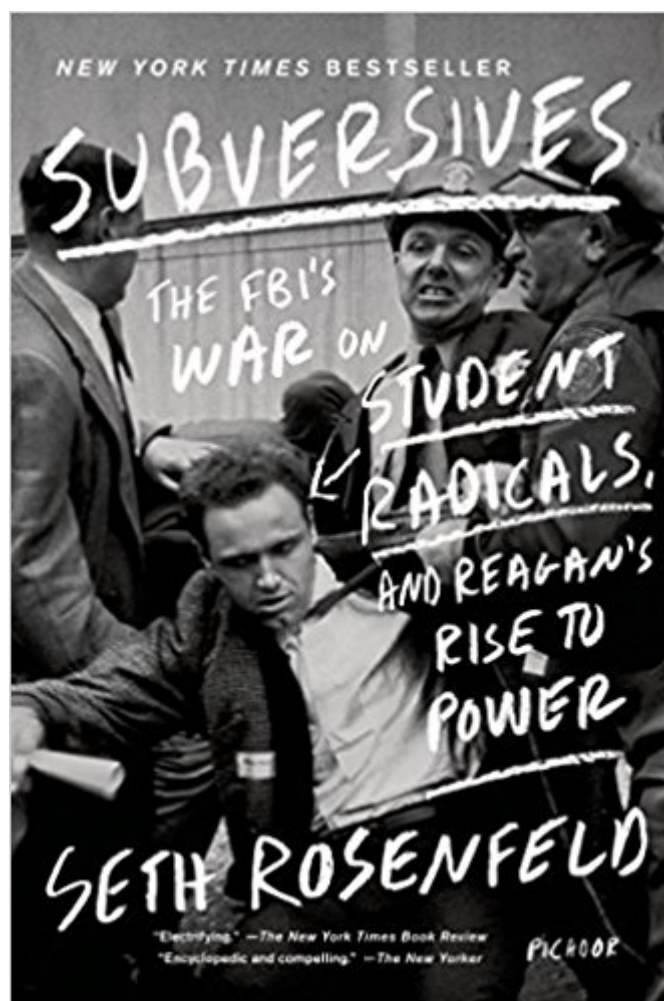


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# Subversives: The FBI's War On Student Radicals, And Reagan's Rise To Power



## Synopsis

"Electrifying." — The New York Times Book Review "Encyclopedic and compelling." — The New Yorker A New York Times Bestseller A Christian Science Monitor Best Non-Fiction Book of the Year A Kirkus Reviews Best Non-Fiction Book of the Year Winner of the PEN Center USA Book Award Winner of the Ridenhour Book Prize Winner of the Society of Professional Journalists' Sunshine Award Winner of Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award Subversives traces the FBI's secret involvement with three iconic figures who clashed at Berkeley during the 1960s: the ambitious neophyte politician Ronald Reagan, the fierce but fragile radical Mario Savio, and the liberal university president Clark Kerr. Through these converging narratives, the award-winning investigative reporter Seth Rosenfeld tells a dramatic and disturbing story of FBI surveillance, illegal break-ins, infiltration, planted news stories, poison-pen letters, and secret detention lists all centered on the nation's leading public university. Rosenfeld vividly evokes the campus counterculture, as he reveals how the FBI's covert operations — led by Reagan's friend J. Edgar Hoover — helped ignite an era of protest, undermine the Democrats, and benefit Reagan personally and politically. The FBI spent more than \$1 million trying to block the release of the secret files on which Subversives is based, but Rosenfeld compelled the bureau to reveal more than 300,000 pages, providing an extraordinary view of what the government was up to during a turning point in our nation. Part history, part biography, and part police procedural, Subversives reads like a true-crime mystery as it provides a fresh look at the legacy of the 1960s, sheds new light on one of America's most popular presidents, and tells a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked secrecy and power.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Documenting the depth of that covert alliance [between Reagan and the FBI] is only one of the amazing things this sweeping book accomplishes. The product of more than thirty years' indomitable work acquiring the files via the Freedom of Information Act to yield these secrets, this volume is also an outstanding primer on the postwar Red Scare; a riveting account of the origins, development, and philosophy of the New Left; and a penetrating look into the mind of Reagan. But most of all, it's the best account I've read on how the FBI corroded due process and democracy.

