Radicalism and Violence: Conceptualizing the Weather Underground Organization’s Actions in the 1960s and 1970s

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Radicalism and Violence: Conceptualizing the Weather Underground Organization's Actions in the 1960s and 1970s

Abstract
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Radicalism and Violence: Conceptualizing the Weather Underground Organization’s Actions in the 1960s and 1970s

by

Jennifer Cerer

April 27, 2018

The report of the investigation undertaken as a Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit in the Department of History and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to (a) compare and contrast a number of theoretical approaches to the study of terrorism in order to clearly define what constitutes a terrorist act, (b) analyze various arguments for the moral justification of terrorism, and (c) provide a detailed historical analysis of the actions of the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) to determine whether or not the group’s actions should be considered terrorism. In so doing, this study demonstrates that the actions of the WUO throughout the late 1960s do not constitute terrorism; however, if they do, they could be considered morally just. This case study sheds light on the sociopolitical dynamics that have historically motivated groups to take up armed struggle against their own government, offering new insights for the sociological study of terrorism, a discipline in its infancy.
DEDICATION

To those who tirelessly study this era of chaos.
I would like to first thank my committee for their guidance and willingness to work with me. Lake Forest College does not offer many classes in what I study, so when I transferred here I did not think that I would have the opportunity to continue to study parts of history that I thought to be both interesting and important. Being a double major in History and Sociology & Anthropology with a minor in Legal Studies, the idea of looking closely at how individuals within a society interact and settle disputes over a period of time is something I find valuable. I have always had a strong belief that without examining the past, a society can never actually move forward into the future. Concentrating my studies in 20th Century American Sociocultural and Popular-cultural History, specifically the 1960s and 1970s and the Vietnam Conflict, has been an honor. It is something I have found both fascinating and hauntingly relevant.

The 1960s and 1970s were a tumultuous time that I argue deserve more attention academically. It is my belief that this generation of Americans revolutionized the culture of American society. Whether this was through music, film, politics, or protesting, the effect that the 1960s and 1970s has had on today's culture is incalculable. When I began studying this period, I soon realized that it was something that I would focus my attention on for the rest of my life. Later, when I decided to do a thesis, I chose so with this era in mind, alongside the idea that my work could possibly help others who concentrate in the same topics. I wanted the opportunity to encourage others to study the 1960s and 1970s, an opportunity that has not always been afforded me. This thesis is the culmination of all of my scholarly
work throughout my undergraduate years. Therefore, I take great pride in it and feel humbled to submit it to a faculty as esteemed and knowledgeable as this. It has been an experience that I will carry over into future studies. Words cannot describe my thanks.
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INTRODUCTION

The Weather Underground Organization was a product of its time. It exemplified young revolutionary sentiment that was able to grow into something more. There were many radical youth movements of the late 1960s, but none set out to accomplish what the Weathermen tried to: a violent overthrow of the United States government, one that would replace American capitalism with a communist system.

America in the 1960s had seen cultural revolution like no decade before it, complete with the rise of the hippie counterculture. By the end of the 1960s, the conflict in Vietnam was at its height, with more than one-half million American troops on the ground in mid-1968. The riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention highlighted political divisions that Americans had continually tried to sweep under the rug. Organizations like the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE) sought out new ways to demonstrate the outrage of college-aged youth with the current political system and the Vietnam Conflict. The Vietnam Conflict, the Civil Rights Movement, and the expansion of youth education and globalization all worked together to create a perfect storm in which radical youth culture emerged.

Political and Social Turmoil in the US

Vietnam was originally a French colony, taken over as a part of French Indochina in 1887. After the Second World War the Vietnamese began a revolution for independence from French imperialism that seemed accomplished in 1954 when France removed itself from the country, essentially giving up on fighting the
Vietnamese people in their own land. After this, the country was run by a series of westernized leaders, many of whom were put in place through fraudulent elections thanks to their ties with western leaders. When John F. Kennedy (JFK) was elected in 1960, Vietnam’s leader was Ngo Dinh Diem, a South Vietnamese politician. Ho Chi Minh was another leader after the French-defeat. The communist visionary emerged to lead the armed struggle against democratic Vietnam. He rose to power in North Vietnam after the Second World War. He had been educated in France, and before returning to Vietnam in 1941, spent time in both China and the Soviet Union, learning about communism. When he did return to Vietnam, he took the opportunity to break away from France and lead the Viet Minh revolt against the French. When the French were defeated in 1954, Ho Chi Minh moved the communist capital to Hanoi in North Vietnam, proclaiming it the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, creating a one-party Viet Minh state. Pro-Western leaders controlled South Vietnam, while Ho Chi Minh held the North, a system that could not last, due to widespread popular support for the Viet Minh.

After much public unrest in 1963, Diem was overthrown and assassinated by the Viet Minh on 1 November, weeks before the assassination of JFK. After this, civil war broke out in Vietnam. Seeing this develop during the early years of his presidency, JFK had already made the decision to deploy American troops before his assassination. American involvement continued during Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency and later under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, lasting until 1975. Fearing the spread of communism to the western world (commonly known as the “Domino Effect”), he felt that the defense of Southern Vietnam was the only way to ensure that this did not happen, seeing as it would, in his eyes, be a quick victory for
Americans and democracy. Thus, Americans became involved in a conflict from which it was unable to extract itself for over a decade.¹

By mid-1968, there were 536,100 US troops on the ground in Vietnam, far more than ever expected or promised by the US.² This number did not get any higher, as the Nixon Administration made the decision in 1969 to reduce the number of new troops being sent. At the end of 1969, only 485,600 troops were deployed.³ However, this was still a significant number of Americans being placed in the small, southeastern Asian country, with little knowledge on how to deal with the rough terrain and the guerilla style warfare that so many troops had already faced in years prior. By the end of the 1960s, a large portion of the American public was not in favor of continued American involvement in Vietnam.

The rise of the counterculture in the mid-1960s and the education of the ‘Baby Boomer’ generation, who were now college-aged, created a sociocultural and popular cultural revolution in America. New fashion, music, and ways of thinking were introduced into the lives of mainstream youth, exacerbating an ever-growing generational divide between parents and their children. Young adults, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five could be seen wearing new trends like fringe, the mini skirt, and second-hand clothing, sometimes even from military surplus stores. They could also be seen listening to rock n’ roll. The British Invasion of the Beatles in 1964 marked a new era of popular music, one that moved away from the teddy-

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¹ This military engagement is referred to by the Vietnamese as the American War; however, this study will refer to it as the Vietnam Conflict, since war on North Vietnam was never technically declared by the US Congress.
boy pop-rock of the early 1960s and slowly became faster and rougher. Stemming from folk and folk-rock, which had been once again popularized by singers like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, rock n’ roll became more and more politicalized during the mid-to-late 1960s, with artists like Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, and even the Beatles singing anti-war and anti-Vietnam protest songs. One could not hide from the political discontent in America. It was everywhere.

New ways of thinking and living emerged from higher numbers of young adults attending college. Sit-ins and be-ins were held on college-campuses throughout the latter half of the 1960s, peaceful and educated discussions about popular topics like the Vietnam Conflict, American imperialism, democracy and communism, and even radical ideas like communal living and self-sustaining communities. Many of these talks were organized by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in an effort to create political consciousness in the youth of America, giving those involved a feeling that they had a voice.

This was especially important to minority groups, such as those who were involved in the Women's Liberation Movement, the Gay Rights Movement, and especially, the Civil Rights Movement, which saw victories in 1964 and 1968 with both the Civil Rights Acts and through the work of Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) and Malcolm X. After both these African-American leaders were assassinated, the Black Liberation Movement and groups like the Black Panthers took on a stronger approach with radical Black Nationalism. Until the late 1970s, these movements were increasingly infiltrated by the FBI, whose goal was to dismantle any possible groups opposing the government. This FBI method of operation meant that the Weathermen would appear on the FBI’s list at the moment of their creation.
The Weather Underground

The Weathermen were a subgroup of the youth culture that broke away from their mother organization of SDS in June of 1969 in an effort to recruit working-class Americans. Made up of mostly middle-class, college-educated, white Americans, its stated goal was the violent overthrow of the United States government, toppling American imperialism and capitalism, and replacing it with a communist system. Between the years 1970-1976 the group was responsible for about a dozen symbolic bombings across the country, bombings that would blow up locations that represented the government they strongly opposed, while killing no one. During this time, leading members of the Weathermen lived underground, off the radar of the FBI, which put many of them on the Top Ten Most Wanted list. At the end of the 1970s, most of the membership resurfaced and returned to normal life with hardly any legal consequences.

The Weather Underground and Terrorism Theory

When it comes to the Weathermen, this study seeks to consider one main research question, one that is based on a debate that has existed since the group’s conception: is it accurate to refer to the Weathermen as a terrorist organization? Do the group’s actions warrant a label as striking and stigma-producing as the term “terrorist”? This work will first review scholarly research and data to develop criteria by which a group may or may not then be labeled as such.

Terrorism theory is quite young, with only a small portion of researched knowledge gathered on the conceptualization of terrorism. Until 11 September,
2001, sociologists had given little effort to the conceptualization and study of terrorism. To this day, clear definitions of the term “terrorism” are “controversial for reasons other than conceptual issues and problems. As labeling actions as ‘terrorism’ promotes condemnation of the actors, a definition may reflect ideological or political bias.” This makes the ability to categorize groups that are referred to as terrorist quite difficult. Therefore, this study must first create a clearer conceptualization and develop criteria before it can be applied to the situation of the Weathermen.

Philosopher C.A.J. Coady argues that the first step to understanding terrorism and terrorist actions is defining it correctly. Rather than describing terrorism as an ideology in and of itself, terrorism should be seen as “no more than [as] the relatively systematic nature of a method or tactic.” Coady explains that “the tendency to think of terrorism as an ideology is no doubt encouraged by superficial verbal resemblances—so many expressions ending in ‘-ism’ are words for ideologies or systems of belief.” However, terrorism is not something that can simply be an ideology on its own.

Coady also says that a “distinctive point of terrorism... is to terrorize, to spread fear and so destabilize social relations.” It is the idea that through the deterioration of social relations, i.e., the creation of clear and rigid social divisions in a society, there can rise a new order in society, one that favors whatever group is committing the violent actions.

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6 Coady, "Morality of Terrorism," 47.
7 Coady, "Morality of Terrorism," 53.
Another requirement for an act to be categorized as terrorism is the idea that it is the use of or threat of violence on non-combatant citizens to accomplish some goal. Along with deeming terrorism a tactic, Coady (as well as many other theorists) argue that terrorists are defined by their decision to “choose to attack non-combatants.” This is a part of the criteria of terrorism that appears in most scholarly research. The use of violence or threat of violence on non-combatant citizens is the “crucial definitional feature” of conceptualizing terrorism. Theorist J. Angelo Corlett’s definition of terrorism is similar, stating that it must be connected to threatening or using violence against citizens. He explains that one of terrorism’s “primary intentions [is] to harm noncombatants” to serve a political purpose. By making the target innocent civilians, terrorism becomes a tactic that can be stigmatized and demonized. Those who witness terrorist actions can then resort to calling those who commit the violent actions “monsters” or “devils,” because who else would act in such a way towards those who do not deserve deliberate and intentional pain and suffering? Corlett insinuates that it is much more difficult to define an action as terroristic in nature if the violence or threat of violence is only directed towards “those guilty of injustice.” Austin T. Turk, a sociologist, would agree with Corlett’s definition of terrorism in that it is essential to include the idea that terrorism targets noncombatants. He argues that “terrorism differs from ordinary crime in that it targets a population, applying the standard of collective

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8 Coady, “Morality of Terrorism,” 53.
9 Coady, “Morality of Terrorism,” 54.
11 Corlett, “Can Terrorism Be Morally Justified?,” 170.
liability for perceived violations of normative expectations.”\textsuperscript{12} This means that those who commit terrorist actions find innocent noncombatants to be in fact guilty, using the simple reasoning that they are not fighting the system they are a part of, and therefore, silently condoning it. Despite this belief on the part of terrorist actors, innocent civilians are just that, innocent. They do not warrant any violence or threat of violence that is thrust upon them by terrorists seeking out a specific goal.

