freeman's memoir, *At Berkeley in the Sixties: The Education of an Activist 1961-1965*, is a welcome contribution to the literature. Few book-length studies have been published on this historical period, and most of the important ones, particularly Max Heirich's *The Spiral of Conflict: Berkeley 1964*, were researched and written during the events themselves or in their immediate aftermath. Yet dedicated veterans and scholars have worked to preserve memories, reinterpret this history, and link it to the present, as shown by the email discussion lists and the anniversary conferences. One of the best recent books, the anthology *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*, resulted from a special panel held at the Organization of American Historians after Savio's death in 1996. A large part of the excellent feature-length documentary, *Berkeley in the Sixties*, covers this period. Archives have assembled extensive

print and visual documents, most notably the Bancroft Library's Free Speech Movement Digital Archive and Oral History Project.[2] At UC Berkeley, you can even walk up the Mario Savio Steps or have an espresso at the Free Speech Caf  .

Freeman's memoir provides a blow-by-blow narrative of events seen through the lens of an FSM "moderate." Indeed, despite her participation in sit-ins and her repeated arrests, Freeman emerges from the story as a moderate who, contrary to "Rumor Central," remained a dedicated member of the movement's core and subsequently a life-long political activist.

At Berkeley in the Sixties gives us but a small glimpse of the author's personal background. We learn about Helen, her remarkable unwed mother from Alabama, who had it "right on race" (p. xxx). We understand how Freeman's antiracism stemmed from values her mother instilled and from the fact that, for practical reasons, she was sent to an all-black school. Yet we know nothing, for example, about how it felt to be what was labeled an "illegitimate" child in the 1950s. In general, we remain frustrated, wanting to know more about Freeman, the person.

This book began as a memoir and ended as the study of only a small chunk of the author's political itinerary. I categorize it as a "study" because it is about two-thirds history and one-third memoir. The author is particularly qualified to offer us both memoir and scholarly study; Freeman not only witnessed and participated in

key movements of the 1960s and 70s, but she has also spent much of her career as an analyst of social movements and public policy.

Even the memoir section feels less like the recollections of an activist and more like the observations of a student of the social sciences. For instance, Freeman noted the sociological profiles of protesters at the sites of her own arrest (p. 100). Her research is equally meticulous and extensive. Her impressive sources include twenty-eight of her own interviews and fifty-five other interviews. She has also consulted FBI files, legal materials, video footage, and the private files of several participants, including her own; the latter show her to be a world-class political pack rat (I say this with admiration).

The author's moderate stance appears repeatedly. As we know from her subsequent work, Freeman has been a prominent critic of views that depict the world in stark right-left or left-liberal terms. In her work on the women's movement, she single-handedly changed the historiography of the second-wave feminist movement. Freeman advanced a now-common position, one I contest in my own work, that the major cleavage in the women's movement was not political, but rather structural and generational (an "older" and "younger branch," not radical versus reformist or liberationist versus liberal).[3]

Over the years, Freeman has been a maverick within her political generation. By the outset of the FSM, she had long been an active Democrat—her "sin," she says, in the eyes of the movement's leadership (p. 171), many of whom were veterans of the southern civil rights movement. Though Freeman herself had gone to Atlantic City to support the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, she did not share many activists' sentiment that by refusing to seat the MFDP instead of the white supremacist delegation, the "system" (here, Cold War Democrats) lost its final chance. If FSM leaders looked askance at Freeman's Democratic Party connections, it must be understood in this context; the emergent hostility towards liberalism would have warranted explication.

As a "radical civil libertarian," Freeman encouraged an FSM predecessor, SLATE, to sponsor an American Nazi Party leader who was otherwise unable to speak on campus (p. 54). At the same time, she repeatedly broke the law in her civil rights and FSM activism. Freeman struggled over the ethical dilemmas linked to civil disobedience. In one of her few moments of passion, she engages with great philosophers encountered in her university classes, in particular, Socrates. After her first ar-

rest, when her mother threatened to cut off her financial support, Freeman remembers, "Socrates had a greater hold on my mind than Helen did on my pocketbook" (p. 101). She agreed to accept the consequences: "As long as we accept the legitimacy of the state—and I did—we must comply with that judgment, even when we think the punishment is unreasonable" (p. 117). Interestingly FSM graduate student leader Steve Weissman remembers hearing Savio proclaim the opposite: "Mario took on the Socrates question about civil disobedience better than anyone. Mario would ask, 'Should we willingly accept our punishment, as Socrates taught? Absolutely not,' he answered. 'We should not be punished for what we did. We should be honored.'"[4]

In Freeman's view, breaking the law represented a necessary evil forced upon her by intransigent institutions, rather than, as some have described it, a self-righteous act of rebellion.[5] In one of her successful attempts to recreate the atmosphere of the early 1960s, she describes how, for many activists, an arrest caused shame, a point also noted by southern blacks in the civil rights movement. This contrasts with the experience in subsequent generations, when an arrest became a badge of honor (I, for one, was always embarrassed to admit that I had never been arrested).