—Rick Perlstein --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Subversives has a powerful story to tell about the vanity and stupidity of political leaders of any persuasion who squander public resources spying on personal enemies...and the frightening weakness of the laws designed to restrain their authority.” —Matt Taibbi, *The New York Times Book Review*

“A well-written, dramatic narrative...many scoops--not just about Hoover and the student radicals but also about the University of California administration and, most surprisingly, about a future president of the United States, Ronald Reagan.” —*The Wall Street Journal*

“Fiercely reported.” —*New York Magazine*, *The Approval Matrix* (Highbrow, Brilliant)

“Armed with a panoply of interviews, court rulings, and freshly acquired F.B.I. document, Rosenfeld shows how J. Edgar Hoover unlawfully distributed confidential intelligence to undermine the nineteen-sixties protest movement in Berkeley, while brightening the political stars of friendly informants like Ronald Reagan. Rosenfeld's history, at once encyclopedic and compelling, follows a number of interwoven threads.” —*The New Yorker*, *Briefly Noted*

“Crucial history. It's also a warning.” —*The Christian Science Monitor*

“Several books have dealt directly or tangentially with the Berkeley student revolt, but Seth Rosenfeld's *Subversives* presents a new and encompassing perspective, including a revisionist view of Ronald Reagan and a detailed picture of FBI corruption. The details of the story did not come easily. It took Rosenfeld, a former reporter for *The Chronicle* and *the Examiner*, 25 years and five Freedom of Information Act lawsuits to finally get all the material he requested from the FBI. The bureau fought him every inch of the way, spending more than \$1 million of taxpayers' money in an effort to withhold public records, until it finally had no choice...A well-paced and

wide-ranging narrative...A deftly woven account. [The San Francisco Chronicle](#) “Vivid and unsettling.” [The New Orleans Times-Picayune](#) “Seth Rosenfeld fought the law and the people won; there can be little doubt of that . . . Subversives deepens our understanding of the political underpinnings of this period with the aid of many new details . . . Subversives will automatically become an essential reference for students of sixties unrest, of the career of Ronald Reagan, and of the FBI’s long history of illegal shenanigans against American citizens.” [Barnes and Noble Review](#) “Stunning revelations.” [NPR, "On the Media"](#) “Subversives is the story the FBI didn’t want told.” [Guernica](#) “Subversives is more than a documentary history--it has the insight that comes only with relentless reporting. This book is the classic history of our most powerful police agency and one of the most influential political figures of our time secretly joining forces.” [Lowell Bergman, Investigative journalist for The New York Times and Frontline](#) “[A] galvanizing account of the student radical movement in the 1960s...This book is the result of 30 years of investigation, including Rosenfeld’s landmark Freedom of Information fight, which resulted in the FBI being forced to release more than 250,000 pages of classified documents (Rosenfeld’s appendix detailing his struggle is gripping in itself). Besides FBI files, Rosenfeld relied on court records, news accounts, and hundreds of interviews. Clearly, he has the goods, and fortunately he also has the writing skills to deliver a scathing, convincingly detailed, and evocative indictment of the tactics of the FBI and of Ronald Reagan during his rise to power against the backdrop of Berkeley in the sixties.” [Connie Fletcher, Booklist \(starred review\)](#) “[Rosenfeld] painstakingly re-creates the dramatic--and unsettling--history of how J. Edgar Hoover worked closely with then California governor Ronald Reagan to undermine student dissent, arrest and expel members of Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement, and fire the University of California’s liberal president, Clark Kerr...[Subversives] is narrative nonfiction at its best.” [Publishers Weekly \(starred review\)](#) “Masterfully researched...A potent reminder of the explosiveness of 1960s politics and how far elements of the government were (and perhaps still are) willing to go to undermine civil liberties.” [Kirkus Reviews \(starred review\)](#) “All students of the sixties are indebted to Seth Rosenfeld for his years of persistent work prying documents out of the FBI. Freedom-loving Americans ought to be indebted to him for showing the lengths to which America’s political police went, and how intensely they colluded with Ronald Reagan, to encroach upon liberty.” [Todd Gitlin, author of The Sixties and Occupy Nation](#)

We've known for some time that the FBI and Ronald Reagan's gubernatorial administration were involved in the sometimes-violent conflicts that roiled Berkeley in the 60s. What we didn't know -- or, at least, what I didn't know -- was that J. Edgar Hoover and Ronald Reagan were personally and directly engaged not just in monitoring but in managing the secret government campaigns that helped raise the temperature to the boiling point again and again. Seth Rosenfeld's exhaustively researched recent book, *Subversives*, documents this story in often minute detail yet manages to keep it eminently readable. Anyone who lived through those times as a sentient adult will surely remember some of the seminal events: the protest against the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1960, lodged in memory through the iconic footage of students being fire-hosed down the steps of San Francisco City Hall; the 1964 Free Speech Movement that pushed the University of California at Berkeley into the forefront of student protest, brought Mario Savio to prominence, and began to change public attitudes about the police; the 1965 Vietnam Day Teach-In that fastened students' attention on the escalating U.S. war in Vietnam and initiated the public's disillusionment with the U.S. government; and the violent clash over People's Park in 1969, which led to the death of young James Rector and confirmed in so many minds the view that law enforcement officials were out of control. *Subversives* breaks new ground in several ways because of Rosenfeld's dogged, three-decade pursuit of classified government files that cast new light on the events themselves as well as the major players whose decisions drove them. The author keeps the story from getting out of hand by maintaining a tight focus on Hoover, Reagan, Savio, and UC Berkeley President Clark Kerr. In *Subversives*, Rosenfeld relates the roles (hitherto largely undocumented) of J. Edgar Hoover and Ronald Reagan in these familiar events, demonstrating the ruthlessness with which both men pursued "Communists" and their lack of respect for the truth. We see Hoover aggressively pushing his agents to seek out embarrassing personal details -- largely rumors -- about Mario Savio, Clark Kerr, and their collaborators, illegally passing the information along to Right Wing publications, and later citing it as documented truth in reports to the President and to the public. We see Reagan eagerly seeking out the FBI to inform on his rivals in Hollywood and secretly naming names behind closed doors with HUAC, destroying the careers of talented actors, directors, and writers because he disagreed with their political beliefs. From a vantage-point of half a century, both men appear to be thoroughly unscrupulous and careless about the sometimes tragic consequences of the action they directed from their privileged positions. Seth Rosenfeld, a winner of the coveted George Polk Award and now a staff member of the Berkeley-based Center for Investigative Reporting, was previously an investigative reporter for the San Francisco Examiner and the San Francisco Chronicle.