Turk also makes note of another requirement for the conceptualization of terrorism: its goal or purpose. He finds that “waves of terrorist activity are associated with cycles of political economic deterioration and replacement by new forms of political order.”\textsuperscript{13} What makes violent actors terrorists is that they have a political motivation of some kind. Terrorism and political goals go hand-in-hand. Those who commit acts of terror or threaten to use acts of terror on civilians do so to advance a political goal.

Along with this political aspect, is how terrorist organizations are created. Sociological theorists on terror Colin J. Beck and Emily Miner explain that terrorism is socially constructed with a political motive. They state that terrorism is something that is “socially constructed... based off of more than just assessments of actual risk.”\textsuperscript{14} They are human beings with a background and reasons why they decide to participate in actions of violence or threaten actions of violence on civilians. However, the terrorist is socially created through their own personal socialization into a culture in which they live, and this then makes them radicalized and willing to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Austin T. Turk. "Sociology of Terrorism." \textit{Annual Review of Sociology} 30 (2004), 285.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Turk, "Sociology of Terrorism," 283.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Colin J. Beck and Emily Miner. "Who Gets Designated a Terrorist and Why?" \textit{Social Forces} 91, no. 3 (2013), 839.
\end{itemize}
commit violent acts on non-combatants in order to push a political agenda of some kind. Beck and Miner would also agree that terrorism can only be defined as such if it targets innocent civilians, rather than just anyone or anything.¹⁵

Disagreeing with this necessary component of the definition of terrorism would be Sociologist Jack P. Gibbs. Gibbs defines terrorism as “illegal violence or threatened violence directed against human or nonhuman objects.”¹⁶ This differs from what Coady, Corlett, Turk, and Beck and Miner all argue, that it is only the targeting of human civilians, rather than including non-human objects. However, Gibbs later contradicts himself by relating to terrorism as simply “inculcating fear of violence in persons.”¹⁷ Because, after all, one cannot induce fear into something that is not alive and therefore, cannot fear or feel pain from violence.

From all of this scholarly work, it seems that a clear definition and criteria of terrorism can be created. Terrorism is the use of violence or threat of violence to induce fear in non-combatant civilians in order to promote a political agenda. This means that all of the elements of the definition need to be present in order for something to qualify as terrorism. It is a (a) tactic that is (b) constructed through actors’ own socialization. There also needs to be (c) the threat or use of violence to (d) induce fear on (e) non-combatant civilians in order to (f) advance the political views that are held by those involved.

Now that there is a clear set of criteria usable for this study, the following question can be asked: if an action can be categorized as terrorism, is there any way

¹⁵ Beck & Miner, "Who Gets Designated a Terrorist and Why?,” 838.
that it can be morally justified? Corlett argues that in certain situations, under certain circumstances, activities that are defined as terroristic in nature may be morally justified. He explains that “one is morally justified... [when] engaging in terrorist activity when: (1) one is defending oneself; (2) one is selective whenever possible; and (3) one directs terrorist activity only against those guilty of injustice.”

Another basis for arguing that terrorism has moral justification is the “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” idea. Those who want to see a terrorist group succeed, or may even be backing it in some way, find ways to morally justify the actions of those terrorists, often referring to them as “freedom fighters.” On the other hand, those who oppose the actions of the terrorist group in question would call them just that, terrorists, because of the negative connotations that the term implies. Beck and Miner mention this method of labeling “terrorists” and “freedom fighters” by explaining that “a government’s relations with a militant organization’s home country could thus influence designation” of what they consider terrorist or non-terrorist action. They go on to give the example of “the American War on Terror,” arguing that it has been “a cover for naked global strategic interests, such as an attempt to preserve and extend US hegemony, serve capitalist economic interests and maintain control of crucial resources.” This is why there is still a debate on a clear definition of terrorism today, because of countries’ inability to separate their own state interests from legitimate labeling. However, this method of labeling is

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18 Corlett, “Can Terrorism Be Morally Justified?,” 170.
incorrect. Countries that use this method only confuse others who wish to correctly categorize a violent organization with a clear definition. The “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” or “one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter” argument for moral justification cannot be accepted as valid. This means that the only acceptable criteria for the moral justification of terrorism would be based on Corlett's categorization: that terrorism is morally justified when it is (1) in self-defense, (2) only violent when absolutely necessary, and (3) used against those who are guilty of an injustice.

In this study, I plan to examine the acts of the Weathermen in the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of this theoretical discussion. Based upon the criteria listed above, I will study the actions of the Weather Underground Organization to see if they can be considered terrorism. This includes considering whether the members of the Weathermen should or should not be considered terrorists, thereby making them technically free of such a stigma. However, if after this examination the Weathermen are considered terrorists and the Weather Underground Organization a terrorist group, their actions may be considered morally justified based upon the criteria laid out above. This study will invoke a complete examination and analysis of the history of the Weathermen. Through this analysis, one will be able to understand why the motivations of groups that take on the idea of armed struggle against a government or society are important, and possibly validated.
Early SDS

In 1960, a group of radical students started the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID). Comprised of local, politically left-leaning students, the Michigan-based organization was very small. Its goals were different than previous college-based groups, created as a “non-partisan educational organization,” which sought, “to promote greater active participation on the part of American students.”

Through campus visits and sit-in teachings, SLID sought to raise the political consciousness of college students. Unfortunately, their work did not gain the type of popular attention that they desired, and the leaders of SLID were forced to approach their goals from a new angle.

In 1962, the organization officially changed its name to Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Under this new title, the group’s leadership created a manifesto entitled the Port Huron Statement, which was completed 15 June, 1962. Mostly constructed and edited by Tom Hayden, one of the founders of SLID, the statement “offered a blueprint for a new ‘participatory democracy,’ and [was] the closest thing the New Left in America ever had to a formal statement of intent.”

It summed up the goals of the organization: to increase the political knowledge of

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American students and encourage participation, especially in support of a more modern Marxist ideology.

More than 65 pages long, the Port Huron Statement argued for the legitimacy of SDS, a point that was particularly important for the leadership, as many had personally witnessed the decline of SLID. The document explicitly cited Karl Marx, pairing political philosophy with colloquial language that spoke to the role of the working-class college student. Its somewhat laid-back tone and everyday vocabulary exemplified the group’s belief that no matter one’s socioeconomic background, every student in America could become politically conscious and involved in the political dialogue of their time.

Further, the manifesto drew parallels between the Marxist proletariat and college youth, encouraging students to join together in support of working-class citizens. The document stressed the importance of idealism in the face of the theoretic chaos that had come to dominate the social and political conversation of the time. In the group’s opinion, the overall negativity of the American public would lead to the nation’s downfall. SDS desired to promote a strong yet peaceful left-wing, socialist agenda that would bring hope and positivity back to a country that now faced a looming threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Although the Port Huron Statement expressed a disagreement with the Soviet Union of the 1960s, its authors saw Marx as a visionary and described the frustration that college-aged youth had with American anti-communist paranoia. Throughout the manifesto, the

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leaders of SDS emphasized the group’s aspiration to awaken college students to the power that they could bring when acting in great numbers.

From the years 1962-1965, SDS grew almost synchronously with America’s involvement in the Vietnam Conflict. Membership rose rapidly, from only nine on-campus chapters (less than 1000 members) at the beginning of 1962, to fifty-two on-campus chapters in 1965, with membership in the mid-thousands. Students at colleges across the country began to form chapters, holding meetings where students could discuss politics with their peers outside of the classroom. The drastic increase in membership during the period of 1962-1965 can be largely attributed to the fact that college students were drawn to the Port Huron Statement, agreeing that because America seemed to be in a national stalemate, it desperately needed leadership, and that the nation’s “goals were ‘ambiguous and tradition-bound instead of informed and clear, its democratic system apathetic and manipulated rather than ‘of, by, and for the people.’”24 After all, it was overwhelmingly college students and youth from as young as sixteen years old, to anywhere between twenty-five and thirty, who were being sent off to fight a conflict in Vietnam that they did not understand, let alone have any say in. SDS offices across the country soon became loud and busy places, bustling with energy and constantly organizing events for this and that and peaceful discussions on hot-button political topics like civil rights and the conflict in Vietnam. By 1965, Students for a Democratic Society was fully developed. Springing up on most of the liberal-leaning campuses in

America and even on some that historically were considered conservative, SDS created a political discussion that gained media attention.

Then, in April of 1967, large-scale on-campus demonstrations organized by SDS began to arise, the first being held at Columbia University. The year 1967 was the most active year for SDS yet, with membership still growing steadily. The rising Vietnam draft rate and the prolonged duration of the conflict proved to be catalysts for the group’s actions. Information on SDS and their message became widely available to all classes of Americans, and their self-described idealistic aim to end the war in Vietnam through the power of political awareness and student organizing began to penetrate the public dialogue. SDS protests now began to make a mark not only on college campuses, but also in major cities.

With the success of growing membership and activism during 1967, SDS began to get more media coverage. Even though not all of this media attention was positive, SDS benefited from an ever-growing presence in the eyes and ears of the American public. In March of 1968, the SDS Columbia Chapter held an event that would become one of the most notable anti-Vietnam student demonstrations of all time. Led by Columbia students and SDS members Ted Gold, John Jacobs (J.J.), and Mark Rudd, SDS organized an on-campus anti-Vietnam Conflict demonstration that drew thousands. The students occupied several campus buildings including the college’s ROTC building, and disrupted classes for days, effectively shutting down the University. This protest signaled a new high point of activity for the organization. The takeover of a relatively conservative Ivy-League college showed that Students for a Democratic Society was capable of generating more than just
campus conversation, affecting public dialogue on the legitimacy of the Vietnam Conflict.

The events at Columbia were the “most significant student rebellion to date.” One could argue that the student youth of America, drawn by the excitement and promise of this event, flocked to SDS. The organization now turned its attention toward an even larger political and social scale, aiming to enact change at an increasingly national level. The 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, 26-29 of August, proved to be the perfect venue for their next major demonstration. Although only about 500 members of SDS were in Chicago in the name of the organization, roughly 2,000 of the 4,000 attendees were members of the group in some capacity, many belonging to different splinter groups with their own more specific aims. One such splinter group, the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE), led by Tom Hayden, one of the founders of SDS, camped out that week in Grant Park across from the Chicago Hilton, the hotel that housed the Democratic delegates. Another splinter group, the Youth International Party (YIP or the Yippies), led by SDS members Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, set up in Lincoln Park.

Three days into the convention on 28 August, the two groups merged. Mayor Daley called in the Illinois National Guard and the Chicago Police Department to control the now immense mob of protesters inhabiting the parks. This choice would prove disastrous, as police officers and National Guard members descended upon the crowd, inciting a riot. The spectacle was beamed into the homes of millions of

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25 Sale, SDS, 441.
Americans across the country by the television crews and reporters that were sent to cover the convention. The entire country watched as members of the Chicago PD viciously attacked protesters in the streets, generating chaos among anti-war and pro-war organizers alike.