Other attempts to help us relive events are less successful, particularly her intentional (p. xi) and unfortunate usage of early 60s terms, such as "Red China" and "Negro." The latter is particularly regrettable given the absence of blacks in her account of the FSM. Freeman dispenses with the issue in three short lines: "Racial discrimination, where it existed, was challenged, but since racial minorities were less than 2 percent of the student body, and most of those were foreign students, such challenges had little real-world impact" (p. 34). This response begs the question of why even this two percent apparently did not participate, let alone why a movement so intertwined with the civil rights movement failed to attract more black activists from the larger community.

Within the FSM, Freeman became notorious when she orchestrated the "'right wing' revolt [quotation marks her own]." She devotes several chapters to her version of these events. At one point, she explains, she was among those who wanted to suspend direct action during negotiations with the administration. When the "tabling" (setting up tables in violation of the regulations) continued, she recounts, "I watched all from the sidelines, sorely troubled. I thought it was morally and tactically wrong. I wanted to speak out against the resumption of tabling,

to tell the students why this was not the time for direct action. But I didn't want to give ammunition to an administration whom we did not trust" (p. 186). Instead, she describes how she contacted a faculty member who obtained needed information from President Clark Kerr. She then proceeded to mobilize like-minded activists, "recruiting" and "drafting" various people to vote at a crucial meeting. Freeman believed that student support for the movement was on the wane, and, ever the social scientist, backs this up retrospectively with the results of a survey conducted at the time. Some methodological circumspection would be called for here. I cannot help but wonder whether, had she been present at Jack Weinberg's arrest, she would have supported immobilizing the car, no doubt a minority position among students.

Freeman's version is vital for the historical record, yet I found her description of the "other side" of the controversy more telling. "The FSM took the position that the only rule governing political activity and speech should be the U.S. Constitution," she writes. "[T]his was a brilliant tactic, but it left no room for compromise" (p. 182). Strange rejection from a social movement theorist who recognizes the mobilizing power that lies in the gaps between democratic ideals and practice (p. 285). Or again on the possibility of a revolution on campus: "I thought it was a beautiful vision, but totally out of touch with reality." Freeman concludes the chapter by agreeing with the accusation that Mario Savio made of her: "The difference between you and me ... is that you would settle for a drab victory, while I prefer a brilliant defeat. He was right" (p. 194).

Paradoxically, Freeman's own account makes me happy that she lost this battle; "drab victories" are not enough. The FSM became a spark for freedom movements not just around the nation, but also around the world; for instance, initiators of the May 1968 movement in France, my country of adoption, cite it as an inspiration. As for the second half of the decade, Freeman's sweeping statement appears in her final paragraph, dropped out of nowhere: "By the end of the sixties, radicalism had become an end in itself and had ceased to be self critical; idealism was corrupted into nihilism and the need for action into an urge for destruction" (p. 286).

Since Jo Freeman, aka Joreen, was a pioneering feminist, I initially approached this book assuming I would find a feminist memoir of the sixties, which was indeed Freeman's initial stated goal (p. xv). However, *At Berkeley in the Sixties* is only gently gendered, peppered with observations such as "I not only *never had* a woman pro-

fessor, I never even *saw* one. Worse yet, I didn't notice." (p. 38) As a feminist historian, and one who has criticized the androcentrism of most histories of the prefeminist Sixties, I expected more compensatory history. Freeman, our knight in shining armor, would set the boys straight (I still expect her to do this in her next installment).

Nevertheless, I glean two important observations from Freeman's story. First, this memoir seems to confirm my own assertion that future feminists felt themselves to be full participants in the co-sexual movements of the sixties, despite the rampant sexism. As Freeman shows, Berkeley radicalism in the first half of the 1960s was male-dominated. She recounts how even Suzanne Goldberg, whom she calls the only woman in leadership other than Bettina Aptheker, would offer constructive ideas, but "[h]er suggestions were often picked up by Mario and Jack, who treated them as their own." (p. 173). She tells the extraordinary tale of how Marilyn Noble informed Savio that he would no longer be doing his own housework, and proceeded to become the housemother of "FSM Central" (p. 178). Yet despite such examples, it appears that Freeman and most of the women she portrays considered themselves full partners in this movement. Later, the stock version of the emergence of feminism reduced it to anger at the sexism of left-wing men. For years, the understandable rage on the part of nascent feminists overshadowed the inspirational heritage of these movements for all their participants.

