



IN MEMORIAM

William Kornhauser
Professor of Sociology, Emeritus
Berkeley
1925 — 2004

A member of the Sociology Department at the University of California, Berkeley for 40 years, William Kornhauser died July 3, 2004 at the age of 79. A political sociologist who was an expert on social movements, Kornhauser was known for his pioneering 1959 book, *The Politics of Mass Society*, for the lucidity and enthusiasm of his teaching, and for his influence on the student activists of the 1960s and 1970s.

A Chicago native and a product of the University of Chicago's secondary school (the "Lab School"), Kornhauser received all of his education on the Midway, except for a freshman year at Antioch College. He also served for three years in Italy as a navigator for the Air Force's 20th Bomb Squadron during World War II. He returned to Chicago to complete his Ph.D. in 1953 on the subject of liberal and radical political careers.

After a year teaching at Columbia University, Kornhauser came to Berkeley in 1953 at a time when the department under its new chair Herbert Blumer was undergoing a rebuilding process that would catapult it into national and international preeminence. Only a year later Kornhauser's intellectual promise was recognized when he became a member of the first class of fellows at the newly opened think tank, the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.

With Seymour Martin Lipset, Reinhard Bendix, and Philip Selznick, Kornhauser was one of a foursome that made Berkeley the center of the vanguard specialties of political and industrial sociology in the 1950s and 1960s. *The Politics of Mass Society* was a seminal contribution to social theory. Synthesizing the insights of Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Mannheim, José Ortega y Gasset, and Robert Nisbet, Kornhauser took their work several steps forward by identifying the conditions under which democratic societies become vulnerable to mass movements with totalitarian potentials. His book contained original contributions to the understanding of political pluralism and elite theory, and it would become a classic.

Kornhauser also published a 1962 book, *Scientists in Industry*, as well as more than 20 articles and essays, including the one on "mass society" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

As a teacher, Kornhauser had few rivals in a department where for many of its "world-class" scholars, research and publication often trumped the classroom as a priority. He had a knack for breaking down abstruse concepts and social phenomena so that they became understandable to graduate students and undergraduates. And there was a thoroughness in the way he analyzed difficult ideas. A concept like mass society would be analyzed in terms of its essential characteristics, for its social conditions, and then for its effects on political behavior. Although Kornhauser was a consummate theorist, he also taught in a way that showed the impact of an idea on the "real world." Philip Selznick notes how popular his classes were with

student activists, who took from them "sophistication and an armory of ideas." In his own way, Kornhauser "fashioned the doctrines of student radicals, well before the 1960s upheavals."

Over the years, Kornhauser increasingly saw himself as more of a political activist than a scholar. During the 1964 Free Speech Movement (FSM) he was a tireless organizer for the Committee of 200, the faculty caucus that worked closely with the student movement. Instead of making speeches at Academic Senate meetings he worked behind the scenes to mobilize the liberal faculty and as an intermediary with the FSM leadership.

While actively supporting student movements, Kornhauser began turning more of his attention to off-campus politics. In 1972 he worked on behalf of George McGovern in the presidential campaign. After the latter's defeat, he continued his efforts to move the Democratic Party to the left. He was involved in the Nuclear Freeze Movement and on a local level with the Berkeley Citizens' Action Committee. His friend Daniel Ellsberg remembers him as always urging people to become politically active against militarism.

In 1980 Kornhauser helped found Democracy, a political and intellectual journal edited by former Berkeley political scientist Sheldon Wolin. For Todd Gitlin, a student who became a close friend, this was when Kornhauser came alive again. The meetings of the magazine's board "gave him a sense of connection to larger political currents."

As Kornhauser became more radicalized, his scholarly production fell, and with promotions slow to come, he became more and more embittered toward the University and his department. An important figure in the internal politics of Berkeley sociology in the first half of the 1960s, he in effect dropped out, and, with the passage of time, became estranged from all but a few of his former friends and colleagues.

As a political sociologist, Kornhauser was deeply disturbed by what he saw as the right-wing drift of the late 1970s and 1980s on campus and in the nation. As students changed, he found himself less able to connect with them. While he had been a favorite instructor of graduate students in the 1950s and 1960s, two decades later, according to Jeff Manza, most of them lost interest in his seminars. But Bill continued to work with a few graduate and undergraduate students until the end of his teaching career.

David Matza, a colleague who remained a friend, recalls how Kornhauser grew more radical with age. Having worked against the war in Vietnam as a political activist, he was distressed by the centrism of Clinton and his New Democrats, and even more by the policies of George W. Bush and his war in Iraq. "He died deeply pessimistic about the fate of a nation for which he had served in the Air Force during World War II."

The members of the Committee on Memorial Resolutions fondly remember the Bill Kornhauser of better days, when he was unrivalled for his charm, openness, wit, and the wealth of his insights. Above all they recall the immediacy of his strong and lively presence.

William Kornhauser is survived by a daughter Anne Kornhauser of Princeton University's History Department, and by a sister, Ruth Zubrensky of Milwaukee.

Bob Blauner
Todd Gitlin
Jeff Manza
David Matza
Philip Selznick