The leaders of Students for a Democratic Society could not have hoped for a more emotionally moving display. The events of the 1968 Democratic National Convention showcased more than ever the power and national recognition that SDS had achieved since its humble beginnings in 1962. Even though the Chicago riot may not have been an officially sanctioned SDS event in the way that the Columbia riots were, it solidified the student group’s position and stature in the eyes of the general public. Membership continued to grow throughout 1969, outgrowing college classrooms and auditoriums and moving their national meetings to convention centers.

As SDS began to grow, so too did the internal disputes that would give rise to factionalism within its ranks. Unlike the smaller splinter groups like the Yippies and MOBE that existed at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, these new, more opinionated factions did not cooperate well with each other. The largest factions disagreed over the future of SDS. Some, like the Youth Revolutionary Movement or RYM, argued for a stronger organization, one with a more revolutionary anti-imperialist vision. Others, like the Worker Student Alliance or WSA, more commonly known as the Progressive Labor Party or PL, would support a relatively conservative, old-left communist viewpoint.26

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26 This will be discussed in the chapter on the split of SDS.
Understanding the rise and fall of Students for a Democratic Society is essential to an understanding of the Weathermen and of the 1960s as a whole. Those who shaped the student-led organization changed the public perception of the leftist youth movement, and made student protests a force with which to be reckoned. By the end of the 1960s, student protests were taken seriously by the American public. Through the media and rise of campus chapters, they gained the power to enact change in America, or at least draw attention to problems that college-aged American youth had with the current political and cultural system. However, much like the Bolsheviks of the Soviet Union decades before, the revolution quickly began to eat its own children. The organization had become so large and so widely popular that it had inadvertently brought about its own demise. Factionalism and internal dispute within SDS, especially the growing voice of the Weathermen, would lead to its doom in the name of violent revolution. But how did it get to this point? In order to answer this question, one must first be introduced to the individuals that would form the Weathermen Organization.

*Origins of the Weathermen*

Once each quarter, leading members of SDS chapters across the country would hold a national conference during which they would discuss their plans and share their struggles and successes. The group went from campus to campus, working with different chapters and signing up new members. As SDS continued to gain momentum, the core leadership grew in power and in size, increasing its influence over a large number of members. Unfortunately, this increased
responsibility prevented the leadership from maintaining a unified trajectory and by 1969, the group became extremely factionalized. The immense surge of new members brought differing ideas about how the organization should be run and which direction it should take in the coming decade. Some factions wanted to remain more conservatively communist, while others desired to place the group on a much more radical course. Still other factions wanted to capitalize on the media frenzy caused by the events of the 1967 Columbia Protest and the 1968 Democratic National Convention in an attempt to kickstart a broader cultural revolution, rather than promote purely political change.

By the late 1960s, SDS divided itself at a frenzied pace, and thus its goals did so as well. Many of the splinter groups that had emerged at the 1968 Democratic National Convention still held significant sway over parts of the membership, though some smaller groups remained. MOBE, acting as more of a subcommittee of SDS than as an independent group, was a long-standing faction that was led by SDS founder Tom Hayden that strove to keep the organization’s morale high, while continuing to focus on opposing the Vietnam Conflict in some form or another—either directly through SDS-sponsored events or indirectly by working with thousands of members to assemble at protests in which SDS was not officially involved. A smaller, yet equally notable faction was the Yippies. Having only a few hundred members, the Yippies were defined by the group’s charismatic leaders Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman who sought to create more of a theatrical, media-focused protest group. The Yippies thought that the most important task was to capture the media’s attention with outrageous acts (their actions at the 1968 Democratic National Convention represent a perfect example). With this increased
media attention, the Yippies believed they could promote positive change and even create an all-new utopian way of living. Of all the factions of SDS, the Yippies exemplified the spirit of anarchistic cultural idealism that was one part of SDS’s appeal to college youth of America. They were not a group that had ever, nor would ever, challenge the SDS leadership or try to break away from it. Like MOBE, some of YIP’s membership was not a part of SDS directly. The two factions had no problem working within the mother organization but maintained their separate views and distinctive irreverent style. They had a foot both inside and outside of SDS, with a small number of YIP’s membership not even being SDS members.

Beyond the many small, non-threatening factions within SDS at the time, there were also larger, more assertive groups that actively vied for control. The Worker Student Alliance (WSA), the student auxiliary of the Progressive Labor Party (PL), was the most traditional and old-Left group in SDS. WSA members believed in a more traditional leftist approach to political change. This approach emphasized the importance of the working-class and SDS combining in order to create a strong proletariat class that would rise up against Western capitalist hegemony. The WSA were consistently held in disapproval by other factions, viewed as being racist as a result of their argument against Black Nationalism. Those who were a part of WSA believed that Black Nationalism was not important at this time, since in order for equality to be possible, a complete overhaul of America’s capitalist system would first have to be replaced with communism. The Worker Student Alliance were ultimately too focused on creating political revolution, on the idealistic notion that they would realize Marx’s vision and topple capitalism through a revolution of the
proletariat. Their dismissal of racial and gender equality ensured that they could not fully capture the approval of many SDS members.

The other and perhaps most militant faction was the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), which opposed both the WSA faction and the middle of the road elements of SDS. RYM contained the most radical members of SDS, opponents of both the old-Left and the more moderate members of the New Left, many of whom were directly involved in the mother organization’s leadership. This group would eventually become the Weathermen. Nevertheless, from its inception in 1969, RYM never intended to split from SDS. Instead, its goal was to change it from the inside out, arguing that faster radicalization of SDS members was the only viable path for the mother organization. Influenced heavily by Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenin, the Revolutionary Youth Movement conceptualized a strategy to push out or seriously weaken the Progressive Labor Party. The idea was that working-class Americans and marginalized groups would stand beside RYM, and the path to a Marxist revolution would begin. They did not necessarily want to destroy SDS, but rather transform it into a more radical organization, one that could defend itself from the US government—and possibly even defeat it.

Led by Bernardine Dohrn, RYM believed firmly that taking on world imperialism directly was not a realistic goal for SDS, especially considering the amount of fractionalization occurring within the group by the late 1960s. Elected to the position of Inter-Organizational Secretary of SDS in mid-1968, Dohrn’s position within the mother organization gave the agenda of RYM some power within the top ranks. Born to a middle-class family in Wisconsin, Dohrn graduated from the University of Chicago with a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science in 1963. She
attended law school at the same institution and graduated with her J.D. in 1967. After working alongside Martin Luther King Jr., she became a member of SDS. A strong member of the organization and one of the few women in a leadership position, Dohrn traveled to many countries, working with radical communist groups in Eastern Europe, North Vietnam, and Latin America. She was influenced heavily by both her legal education and these revolutionary groups. Believing the legal system was horribly flawed and capitalism and imperialism were together the exploiters of the masses, Dohrn wanted to do more than merely participate in SDS: she wanted to influence it. She envisioned SDS as a shining light of what America could be: a society that is equal and representative of all its people.

Working closely with Dohrn was John Jacobs, known as J.J., a close friend and leader of SDS, who helped organize the 1968 Columbia protests and was original members of SLID. J.J. was born to vastly different circumstances than Dohrn. The Jacobs were a prominent, upper-middle-class, leftist Jewish family from New York. Prior to his years at Columbia, John immersed himself in Marxist philosophy and studied the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. He was also influenced by the work of Che Guevara. Like Dohrn, he came to believe that a more radical approach was needed if SDS were to survive into the 1970s. Together, the two would turn the Revolutionary Youth Movement into a much more radically-focused group: the Weathermen.

Mark Rudd also worked alongside J.J. and Dohrn to drive the RYM towards a revolutionary stance. A student at Columbia in 1968, he was an influential person in the 1968 protests. Rudd was born to a middle-class, Jewish family in New Jersey. He discovered the works of Karl Marx and Che Guevara during his first year at Columbia and became a part of SDS in 1967. Agreeing with Dohrn and Jones on the
necessity of infusing SDS with a sense of revolutionary struggle, Rudd became a prominent part of the SDS’s leadership as National Secretary in 1969, just before the Weathermen emerged.

Probably the most best-known member of the Weathermen, Bill Ayers was first a member of the Revolutionary Youth Movement. Ayers grew up the most financially well-situated of all of the Weathermen. He was the son of Thomas G. Ayers, who was at the time the Chief Executive Officer of Commonwealth Edison. He attended Lake Forest Academy and then the University of Michigan, graduating with a BA in American Studies. Often criticized for his upper-class upbringing, Ayers became interested in leftist ideology in 1965 at the beginning of the Vietnam Conflict, an interest that was spurred by a failed Marine recruitment event on the Ann Arbor campus that involved many anti-Vietnam students showing up to protest.27 After this experience, he became involved in SDS and later on its leadership.

Rounding out the influential members of the RYM leadership was Terry Robbins. Close to Bill Ayers, he came from a working-class family—one of, if not the only, member of the Weathermen with a somewhat humble upbringing. His mother died young of cancer and his father worked in a garment factory. A true believer in radical causes and communist revolution, Robbins joined SDS in 1966 and shortly dropped out of Kenyon College to travel to more radical campuses and recruit students for their chapters. A more sporadic and easily angered member, his energy and hard-left line was exactly what RYM wanted and needed in its ranks. He spent a

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lot of time in Ann Arbor, working with Ayers and his girlfriend, Diana Oughton, who was also an SDS member.

RYM and PL each had thousands of followers within SDS; however, in mid-1969, eleven leading members of RYM would produce something that the PL faction did not: a manifesto.
CHAPTER TWO

THE WAY THE WIND BLEW:

A SHIFT TO RADICAL VIOLENCE

Manifesto

In May of 1969, the leaders of the Revolutionary Youth Movement penned a manifesto, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows.”

Eleven influential SDS members, many of whom are now considered pillars of the radical counterculture submitted the document:

- Bernardine Dohrn
- John Jacobs
- Mark Rudd
- Bill Ayers
- Jeff Jones
- Terry Robbins
- Karin Ashley
- Jim Mellen
- Gerry Long
- Howie Machtinger
- Steve Tappis.

Titled after lyrics from the song “Subterranean Homesick Blues” by Bob Dylan, the manifesto of nearly forty pages started as the platform of RYM but in fact

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28 Although written in May, the Manifesto was not published until June, when it appeared in a special edition of the New Left Notes for the SDS National Convention (18 June 1969).
became the founding document for a new organization: the Weathermen. On the pages of the first printing of the document, one could see illustrations of silhouetted soldiers that grew bigger with each page. The Weatherman were the embodiment of the new revolutionary radicalism of the New Left in 1960s America. The document stated the dedicated intent of eleven individuals to challenge the US Government and bring about its demise. The writers’ ultimate goal was, the “destruction of US imperialism and the achievement of a classless world,” that is “world communism,” made official.\(^{29}\) Although many of its authors led the RYM and believed strongly that a complete split from SDS was not absolutely required, it became evident after the Weatherman manifesto that the group had gone beyond the aspirations and the methods of the mother organization, methods that involved violence.

It was in effect a declaration of the establishment of a new group. The statement instantly shocked most of the members of Students for a Democratic Society and even many in the Revolutionary Youth Movement. A fair number of members of the RYM faction eventually came to the conclusion during the final days of the June National Convention that the manifesto’s message was so out of line with their views that they decided to cut their connections to the old RYM group. They created yet another splinter group within SDS, this one called the Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM II), to differentiate themselves from the former group. The splitting of the RYM only further demonstrates the extent to which fractionalization disrupted the development of SDS.