I shouldn't watch C-SPAN's Book-TV quite as much as I do. There are so many great books presented by the authors themselves. What is more inviting (in most cases) than that? Sometimes I get enough information just by watching the reading. Other times, as with this book, I can't resist buying my own copy. Rosenfeld researched this book for over thirty years, not because he wanted to, but because he was forced to sue the FBI repeatedly to induce the agency to release documents under the Freedom of Information Act. As the author states in his preface, "Many pages were disclosed for the first time, including those concerning the surveillance of law-abiding citizens and efforts to disrupt political organizations. Many others were reprocessed to release additional information, such as the names of people Ronald Reagan informed on" (loc 64). Almost fifty percent of the book consists of appendices, FBI files, notes, selected bibliography, documents, interviews, other sources, acknowledgments, and a subject index. While Rosenfeld was speaking on C-SPAN, I became reacquainted with this era of unrest, the early and middle 1960s, and after I finished the book I became more and more satisfied with the fact that I'd never mustered much respect for the gipper (or is it gypper?). Rosenfeld produces evidence that Reagan began buying favors from J. Edgar Hoover by turning in certain Hollywood celebs who were suspected of being communists. In exchange, he would later ask Hoover to tail his eighteen-year-old daughter, Maureen, in the Washington, D.C. area to see if she was truly living with a man much older than she. Why would a leader who hated excessive government exploit said government for private reasons instead of hiring his own private investigator? Was he just cheap? Why would Reagan use his power as California governor to remove a liberal chancellor at UC Berkeley by seating himself as one of the regents? All throughout his life as a politician of "less government," he used more government to further his own political standing. Our upstanding Reagan, according to Rosenfeld's information, was quite promiscuous by way of starlets as much as fifteen years his junior during the period following his divorce from Jane Wyman and before he met Nancy Davis. He neither cared much for nor spent much time with his "Wyman" children, and, well, we know through Patty Davis how great a father he was to the "Davis" kids. What an all-around wonderful human being he seems to have been •having justified all his actions on behalf of his brilliant career. If you can stand getting angry all over again, as I did, you might enjoy reading how Rosenfeld documents everything that seemed to be true about Reagan and his horrible misuse of power but which one couldn't prove. By the end of the book, you realize that

Rosenfeld's title, *Subversives*, is true not only (according to the media and popular culture) of the UC students who rioted for reform but also of Reagan, who used his power to subvert democracy, the very ideal he purported to be protecting.

I lived through the San Francisco and Berkeley episodes described. My first protest action was at the SF Civic Plaza during HUAC hearings across the street. The depth of the research, and the excellent writing laid out the extent of FBI and HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) illegal activities, and evoked visceral reactions at how many breaches of laws were ignored and criminal acts by government employees never prosecuted before statutes of limitations expired. This book contains much more than has been made public previously; it took the author 30 years and countless Freedom-of-Information suits to get the papers released. The roster of those mentioned adds familiarity to the story as every reader will know some of them. This non-fiction work is better than many mysteries, and might be as compelling a page-turner for you as it was for me.

Excellent narrative of a time that is becoming a half a century old, but is closely related to current Times. The free speech movement, led by Mario Savio, awakened other students and youth to an unjust war. To mark the thirty year anniversary of the free speech movement, Savio said we must be prepared to speak out even if we are not meant to prevail. The book chronicles the rise of Ronald Reagan and his abuse of constitutional power to bring an end to student unrest at Berkeley. Also, the crimes committed by Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover and his agents. Both Reagan and the FBI claimed that the student unrest was the result of a communist plot directive from the Kremlin, when in truth it was highly intelligent students that realized and understood that the war in Vietnam was not just. Outstanding read.

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