Second, *At Berkeley in the Sixties* helps readers contextualize some of Freeman's early writings. While she has penned numerous scholarly books and articles, no doubt her most influential writing remains the 1972 pamphlet "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" in which she criticizes the early "structureless" women's liberation movement for obscuring an informal, unchecked elite (another position I contest in my own work). From her memoir, however, it seems clear that "Joreen's" position came not from opposing sectarian takeovers or *eminences grises* in the movement, but from a life-long adherence to traditional political procedure. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," deployed repeatedly by certain feminists to curb innovative, utopian, structural experimentation within the movement, has deeper roots in mainstream political parties than in sixties radicalism.[6]

After more than fifty mini-chapters, Freeman devotes the final few to more explicit analysis and transversal issues. These include the interlocking directorates of the Regents, the extent of FBI surveillance, the impact of the FSM on California politics, and the movement's relation-

ship to the Cold War. For instance, Freeman concurs with Governor Pat Brown that the FSM “was one of the main factors in [his] defeat” by Ronald Reagan in 1966. This fairly commonly held view invites speculation about whether the FSM was “responsible” for Reagan’s political ascension and thus offers a cautionary tale to social movement activists. However other commentators predate the conservative tide. Californian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, feminist pioneer and author of another memoir of the period, recalls “I was here ... to witness the right wing buildup in California, with the John Birch Society as the base. California was—and is—run by the arms industry and agribusiness. Without the FSM and other actions during that time—the sit-ins here in the Civil Rights movement, opposition to the death penalty, and defiance of the HUAC—I believe things would have been much worse.”[7]

In the final chapters of her book, Freeman returns to the question of the movement’s meaning. At the outset, she declares, “I discovered that the Free Speech Movement was not a battle in the Civil Rights Movement, as we had thought at the time, but a skirmish in the Cold War... By dismantling the restrictions and rules imposed by the Cold War, we broke the chains of the past and opened up the future” (p. xxiii). In conclusion, Freeman casts the movement as thoroughly American, the heir to both World War II and Cold War rhetoric about American ideals. “It didn’t take Communist influence or outside agitators for us to see these things were wrong,” she writes. “We were our parents’ children” (p. 285). No doubt Freeman means to counter right-wing redbaiting, but she glosses over the radical roots of the 1960s rebellions, roots suggested by figures she quotes herself, that “independents and socialists” as well as Jews and those with no religion were the staunchest supporters of the FSM (pp. 282-283).

Social movements are unruly creatures, and those of the 1960s perhaps particularly so. The multiple viewpoints provided by memoirs are helping us fill out and complexify our understanding of the period. Jo Freeman’s *At Berkeley in the 60s* offers us an unusual window onto the era, that of a dedicated, soon-to-be-feminist

“moderate.” As such, it merits the attention of all those interested in the social movements of the 1960s.

Notes

[1]. See Robert Cohen, “The Many Meanings of the FSM,” in *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*, eds. Robert Cohen and Reginald E. Zelnik (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 1-53.

[2]. Max Heirich, *The Spiral of Conflict: Berkeley 1964* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). This book is out of print, but an earlier, shorter version, *The Beginning: Berkeley, 1964* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) is available online at <[http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt987006rv/\\$>\\$](http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt987006rv/$>$). Mark Kitchell, *Berkeley in the Sixties*, videocassette, (NY: First Run Features). Free Speech Movement Digital Archive, <[http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/FSM/\\$>\\$](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/FSM/$>$).

[3]. Using public policy change as the barometer of success, she concluded that the women’s liberationists were in many ways less radical than the so-called liberal feminists: “the liberationists’ segmented oligarchies and service projects restrict its activities to politically innocuous ones.” Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women’s Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process* (New York: Longman, 1975), p. 145.

[4]. Stephan Weissman, Letter to the author, 2 August 2004.

[5]. Robert Cohen, “This Was *Their* Fight and *They* Had to Fight It: The FSM’s Nonradical Rank and File,” in *The Free Speech Movement*, pp. 235-263.

[6]. Judith Ezekiel, *Feminism in the Heartland* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 92-93, 107-109.

[7]. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Letter to the author, 2 August 2004. Author of *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001).

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