From the first appearance of the Manifesto, it was assumed by many that Bernardine Dohrn was likely the main contributor. The patchwork of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and a heavy dose of Che Guevara flowed from a melting pot of radical thought in a style reminiscent of Dohrn. Mark Rudd and John Jacobs (J.J.) also significantly influenced the piece, although it is not proven that they specifically wrote any of it. This is not surprising considering their position and importance within both SDS and the RYM faction. The only member of the Weathermen who has officially spoken out about who wrote the piece is Bill Ayers. In an interview, Ayers explained that he remembers J.J. being responsible for writing most of the piece. Ultimately, however, the manifesto was the work of eleven creative revolutionaries that believed that they could advance change by any means necessary, all of them contributing their own ideas, no matter whether those ideas made it into the writing of the document or not.

More specifically, the manifesto’s revolutionary language was borrowed from the works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and Che Guevara. Although the Weathermen adopted the language of revolution, their goals were not exactly aligned with those of The Communist Manifesto. In The Communist Manifesto, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, a proletarian revolution is only possible through the growth of political consciousness in the working-class, and in order for this to happen, capitalism must run its course first. Not only do the young radicals make note of the need to forsake bourgeois ways of living, the Weathermen push for revolution immediately, rather than letting it happen naturally on its own. The piece

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also contained heavy traces of Latin American influences drawn from Che Guevara, an aspect that is especially visible in passages like: “the goal of the revolutionary struggle must be the control and use of this wealth in the interests of the oppressed peoples of the world.”31 By using language of this nature, the Weathermen breathed new life into old-left Marxist beliefs while at the same time using recent Latin American communist variants to excite readers and instill hope that capitalist America could truly be overthrown. However, the combination of all of these revolutionaries’ viewpoints highlighted the lack of depth in the radical-left’s idea of American communism. The Manifesto made it clear that the Weathermen wanted to jump into a revolution that they did not have a clear or concise plan of action for.

On the other hand, the language of the Manifesto illustrates the fact that the Weathermen’s goals were political in nature. The group aimed to go against the government that they dwelled within and act against it with violence. This threat of violence is one of the main components of the definition of terrorism. Through this threat of violence, those who are noncombatant citizens could be fearful of the group. When one considers both of these elements (the threat of violence to induce fear and the fact that there was a political agenda), one could argue that the Manifesto could be that of a terrorist organization.

The notion that members of SDS needed to join with the rest of the world in arms against the imperialist governments of the world and topple the capitalist hegemony was not new to SDS. By the late 1960s, they had been struggling to accomplish this aim for quite some time. In spite of the past experience, the

31 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman.”
Weathermen believed that they could draw in working-class Americans through rallies and demonstrations, events that were to be more provocative and violent than earlier SDS activities in order to awaken workers to the possibility of revolution. Bill Ayers explains, “our logic went something like this: working-class youth can never be won to a movement that is soft and overly cerebral; even though we are soft and cerebral, we’re working on it and trying to prove our courage and seriousness; when they see us raising the question of power and contending for control, they will join us in droves.”

The Weathermen believed that their main goal of destroying US imperialism and replacing it with communism could be achieved only through the successful gathering of the working-class. However, yet again they did not explain a specific plan on how to convince the peoples of the working-class to join them. The Weathermen simply believed that when working-class Americans saw that they were serious about revolution, they would side with them. But there was a naïve disconnect between the Weathermen, who were made up of educated middle-class Americans and the working-class. Thus, without getting the working-class and other social groups to join, the revolution could never be carried out. The Weathermen continued to ask for this backing many times over the course of the next decade, but with no response.

One of the principal targets of the Weathermen was the police. According to the document, the “pigs” embodied the “capitalist state.” Without the police, there would be no group to enforce a conservative, capitalist agenda. They were the

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32 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 159.
33 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman.”
facilitators of institutionalized racism and systemic oppression. The Manifesto said that the first step to combating capitalism began at the local level by raising “anti-pig consciousness” as well as a clear “understanding of imperialism, class struggle and the State.”

Taking a lesson from history, the Manifesto spoke of the necessity of instilling a revolutionary consciousness within the proletariat and argued that education would be the most powerful tool in the revolution. Without it, violence would be pointless.

The Manifesto’s expression of strong support for the Black Liberation Movement would make one think that the Weathermen saw them as brothers in arms. However, this was not the case. The manifesto discussed the need for African-American rights and a strong liberation movement for roughly five pages, arguing that African-Americans are like a third-world group in America, constantly oppressed by the white population. The manifesto claimed to stand with the Black Liberation Movement and support it in every way, shape and form, though it also explained why the all-white group behind the Manifesto planned to fight separately, but alongside, the Black Liberation Movement to overthrow imperialism and racism in America. They argued that “because all blacks experience oppression in a form that no whites do, no whites are in the position to fully understand and test from their own practice the real situation black people face and the necessary response to it.”

The Weathermen, recognizing their own white, middle- to upper-class privilege, believed that they could never be able to truly put themselves in the shoes of African Americans. The Black Panthers and the Black Liberation Movement as a

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34 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman.”
35 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman.”
whole later refused any help from the Weathermen, claiming that they were too naive to understand African-American struggles.

Although the Weathermen were being led by Bernardine Dohrn, one of the most recognizable women in the left-wing student movement, the group was not a part of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Similar to their affiliation with the African-American equality groups, the Weathermen fully supported the cause of the Women’s Liberation Movement but believed in a long-time Marxist notion that before equality of any kind could be achieved, whether it was racial or gender, an anti-imperialist, communist revolution would first have to take place. Without the defeat of capitalism, America could never ensure full equality to its citizens. The Weathermen also believed that “to become relevant to the growing women’s movement, SDS women should begin to see as a primary responsibility the self-conscious organization of women.”

By wanting to stir political consciousness within the working-class peoples of America to make them rise up and overthrow the government, the Weathermen, at this point in their existence, could be argued as terrorist in nature. Their target was innocent civilians (police, the upper-class); their goal was political. However, their objective was not to induce fear. The Weathermen used (a) tactics that were (b) constructed through their own radical socialization. They also planned to use (c) violence or the threat of violence on (e) non-combatant citizens, in order to (f) advance the political views. However, this conceptualization is missing one of the requirements for terrorism previously outlined: (d) the goal to induce fear. Even

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36 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman.”
though at this point the Weathermen saw the use of violence on non-combatants as an acceptable horror of revolution, their goal was not to induce fear on those non-combatants, but rather, overthrow the US government. The Manifesto lays out the tactics that the Weathermen plan to use in order to create a communist revolution. Yet, these tactics and goals would shift as their organization matured.

_The Split of SDS_

The June 1969 Students for a Democratic Society National Convention, held in Chicago, IL, marked the beginning of the Weathermen’s reign over SDS and the solidifying of a harsher, more violent strategy for the group as a whole. The new “infusion of revolutionary ‘ideology’ into SDS caused a dramatic shift in the organization’s discourse and culture.”

37 During the convention, divisions within the organization became obvious. The Weathermen’s Manifesto, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” had been circulated among the members of SDS at every level. The Manifesto had been published in the June 1969 Convention issue of the _New Left Notes_. At this time, the Weathermen still called themselves the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) and it was under this name that they had published their Manifesto. It was also under this name that they acted as a determined minority to divide SDS into sectarian groups. The radicalization of RYM members, and their transformation into the Weathermen, created tension within Students for a Democratic Society as a whole. Many members of SDS found

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out about the new “action faction” only a couple of days before the Weathermen emerged and took over the mother organization. One reporter described the mood of the auditorium in Chicago as no longer being “free and open,” explaining that SDS was no longer the “free form group that it once was... bedeviled by the incomprehensible, Marxist sectarianism which wrecked the old left.”38

As for the members of RYM themselves, they could not have been more ready. They wanted to change the world, and in their minds, this meant a precisely planned split from their mother organization. Mark Rudd describes the convention center itself as a “cavernous, gloomy roller rink,”39 illustrating the looks of the building. The fifteen hundred SDS delegates to the convention were meeting at the Chicago Coliseum. The original plan had been for the convention to be held on a college campus, but further threats from the FBI created a need for a different location. The Coliseum was, in reality, a great location, giving SDS the power to keep the media, the FBI, the police, and all others who were not members out of the facility. The secrecy of the meeting created a frenzy outside its walls, consisting of police officers, the media, and crowds of other non-SDSers, all speculating about what was happening inside the arena.

Inside the Coliseum, things were even more tense and chaotic. The RYM officially declared themselves the Weathermen. Dohrn, Rudd, Ayers, and the eight other RYM leaders who had signed the Manifesto were intent on taking over SDS and casting out those who disagreed. The two other main factions, the Worker

38 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 49.
Student Alliance (WSA)/Progressive Labor Party (PL) and Revolutionary Youth Movement II, opposed the actions and goals the Weathermen put forward. As a result, the leaders of the Weathermen sought to remove those belonging to the WSA/PL while simultaneously reabsorbing RYM II.

The Worker Student Alliance (WSA) faction, also known on a global level as being a part of the Progressive Labor Party (PL), was a clear contrast to RYM (or the newly-named Weathermen). The Maoist-leaning WSA focused on class conflict above all other issues, aligning themselves with the working-class and proletarian groups of the United States. Essentially, WSA wanted to create a popular revolution, led by the party, as Lenin had done in Russia in 1917. They believed in class struggle and class struggle only, claiming this, rather than racism, was the problem in America. The WSA was a group that wanted to remain far away from the counterculture of the 1960s in order to appeal to its constituents. Paradoxically, the WSA had grown inside the big umbrella of SDS, an organization made specifically for the counterculture. The WSA leaders approached the notion of class struggle under the assumption that there was “no such thing as black culture and white culture [but] only working-class culture and bourgeois culture.” Rudd later described the WSA from the point of view of a Weatherman, saying, “PLers didn’t smoke dope or wear their hair long. That would turn off the workers, who according to the PL line, were serious proletarians and wanted nothing to do with the counterculture.” RYM rejected these views and would no longer tolerate their membership in SDS. Because by 1969 most of the SDS secretaries, office holders, and leaders were a part

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40 Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 46.
41 Rudd, *Underground*, 142.
of the RYM faction that later became the Weathermen, it was not difficult to push
the PLers out of SDS.

RYM II was created at the June SDS National Convention by dissident
members of RYM who did not agree with the increasingly militant leaders of RYM.
The group emerged from the convention as an effect of the conflict between
members of SDS. Led by previous RYM member Mike Klonsky, the members of RYM
II sat in the middle-ground between the Worker Student Alliance and the
increasingly leftward movement of RYM. Those who stayed with RYM and did not
join the Weathermen “felt that the politics presented in the ‘Weathermen’ statement
neglected to account for class, especially the revolutionary potential of white
workers.”\textsuperscript{42} Even though their views appeared to be much like that of the WSA, with
traditional Marxist ideology. Much like PL, they held old-leftist values, and “sought
to capture white allegiance by appealing to white ‘material interest’ - wages, or
hours, or benefits.”\textsuperscript{43} RYM II did not go as far as to make the argument that there
was no such thing as racial struggle. They agreed with RYM that the struggle
included imperialism, but they also wanted to follow the traditional Marxist values
that WSA spoke for, but not as conservatively. Specifically, they thought the WSA
was blindly excluding the idea of racial struggle. Where PL tended to reject black
nationalism, RYM II took the opposite approach. They wanted to draw a fine middle
line between the WSA and the RYM. By doing so at the June 1969 Convention, this
faction of RYM wanted to begin to move “much more immediately toward the

\textsuperscript{42} Berger, \textit{Outlaws of America}, 87.
\textsuperscript{43} Barber, \textit{A Hard Rain Fell}, 175.
creation of a Communist party.”44 This involved teaming up with RYM at the Convention and helping them push out PL, the move that allowed the Weathermen to be officially formed.

On the first day of the Convention, 18 June, 1969, delegates from Students for a Democratic Society chapters across the country gathered at the Chicago Coliseum to begin a five-day celebration. As the festivities began, it was clear that both wings of RYM were setting out to remove the Worker Student Alliance from SDS. Opening remarks led to sparring between WSA and RYM, and a series of arguments, “clashing over seemingly minor procedural issues.”45 One example was a proposal by PL that all “mainstream media be barred completely from the convention.”46 By this time, the Weathermen Manifesto had been circulated to the members of SDS in the convention’s issue of the New Left Notes. Mark Rudd later made the argument that the manifesto was “the perfect sort of dig at the super-straight PLers,” explaining further that one did not need “ancient dogmas to understand the reality around”47 them at the time, a critique of WSA’s very hardcore, traditional Marxist line. David Gilbert remember that when he went to the convention, he never expected a complete split of SDS; however, he did go “prepared for a battle.”48 Ultimately, the first day was full of bickering and distrust. When RYM suggested having a participant of the Chinese Red Guard speak on his experiences in the cultural revolution, PL opposed the idea in mere hatred of RYM.

44 Berger, Outlaws of America, 87.
45 Berger, Outlaws of America, 83.
46 Berger, Outlaws of America, 83.
47 Rudd, Underground, 146.
Friday, the second day of the convention, started off with great ferocity. The leaders of both RYM factions (the now Weathermen and RYM II) “engineered a show of solidarity,” as they had invited leaders of the “Young Lords, a Puerto Rican nationalist group, and the Black Panthers” to address the assembly of constituents. This would prove to be a “powerful blow to PL and its ‘all nationalism is reactionary line,’” as both factions would later criticize WSA as having racist and sexist tendencies. First to speak was Black Panther revolutionary Rufus “Chaka” Walls. Calling out PL as “armchair Marxists,” he “sneered at [their] claims of being a vanguard party and declared that the Panthers were the true vanguard because they had been out shedding blood and the white left hadn’t even shot rubber bands yet.” In actuality, Walls was addressing white left radicals as a whole. He further spoke on the role of women within SDS, “criticizing women’s liberation as ‘pussy power.’” This became an insult to all factions present at the convention, horrifying RYM and causing PL to begin chanting “Stop Male Chauvinism!” Although members of the Progressive Labor Party seemed to rally against male chauvinism, it was only insofar as their support would counter the Black Panthers’ insults and sneers. In reality, “PL saw the struggle for women’s rights in much the same terms as it viewed the struggle for black rights... Women in American society faced no special oppression, they were simply ‘superexploited’ as workers.” When the chanting would not cease, the session concluded with a fist fight.

49 Barber, A Hard Rain Fell, 164.
50 Barber, A Hard Rain Fell, 164.
51 Sale, SDS, 566.
52 Berger, Outlaws of America, 84.
53 Barber, A Hard Rain Fell, 166.
Tensions were at an all-time high following the scuffle, and yet amidst the shouting and fighting, RYM II officially stepped into the conversation as a new, completely independent group, no longer affiliated with RYM. Going into the convention, those who would create RYM II were still considered a part of RYM merely disagreeing on certain issues, but still remaining inside the newly named Weathermen faction. RYM preferred to push women’s liberation and the women’s movement in general to the side; however, they did “recognize the real reactionary danger of women’s groups that are not self-consciously revolutionary and anti-imperialist... and while [they] did speak of the [real] necessity to ‘smash male supremacy,’ [they] again offered no picture of how male supremacy manifested itself in men.”

RYM believed that, for now, the fight was against the imperialist forces of America and that only after revolution was achieved would women’s liberation be possible.

The 20th of June began like the first two days did: riddled with tense conversations and bickering between factions. RYM had come to the conclusion that kicking out PL was the most important step in being able to move SDS towards the revolutionary path RYM wished. PL leader Jeff Gordon spoke in front of the assembly saying “PL... will not... be intimidated out of SDS.”

The main leaders of RYM — Bernardine Dohrn, Terry Robbins, Mark Rudd, and RYM II leader Mike Klonsky — stood backstage, thinking about how to react to Gordon. They were “reluctant to split the organization, no matter how much [they] despised PL.”

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54 Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell*, 166.
56 Rudd, *Underground*, 151.
Focusing on anti-imperialism and anti-racism, Bernardine Dohrn spoke for RYM and “led the RYM bloc in a walkout from the plenary session, saying that the organization needed to decide if it could allow in its ranks those who denied the right of self-determination for oppressed people.”57 The number of walk-out members grew to around five hundred.58 This was seen by RYM as a victory, illustrating how PL did not have the number of constituents that it would take to overpower the RYM factions and stay within SDS, let alone overthrow the current leadership and seize control.

The fourth day of the convention began with the main factions of SDS meeting on opposite sides of the convention hall. The discussion resumed and as it continued it became evident that PL’s expulsion was probable. Although PL had a “sure, tight, almost missionary state of mind that made them certain they held the ‘correct revolutionary line,’”59 they could not successfully achieve a hostile takeover of SDS. They simply did not have the delegates and constituent support. After the opening talks had ceased, chanting began, Bernardine Dohrn grabbed the microphone and gave a speech, hostile to WSA and calling for the removal of it from the SDS completely. Mark Rudd recalls that “for about twenty minutes, [Dohrn] recounted all of PL’s crimes,” and accused PL of being “objectively racist, anti-communist, and reactionary.”60 Dohrn claimed that SDS was “becoming a revolutionary movement; and as such, it could not allow a group such as PL in its ranks.”61 She called for the complete expulsion of WSA. After this speech, Dohrn led

57 Berger, Outlaws of America, 84.  
58 Rudd, Underground, 151.  
59 Rudd, Underground, 142.  
60 Rudd, Underground, 152.  
61 Berger, Outlaws of America, 86.
RYM into the main convention hall where WSA delegates were gathered and gave
the faction the official news: it was over. In the eyes of the entire RYM faction, WSA
had “attacked every revolutionary nationalist struggle,”62 and that could not be
forgiven.

The final day of the June Convention was concise and docile. The
Weathermen were now in full control of all leadership positions within SDS; WSA
had been officially cast out, and the dissidents of RYM II were not a threat. Aside
from the two remaining main factions, the Weathermen and their opponents within
RYM, now called RYM II, “other [smaller] pre-formed groups—Yippie collectives, the
Panthers, and the Radical Union, for example—stayed with the SDS regulars.”63
Although not formally part of SDS any longer, WSA continued to meet at the
Coliseum, claiming themselves the true SDS. It elected its own national officers and
voted to set up its own SDS National Office in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Back in the
main convention hall, Dohrn, Rudd, Jacobs, and other leaders of SDS began planning
future events in Chicago, including protests during the trial of the “Chicago Eight.”

The June 1969 SDS National Convention was as much a celebration as it was
a struggle. The emergence of the Weathermen into a larger spotlight created a
displacement of the New Left from its previous path and changed the movement’s
course of action forever. The Weathermen took an organization that was beginning
to crack and split it wide open, fracturing SDS into pieces that could not be put
together again. Rudd says that the split “marked the beginning of the end for SDS.”64

62 Berger, Outlaws of America, 86.
63 Sale, SDS, 575.
64 Rudd, Underground, 153.
Although RYM II disagreed with its mother faction RYM, RYM II never posed any threat to the Weathermen faction, the new leadership of SDS. Shortly after the convention, RYM II began to splinter into a host of tiny vanguard parties. These parties tended to focus on one specific issue, like gender equality or Native American rights for example, rather than a host of many different issues that a larger group may not view as highly important. The Weathermen felt that they need not concern themselves with Mike Klonsky and the quickly disintegrating RYM II group, rather they looked forward to testing out whether or not the Weathermen could successfully inspire a revolution. Their assumption proved correct, but their own confidence over the viability of the Weathermen would prove to play a significant part in their own demise.

On the first day of the convention, Abbie Hoffman is reported to have said, “we have come to praise SDS, not to bury it,” but this is not how the national convention ended up playing out. The June 1969 National Convention was the last convention SDS had. The mass membership that SDS had finally achieved after years of hard work had become its own downfall. The Weathermen emerged within SDS and then became increasingly radical. They took over SDS in 1969 when factionalism had pushed the organization to its end. The Weathermen members who were not a part of the Weathermen faction soon splintered off, some joining other organizations that resembled SDS. Some of the smaller factions within SDS survived the split. The Yippies and RYM II, for example, remained as autonomous and identifiable groups. The Yippies stuck to their own messages of media blitz and

65 Sale, SDS, 557.
communal-style living, while RYM II carried a communist message that could incorporate anti-racism, but also appeal to working-class Americans.

Around the mid-1970s, all of these factions began to fade out of the public eye and become nonfunctional, including the Weathermen. But first, the Weathermen, in their new radical stance began their path towards a revolution that they viewed as viable. Their intentions were illustrated in their key slogan: “Bring the War Home!” This home would be Chicago, and the event would be a coming out of sorts, now called the Days of Rage.
CHAPTER THREE

IT'S ALRIGHT MA (I'M ONLY BLEEDING)

FROM WEATHERMEN ABOVE, TO UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION BELOW

The Days of Rage

After the National Convention, SDS was an organization in name only. Instead, the Weathermen controlled what was once SDS until the official end of the college-based organization in late 1970, when many members of the group’s leadership went underground as Weathermen. The last day of the convention, 22 June, was devoted to planning for the Days of Rage. The RYM collective wanted to get started on the new direction of SDS as soon as possible and recruit as many to join the group as they could, especially college students and members of the working-class. From 8 October to 11 October 1969, the Weathermen intended on “Bringing the War Home.” Although there was a demonstration mid-September to protest the trial of the famous ‘Chicago Eight,’ this was the real coming-out event of the new Weathermen-controlled SDS.

This event was designed to provoke radical violence and pro-revolutionary sentiment. It was, essentially, supposed to be the spark that lit the fire of revolution. This means that the Weathermen were not concerned with the safety of non-combatants, they figured that citizens who were not in favor of their cause, specifically the police, deserved violence and blood-shed. There were no innocents in their minds: one was either with the Weathermen or against them; there was no middle ground. The willingness to attack non-combatant citizens is an element that
is a part of the conceptualization of terrorism; however, there is still no proof that the Weathermen’s goal was to induce fear, an essential component of terrorism.

The Weathermen were intent on creating the path toward what they saw as a viable revolution. They sought an end to American imperialism, racism, and the Vietnam Conflict. They were also increasingly in conflict with the police. Mark Rudd recalls that over the course of that summer, “both the Black Panther Party’s office and the SDS National Office had been raided by the Chicago police, with several Panthers arrested,” adding that during the September demonstration for the Chicago Eight, “twelve members of the Chicago Weathermen collective and people from the National Office had been beaten and arrested.”

Things had gotten more confrontational since the events at the 1968 Democratic National Convention a year before and the strong anti-police words in the Weathermen Manifesto. The Chicago Police would no longer tolerate any anti-war or anti-imperialist agendas. Two nights before the beginning of the event, on 6 October, 1969, the Weathermen struck symbolically at the police. The leadership sent out a small team to detonate their first bomb, one that destroyed the ten-foot bronze statue of a Policeman in Haymarket Square, which was the site of the violent 1886 labor rally in which eleven people died, seven of which were police.

On the first day, 8 October, 1969, the Weathermen had planned a large rally in Lincoln Park, expecting over 25,000 youth and middle-class people. Their expectations were wildly overestimated, as only about 700 to 800 would attend in

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67 Although this was technically the first official bombing done by the Weathermen, it is usually not recorded that way.
reality. The Weathermen leadership did not know that the number of attendees would grow throughout the following three days; however, the first day’s turnout was an extreme disappointment to them. It could already be argued as the first case in which the Weathermen had to face the realization that bringing about revolution was a very difficult task, one that could quite possibly be far beyond their reach. Regardless of this let down, the event began anyway with a speech by Bernardine Dohrn at 9 p.m. In her speech, she points out that it was, in fact, the second anniversary of the death of Che Guevara. From the start, her speech was designed to generate a reaction from the youthful crowd, one that intended to incite outrage and a feeling of loss. Shortly after Dohrn, Tom Hayden appeared. Everyone knew his name, one of the founders of SDS and a part of the “Chicago Eight” who were on trial from the 1968 Democratic National Convention riots a year before. Mark Rudd remembers that it was uplifting that a “non-Weatherman supported [their] efforts.” There were not many outside organizations that supported the Weathermen. “Only one other national group, Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF), the youth branch of the Workers World Party (WWP), one of the many tiny Communist parties, sent a contingent” for the Days of Rage. The support was appreciated, but it did not do much to boost attendance numbers on that night in Lincoln Park.

The Weathermen were not even the only group demonstrating in Chicago during the four days of the Weathermen event. A rival demonstration, created by

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70 Rudd, *Underground*, 173.
Mike Klonsky and RYM II, and involving Fred Hampton, a leader of the Chicago Black Panthers, were present in Chicago as well. On the same night as the Weathermen’s first day of rage, Fred Hampton was signed up at the RYM II event to make a speech. This made it very clear just how factionalized and broken SDS was by 1969.

Back in Lincoln Park, around 10:35 p.m., Jeff Jones took the microphone shouting “the code words, ‘I am Marion Delgado!’—evoking the name of a five-year-old California boy who in 1947 had placed a concrete block on railroad tracks to derail an oncoming locomotive.” This was the war-cry to begin the battle, the riot. Jones’s words signified that the Weathermen were calling for the derailing of the American government and a sort of “David and Goliath” outlook on the fight. This was what the Days of Rage were all about: the belief that although they were but a small group, they could defeat the giant American imperialist government. This naive idealism pervaded every action of the group and was a characteristic that would inevitably stop them from achieving their goals in the end.

The protesters ran down the streets of Chicago, toward the city’s affluent Gold Coast, chanting and screaming, trying to catch the police off guard. Weathermen smashed windows of businesses and shops, police cars, and homes, creating a theatrical show on purpose. They wanted to get the attention of the upper classes and challenge any elitism in sight. They succeeded in this. Police barricades began to cut off the protesters near the heart of the city. Bill Ayers recalls that “tear gas seized the air as wailing sirens crisscrossed the city streets.” The first day ended in a riotous mess, concluding around 11:30 p.m. with thirty protesters beaten

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71 Burrough, Days of Rage, 79.
72 Bill Ayers, Fugitive Days, 180.
to the pavement, six Weathermen shot (though none injured seriously), and dozens of arrests.\textsuperscript{73} One thing was for certain, “the macho mood was dissipated,” concludes historian Kirkpatrick Sale, “no one seemed to have joined the Weather ranks that night.”\textsuperscript{74}

Although most accounts say that there were dozens of arrests on that first night, Bill Ayers places the number near one hundred. Moreover, he emphasizes that it was not only the large number that was notable. It was important to see that “each arrest was in fact a collision of pain and blood and ripped skin and chipped teeth or broken bone: broken arms and legs, fractured skulls and jaws, concussions, lacerations, burns, and abrasions.”\textsuperscript{75} However, this illustrative figure is contradicted by Mark Rudd who offers a more moderate account, putting the number of arrests at sixty-eight.\textsuperscript{76} Kathy Wilkerson also says that “sixty-eight people had been arrested.”\textsuperscript{77} Number of arrests aside, the night had ended in violence and bloodshed. Ayers claimed that the police violence only got worse for those who were arrested, with “systematic beatings, breaking people’s glasses in their faces, mace at close range, stomplings, and gauntlets to run.”\textsuperscript{78} This blatant disregard by police of the legal process only infuriated the Weathermen more. Seeing their comrades injured did nothing but fuel the fire. They remained intent on continuing their Days of Rage celebration, no matter the cost. After all, violence was to be expected in an overthrow of the government.

\textsuperscript{73} Burrough, \textit{Days of Rage}, 80.  
\textsuperscript{74} Sale, \textit{SDS}, 601.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, 184.  
\textsuperscript{76} Rudd, \textit{Underground}, 175.  
\textsuperscript{77} Cathy Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close to the Sun} (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 302.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, 184.
It took the next two days, 9 October and 10 October, to bail leading members out of jail. There was supposed to be a women’s march on Thursday, 9 October, but it did not happen, partly because of a low turnout due to so many Weathermen still being incarcerated. Weatherman David Gilbert remembers that when “Illinois called out the National Guard, some of the other actions [we had] planned... had to be cancelled.” Weathermen members were desperate to make sure the Days of Rage did not go down as a loss for the cause of anti-imperialism.

The Weathermen reassembled on what would be the final Day of Rage, Saturday, 11 October, 1969, in the Chicago Loop, “marching peacefully through [the] downtown streets,” past police lines. Once again the marchers sought out the Chicago Police. Coming upon them, rioting then began when David Gilbert “threw a bottle” at them, “which shattered at their feet” as he dashed past them. Again, the protesters found themselves face-to-face with the less-than-compassionate Chicago Police. The police were ready this time and according to historian Bryan Burrough, proceeded to mercilessly beat “everyone with long hair until they fell, bloodied, into the gutters.” Many arrests were made; an outcome that was not much different than the two previous days. Burrough also claims that “more than 120 people were arrested,” and that there was one serious injury, “a city attorney named Richard Elrod, who charged at [Weatherman] Brian Flanagan, lost his balance, and hit his head, leaving him paralyzed from the neck down;” however, a jury later found Flanagan not guilty. The FBI recorded that during the four days, “59 police officers

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79 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 133.  
80 Burrough, Days of Rage, 80.  
81 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 133.  
82 Burrough, Days of Rage, 80.  
83 Burrough, Days of Rage, 80.
sustained personal injury including abrasions, contusions, cuts and bruises on the
arms, legs, groins, body and head; human bites on the arms and hands, loose teeth
and injury to eyes and ears,”\textsuperscript{84} an outcome that is normally overlooked.

From the moment of its conclusion, the Days of Rage was recognized as a
colossal failure and disappointment. Despite many weeks of “intense organizing—
speeches at campuses, outreach to other movement groups, daily trips to high
schools, and ‘exemplary’ acts of militancy—the Weathermen brought almost no one
new to Chicago.”\textsuperscript{85} An event that was supposed to draw many thousands to Chicago
in the name of revolution, anti-racism, and anti-imperialism, can be seen historically
as another step towards the end of the Weathermen, a moment in which the
movement was proven to have a far smaller membership than was originally
expected and far less revolutionary potential. It can be argued that because of this,
many historians today do not give the event much time or consideration when it
comes to its overall cultural effect; however, this is certainly a mistake. The fact that
an event like this was even considered, let alone planned and created, shows the
real cultural tide of the decade, the cultural tide of the decade being a radicalization
of popular culture. The Weathermen, who had been peacefully singing anti-Vietnam
songs in the mid-1960s, had now shifted towards radical violence.

Although there was a lower turnout than expected, many men and women
did attend, they did participate in an expression of anger and outrage towards the
Vietnam Conflict and the actions the government had been taking in many areas of

\textsuperscript{84} Federal Bureau of Investigation (Chicago office), “Foreign Influence – Weather
Underground Organization,” dated August 20, 1976, Links to Resources from Students for a
Democratic Society (SDS) and Related Groups and Activities, accessed May, 2017, http://www.sds-
1960s.org/wuo.htm.

\textsuperscript{85} Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 77.
the world. Burrough argues that the Days of Rage “did achieve something important: it marked Weathermen as the leading player on the ‘heavy edge’ of the New Left, the furthest left, the wildest, the craziest, the most committed.”86 They were not afraid to be arrested, beaten, or shot; they would send their message regardless of the cost. Rudd says that the Weathermen were now “a classic cult, true believers surrounded by a hostile world that [they] rejected and that rejected [them] in return;” he adds that “the rest of the movement hated us, which only confirmed the rightness of our path.”87 They now understood the membership that they had to work with. Ayers remembers it as an important moment, that they were now ready, “dress rehearsal behind [them], to plunge headlong into the whirlpool of violence.”88

The FBI and Going Underground

The aftermath of the Days of Rage brought about a multitude of adjustments for the Weathermen. The violent events separated the Weathermen from other Leftist student groups and the leaders had to face the harsh reality that they were a small group of about 300 members and could not grow much bigger. SDS was hanging on by a thread, increasingly fragmented and barely functioning due to its leadership consisting of Weathermen, who were concerned with their own group’s agenda. The Weathermen were planning events that did not involve SDS and leaving it in limbo, and increasingly since the SDS June 1969 Convention, the group faced a new problem: FBI scrutiny.

86 Burrough, Days of Rage, 80.
87 Rudd, Underground, 184.
88 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 187.
The FBI counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO, was headed by J. Edgar Hoover, who had personally become interested in the Weathermen after they took over SDS at the June 1969 convention. The bureau saw the Weathermen as a made-in-America communist revolutionary group and considered it an overwhelming threat to democracy. COINTELPRO was a special unit that used illegal programs conducted by FBI agents under the table, without the knowledge of the general public; they employed techniques of infiltration, extralegal force, harassment of activists and organization leaders, psychological warfare, spreading disinformation and false rumors intended to harm relationships between organizations, and even occasionally assassinations. There was no boundary the agency would not cross to suppress activists and leftist organizations. One example of their tactics was the supply of false information to the Black Panther Party and the Weathermen so that the two would no longer collaborate on any protest activities. This operation lasted until 1971 when the general public became aware of the FBI’s illegal actions. During this short period of time, COINTELPRO ravaged civil rights groups and sabotaged many organizations, the Black Panthers being just one such example. By using COINTELPRO tactics, the FBI sought to “prevent or break any attempts at multiracial solidarity,” so that multiple organizations could not work together to achieve governmental change.

Created long before the Weathermen, COINTELPRO began in 1956 with the goal of dismantling the Civil Rights Movement and the Communist Party. The two were not related at the time, but through this, Hoover sought to root-out these so-

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89 Berger, Outlaws of America, 64.
called ‘enemies of the state’ to ensure that white, capitalist America remained unchanged. Hoover saw the creation of COINTELPRO as a means of maintaining order. The group used wiretapping and infiltration to keep tabs on and to constantly know the whereabouts of high-profile African American leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. In fact, one of the FBI’s plans was to use harassment to get Dr. King to commit suicide. However, COINTELPRO has not been found to be responsible for King’s assassination. The assassination of Black Panther Fred Hampton by the Chicago Police in late-1969 was directly connected to COINTELPRO, as well as the murder of dozens of other Black Panthers.

One of COINTELPRO’s most important targets was the Black Liberation Movement. Including the Black Panthers in this group, the FBI started targeting African-American radicals in August of 1967. They wanted to counter the growing unrest in African American neighborhoods while also maintaining white supremacy in capitalist America. In order to do so, they used a wide range of tactics to ensure that African American and white Leftist groups would not work together. The counterintelligence action came to a climax in December of 1969 when Fred Hampton, a prominent Black Panther leader, was murdered in a COINTELPRO plan carried out by a Chicago Police division named the Red Squad. The Red Squad was responsible for the deaths of dozens of African-American rebels and activists between the years 1967 and 1969. To some extent, the FBI’s plan to ruin multiracial solidarity had worked and there were quarrels between predominantly

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92 Burrough, *Days of Rage*, 71.
white organizations like Students for a Democratic Society and African-American groups like the Black Panthers. Black Liberation activists did not want to work with white groups, whom they saw as unwilling to give up authority or to compromise. This was one of COINTELPRO's successes, coming at the cost of many murders.

The dramatic difference between African-American and white radical organizations was the high rate of assassination of African-American leadership. White leaders tended to be middle-class and that gave them advantages. They were protected by their skin color and their middle-class upbringing; they could not be murdered in cold blood as could African-American leaders without inciting public outrage. The white organizers understood the privilege of their socioeconomic status, using it to their advantage when setting up demonstrations like the Days of Rage. Even though there were disagreements between the Black Panthers, other African-American organizations, and the Weathermen, the Weathermen saw themselves as being, ultimately, on the same side as the African-Americans with whom they were bickering. But despite having many of the same goals—to end imperialism in America and in so doing, banish the harmful systemic oppression and structural violence that had plagued African-Americans and other ethnic minorities since the beginning of the slave trade—there were many impediments to African-American and white radicals working together.

As with the Black Panthers, COINTELPRO began collecting information and trying to infiltrate the Weathermen following the group's emergence at the June 1969 SDS Convention. This was no surprise; it had been monitoring SDS since 1962 when the Port Huron Statement was published. But the takeover of SDS by the radical Weathermen intensified the FBI's interest in student radicalism and to
dismantle revolutionary plans and communist ideology. Although COINTELPRO’s actions against SDS were not as severe as their blatant acts against African-Americans, their actions were definitely illegal. In June of 1969, former FBI Special Agent, William E. Dyson Jr., was assigned to the case. His job consisted of learning all there was to know about the Weathermen. He explained to an interviewer in 2008 that, “I watched them become the Weathermen! I was with them when they became the Weathermen!”93 He was in Chicago, outside of the June 1969 Convention when SDS split, and was also responsible for monitoring any actions by Weathermembers during their first two years of action, particularly violent acts like the Weathermen bombings. Dyson recalls that after every bombing, he was unable to catch the Weathermen responsible for it, “there was no rule book on how to do these investigations...we couldn’t solve the bombings.”94 He and the rest of his unit continued monitoring the Weathermen until COINTELPRO was shut down in 1971; however, the FBI continued to carefully and illegally keep an eye on the Weathermen, and constantly tried to sabotage the organization, even when the radical core went underground. Despite their best efforts, there was not “much the FBI was able to do to counter the Weathermen... [FBI] agents tried to recruit informants who might signal the group’s plans, but they were all but impossible to come by.”95

The pressures from COINTELPRO may have given an extra push to the Weathermen’s decision to protect themselves and their organization by going

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95 Burrough, Days of Rage, 71.
underground. This decision was made a few months after the Days of Rage. Dohrn and the rest of the leadership gathered the active Weathermen members for a meeting in Flint, Michigan, known as the Flint War Council to go into hiding in order to be able to promote and act out their agenda. This meeting in December 1969, drew together the 300 remaining Weathermen members and consisted of discussing what actions the organization should take next. The meeting hall in Flint was adorned with posters of revolutionaries such as Castro, Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh, as well as “mug shots of enemies of the people, including Vice President Spiro Agnew.” The group was very outspoken, chanting “EXPLODE!” The war council concluded with the group realization that they would be safest underground, where the FBI and right-wing supporters could not find them. The meeting also inadvertently decided the fate of SDS, which was only a shell at this point. In January 1970, the SDS National Office in Chicago was officially closed by the Weathermen. The plan to turn SDS into a revolutionary mass organization were dropped in favor of developing a small, narrow, and disciplined revolutionary organization. After the meeting in Flint, the Weathermen were now underground, meaning they would begin a new phase of their lives in hiding, fugitives who would not resurface until the end of the 1970s.

A little over a year later, on 8 March, 1971, a governmental building was broken into in Media, Pennsylvania. The building, which was small and very discrete-looking, was owned by the FBI and housed many documents on the secret operations that went on inside COINTELPRO. The burglars, who were part of a

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96 Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 123.
group called the Citizens’ Commission to Investigate the FBI, broke in and stole over 1,000 documents containing information on COINTELPRO missions. Stealing these documents was a serious crime; however, the Citizens’ Commission had been right in suspecting COINTELPRO. The documents contained evidence of many illegal dealings, gross misconduct, and details on COINTELPRO’s infiltration of left-wing organizations across the board, harassment, and murder in the name of democracy. The damning truth was out. The documents contained evidence of the FBI meddling in groups like the Black Panthers and wiretapping the Weathermen. The Commission accepted responsibility for carrying out an illegal operation, while at the same time expressing their disgust that the FBI’s “surveillance activities were being carried out on a regular basis against ‘groups and individuals working for a more just, humane, and peaceful society.’” COINTELPRO was shut down immediately and some agents were even prosecuted. As the Weather Underground had suspected, the FBI was indeed trying to infiltrate them. Though the threat of FBI scrutiny was slightly diminished, the Weathermen did not come up from living and operating their organization underground. They remained underground, where they continued to bomb locations around America in an effort to send their anti-imperialist message.

Ultimately, the FBI viewed the Weather Underground as terrorists. In its mind, the Weathermen did indeed use violence to induce fear in non-combatant civilians in order to promote a specific political agenda. This was the excuse for COINTELPRO: that radical violence had to be put to an end. However, the sloppiness

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of the FBI to conceal the COINTELPRO operations eventually led to its demise. The
evidence that they had gathered illegally was of no use to the government now.
Evidently, the Weathermen had stayed the course of their violence, and did not
allow the FBI to intercept that.

The Greenwich Village Townhouse Explosion and a Change in Strategy

After the Weathermen went underground in early 1970, they remained
vigilant of the FBI. Nonetheless, Dohrn, Rudd, and other leading members felt that
staying the course of trying to spur a revolution was still the only way of ending US
imperialism. On 6 March, 1970, Ted Gold, Terry Robbins, and Diana Oughton were
working on a small bomb in a Greenwich Village townhouse when it accidentally
exploded, killing them in the process. Cathy Wilkerson and Kathy Boudin were also
in the townhouse at the time but survived. Commonly referred to by former
members of Weather and historians as the Greenwich Village Townhouse Explosion,
the events of that day changed the course of the group by forever altering their
ideology.

Until 6 March, 1970, those in the Greenwich Village townhouse (and the
Weather Underground as a whole) still believed in their original message,
destroying US imperialism through violent revolution and replacing it with a new
communist government. Terry Robbins was the only member in the townhouse who
had been a part of creating the Weathermen's manifesto; however, all five of them
were leading members of the organization at the time, a part of the New York
collective. Ted Gold had been Columbia's Students for a Democratic Society vice
chairman and Diana Oughton, who was from a very wealthy family, was one of the
few influential women involved with Weather. Cathy Wilkerson, whose family owned the townhome, and Kathy Boudin were there cleaning up the rooms before Wilkerson’s parents returned to the home that night.

That fateful morning, Terry Robbins and Diana Oughton were in the basement working on the bomb meant for a police event at Fort Dix in nearby New Jersey. Cathy Wilkerson recalls that “Terry had decided that [the basement] was the safest place to work on the devices.” Ted Gold left the townhouse to go down to the closest drugstore and buy cotton balls. Moments after Gold’s return, there were three explosions, the first explosion went off at 11:55am, shaking the home, then another blast seconds afterward, essentially destroying the townhouse completely. The “two explosions eviscerated the townhouse, destroying the first floor and blowing a great hole in its brick facade; above, the top floors hung like a set of trembling balconies, ready to fall at any moment.” Cathy Wilkerson says she and Kathy Boudin were in different rooms of the top floor when the first two blasts went off. Immediately after the first, Wilkerson began yelling for Boudin, and after the second, coughing through the thick dust, they ran from the townhouse to the home of Susan Wagner, a neighbor. When the bomb exploded, Boudin was in the shower. When the two got to Wagner’s, someone gave Boudin a blanket because she was still soaking wet and, more importantly, in shock. The explosions had gone off so quickly that the two women could only think to escape as fast as possible. A third explosion finally destroyed everything that was left in the townhome.

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After Wilkerson and Boudin got out of the almost disintegrated townhouse, they planned to escape the city by subway train, knowing they could not hide out with their neighbor for long. The police were arriving and were sure to come to the Wagner house seeking witnesses. The fire department was already throwing water on the mess when Wilkerson and Boudin were escaping the neighborhood. Wilkerson writes, “hoping that our gender and the color of our skin would deflect the notice of the subway clerk, the two of us went through the turnstile together on our one token.”\textsuperscript{100} They had once again gone underground.

By 12:30pm, “a half hour after the explosions, the hollowed-out skeleton of the townhouse was engulfed in angry flames, spewing thick clouds of smoke into the gray sky.”\textsuperscript{101} Originally it was thought that the destruction had been caused by a gas explosion, but the authorities soon realized that there had been explosive material in the basement of the townhouse. Identifying Gold and Oughton did not take very long (only a matter of days), but because there was relatively nothing left of Robbins, he was not identified until two months later by a single finger. After identifying the remains of Gold and Oughton, the police concluded that this had been a Weatherman “bomb factory.”\textsuperscript{102}

It took days for all of the members of the Weathermen Organization across the country to be alerted, but when they were, the organization descended into chaos. Rudd found Boudin with Wilkerson in her family’s second home, hiding from authorities after fleeing from Greenwich Village. Bill Ayers, who was in a serious

\textsuperscript{100} Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close}, 348.
\textsuperscript{101} Burrough, \textit{Days of Rage}, 109.
\textsuperscript{102} Federal Bureau of Investigation (Chicago office), “Foreign Influence.”
relationship with Diana Oughton at the time, recalls that he found out in a phone booth somewhere across the country days later. Weathermen members were in shock and horror at the loss of Robbins and Gold, individuals who were leading figures of the group and symbolized strength and determination for the cause. Their deaths scared non-leadership members and hurt participation enough to bring membership down significantly. Although it is not known the exact number of members who dropped out of the group after the explosion, it was most likely about half of their membership. This forced the organization to consolidate its leadership, which afterward would leave the Weathermen with “150 or so members.”

Despite living through the Vietnam Conflict and having the violent destruction of the US government as its principal aim, the group was, nevertheless, unprepared to handle the loss of its members. The loss of key members in any situation would harm an organization; however, Robbins, Gold, and Oughton symbolized the pinnacle of the Weathermen Organization. This severe loss within the leadership worsened organizational problems, such as membership recruitment, that had plagued the Weather Underground since its inception after the Days of Rage. Many within the group worried that further loss of leadership life would doom their mission to failure, as there would likely be large scale losses of normal members as well. However, this loss of life was something that should have been expected. The Weathermen wanted a violent revolution, and violent revolutions often result in pain and death. “This is what the Vietnamese [were] being subjected

103 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 195.
104 Berger, Outlaws of America, 129.
105 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 172.
to every day;” unfortunately, “this is the ugliness of violence.” But the Weathermen could not handle this.

After the explosion, the leadership of the Weather Underground was reduced and renamed the Central Committee. This Committee consisted of Dohrn at the helm, Mark Rudd (who would soon be pushed out), J.J., Jeff Jones, and Bill Ayers. Their exact positions within the leadership were not recorded. They led the Weather Underground from different posts around the country in secret, with one leader controlling each location.

For the Weather Underground, the townhouse explosion confirmed the decision to go underground and become an anonymous network of individuals across the country, devoted to stopping the Vietnam Conflict and crippling US imperialism. By March 1970, that process had been going on for months. Hoover and the FBI called for the arrest of the Weathermen then more often than ever.

Most importantly, the townhouse event precipitated a shift in strategy for the Weathermen Underground. The group “defined the greatest error to be its own political thinking and attitude, rather than just the bomb’s inadvertent detonation or the group’s technical inexperience.” The Central Committee decided in the middle of March 1970 that they would no longer target human beings with their violence. Instead, they would bomb buildings only after warning people to evacuate the location. The new-found path to de-escalate violence shifted Weather strategy from full-fledged revolution to symbolic expressions of anger and outrage. The Weathermen believed that this would open the eyes of the government to the terror

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106 Burrough, Days of Rage, 111.
107 Berger, Outlaws in America, 130.
for which it was responsible on a daily basis in Vietnam, prompting the US to pull out of Southeast Asia for good. It was clear that their intention was violence without death. In fact, after the incident in Greenwich, not a single death was caused by the Weathermen.

The Weather Underground went from fearlessly threatening to violently destroying the country in the name of anti-imperialism no matter the cost to vowing never to harm a human being. The reasons for this include more than the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion. The Chicago Days of Rage highlighted the inexperience of the group when it came to rallying the working-class, showed their short-sightedness, lack of knowledge of the American lower-class, and overconfidence. The best example of these faults was their uninformed belief that tens of thousands would show up to join them in Chicago. There cannot be a revolution without revolutionaries. The Weathermen knew this quite well, having witnessed failed communist revolutions in countries across the globe; however, it was the communist victories—Che Guevara’s victory in Cuba for example—that kept them going. The Weathermen leadership believed that if they could gain the support of non-student working-class Americans, revolution would be not only possible, but inevitable. The Days of Rage proved to Weatherleaders like Dohrn and Rudd that they were going to have a much tougher time winning popular support than they had previously anticipated. The failure of that four-day protest had already demonstrated the need for a shift in ideology; however, the Weathermen continued on, determined that things would change, still believing in their original message in their Manifesto.
The Days of Rage marked the first turning point in the course of the Weathermen’s trajectory and the townhouse explosion marked the second. The townhouse explosion hit the Weathermen where they cared most, their own members, making their decision to change ideology an emotional one. The feeling of loss created by the deaths of three important leaders elicited a reaction that had not been foreseen by the group’s leadership; emotional tragedy and loss are the easiest and most logical explanation for this drastic shift in ideology. Mark Rudd recalled his immediate reaction of anger and sadness when he heard who had died in the townhouse, “a red gash split open in time... a stillness [that] lasted less than a second, an eternity before the pain rushed in... I was face-to-face with a loss so immense that it dwarfed everything else, yet I had to act.”\textsuperscript{108} He knew that Robbins’s leadership had been a problem in the New York collective; he was never allowed to be questioned and had a terrible temper. Robbins’s actions aside, Rudd’s emotionality over the event began a change in his own beliefs.

Realizing the cost of radical violence, the Weathermen no longer wanted to stay a violent, revolutionary course. It had only resulted in the harming of their own members. In shifting their strategy from one hellbent on a violent overthrow of capitalist and imperialist hegemony to one focused on staging protests, directed at symbols of capitalism and ruthless power, the Weathermen attempted to distance themselves from terror as a political method. They no longer targeted noncombatants, having never actually harmed them. Along with this, they were not technically using violence to induce fear, but rather to change government.

\textsuperscript{108} Rudd, \textit{Underground}, 195.
Through the loss of their own members and close friends, the Weathermen came to an emotional realization that using terror as a tactic to induce fear in non-combatants for the advancement of a political agenda was not going to give them the outcome that they desired. A shift to symbolic bombings would target the source of their grievances: the US government. According to the third criterion of moral justification for the use of terror specified in this study, directing terrorist activity only at those who are guilty of injustice would now morally justify the Weathermen, if one were to still argue that they were a terrorist organization.
CHAPTER FOUR

A HARD RAIN’S A-GONNA FALL:

THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND IN ACTION

Non-Lethal Bombing as a Strategy (1970-1971)

After the explosion at the Greenwich Village townhouse and the Weathermen’s decision not to harm anyone again with one of their bombs, planning began for when and where their next detonation would occur. The leaders who remained traveled to different Weather collectives across the country from New York to the Midwest, and especially on the West Coast, in order to discuss where the organization would go from there. The leading members, Ayers and Rudd, ended up in San Francisco.

At this time, many within the Weather Underground were disheartened by the rapidly declining membership. Dozens of members left without any notice. The leadership assumed that those who were not responding to messages had lost faith in the group and abandoned the belief that they could ever be a viable competitor to the United States government. Dohrn and J.J. were already in San Francisco, heading the collective, the San Francisco Tribe, that had been working out of there from the beginning of 1970 when the group decided to go underground. Rudd and Ayers soon joined them, while Wilkerson and Gilbert stayed somewhere else on the West Coast, although their exact location is still unknown. Many of the Weathermen who were not part of the main leadership have never disclosed where they were at this time, especially those who had been in New York at the time of the townhouse explosion.

Ayers makes the comparison that their “lives underground, in outward form at least, resembled the lives of a generation—moving from place to place, extending
childhood indefinitely, entering and ending relationships, experimenting with love
and work and all manner of ways of being.” With this he argues that at this time,
the Weathermen were just an extension of the counterculture that birthed them. He
also makes life underground sound like a serene break from a capitalist above
ground. That being said, life underground was not always peaceful.

Then, in a bombshell announcement, Dohrn announced that J.J. had been
expelled from the Weathermen and that Mark Rudd had been demoted. His role in
the organization was lowered to the spotter, the member who would find the best
place to lay the bomb. According to Rudd, Dohrn explained that J.J. needed to “go out
on his own... to learn about the emerging youth culture and ‘to get his head
straight.’” It is likely that Rudd’s close friendship with J.J. caused his own fall in
the Weatherman ranks and his eventual exile from the Weatherman leadership.
The year 1970 brought about change in Rudd’s viewpoint. He became much less
violent in his pursuits, likely a result of his loss of faith that the working-class would
ever join with the Weathermen in creating a revolution. During the first year
underground, looking back, Mark Rudd writes about a feeling of overall
disillusionment and the loneliness of being on the run, explaining that he was
“unhappy and cynical,” and began “sinking deeper and deeper into depression” by
the latter half of 1970. The longer he was underground, the more discontent
boiled within him towards a leadership that was beginning to push him out of the
organization. On the other hand, Gilbert, whose exact location was unknown at this

109 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 222.
110 Rudd, Underground, 214.
111 Rudd, Underground, 214.
112 Rudd, Underground, 219,231.
time, says his time underground was “almost like living in a fairy tale. Contrary to
the common misconception, [he] didn’t feel paranoid... wasn’t constantly looking
over [his] shoulder.”

Other members write of their mixed feelings towards living underground.

Ayers also looks back on the early 1970s fondly, even after losing Diana
Oughton in the Greenwich Townhouse Explosion, writing that he and Dohrn “fell in
love slowly in that first year” underground. All of the Weathermen took on aliases
when they went underground, Dohrn went by the name Rose Bridges and Ayers, by
Joe Brown. He describes the transition as shedding his former identity “like an old
skin,” saying, “someone had called out Bill in a crowded room in those years, I
wouldn’t have even looked up.” Everything was “need-to-know,” wrote Ayers,
which may have made things somewhat unorganized, but the leadership did not find
this concerning.

All of the members lived very modestly and, even though they were
sometimes funded heavily by their own family members or wealthy connections,
they were not the privileged, upper-class children that the media tended to portray
them as. Most of the money they were given went towards the planning and
carrying out of bombings across the country. The organization seemed to have hit
its stride, acting against the government of the United States in the name of anti-
imperialism and anti-racism. Even more encouraging for the group: they were

113 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 167.
114 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 218.
115 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 218.
116 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 218.
getting away with it. However, they were still not gaining any working-class followers.

Meanwhile, student resistance to the Vietnam Conflict was reaching a height it had never before seen. On 4 May, 1970, shots were heard around the world when the National Guard opened fire on students who were protesting the looming invasion of Cambodia at Kent State University in Ohio. Four students were killed, and even more were injured. Campuses erupted in revolt by students who were horrified that their own country had resorted to murdering its youth. The Weathermen, equally disgusted by these events, saw an opportunity. They had been planning a bombing since the townhouse explosion and now wanted to make the forthcoming detonation a tribute to the students who had been murdered. The site chosen was on the West Coast; however, when they tried to detonate it, it did not go off. The young radicals had no choice but to responsibly (and anonymously) call authorities so that the bomb could be safely defused. The Weathermen had planned on this bombing being their first major event since the townhouse explosion. Instead, they settled for a release of their first communique.

The Weathermen used the communique, released on 21 May 1970, to officially declare war on the United States government. Their first communique began with a hello from author Bernardine Dohrn, proving that she was still alive and had so far eluded capture by the FBI. The statement said that “black people [had] been fighting almost alone for years,” and that their job was now “to lead
white kids into armed revolution.”

It further discussed the influence of Che Guevara, how he had opened their eyes to the fact that “revolutionaries move like fish in the sea,” and that the “alienation and contempt that young people [now had] for this country [had] created the ocean” for the revolution. The communique further declared that the Weathermen would live peacefully underground, refusing to let a single human being get killed by one of their bombs ever again. Their targets would now be locations and infrastructure that symbolized the capitalist, imperialist American government. The communique immediately put the Weathermen back on the FBI’s radar. They had been unable to locate the Weathermen after the chaos of the Greenwich Village explosion and those who went underground seemed to remain one step ahead of the FBI throughout the 1970s.

About two weeks later, on 9 June, the Weathermen detonated a bomb at the New York City Police Headquarters, calling this a response to police oppression of African-Americans. This was actually the Weather Underground’s first successful detonation and marked an important moment for the group. Gilbert says that according to newspaper reports, “the device had been placed in a locker room and... seven employees sustained minor injuries from shattered glass.” By alerting the police headquarters that they were going to bomb the location, almost everyone had time to evacuate safely before it detonated. The Weather Underground most likely targeted New York City because it was one of the only cities on the East Coast in which Weathermembers were still living. By this time, most members were living on

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118 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “Communique #1.”
119 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 161.
the West Coast in or outside San Francisco. Others were in Chicago, and the rest of
the reported members were in New York City. It has never been reported that
Weathermen were living anywhere other than these three areas during the 1970s.

To accompany the bomb, the Weathermen issued their second communiqué.
This pattern would be repeated throughout 1970: they would detonate a bomb, then
claim responsibility through a communiqué and explain more specifically why they
blew up a certain location. Communiqué #2 came with the title “Damage and
Injuries at This Time—Details Later.” The letter explained that the police
headquarters was symbolic of the Weathermen’s enemies—all police—and that this
bomb was meant to protest the ongoing violence that police imposed on minorities
and youth in America. The group also used this bombing to express outrage over the
Kent State massacre. The communiqué ended with the statement “the time is now.
Political power grows out of a gun, a Molotov, a riot, a commune… and from the soul
of the people,” calling upon working-class and youth to act in the name of
socialism.120

The Weather Underground detonated their next bomb on 16 July, 1970 at the
Presidio Army base in California, to mark the eleventh anniversary of the Cuban
Revolution. They used the anniversary to assert their viewpoint that revolution was
still possible. It also stood as a reminder that the Weathermen were everywhere,
coast to coast, and showed that the FBI could not catch them, despite having the
funds and resources of the US government behind the search. Immediately they

to Resources from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Related Groups and Activities,
issued their third communique, which stated that “hundreds of thousands of freaks plot to build a new world on the ruins of honky America.” By the phrase “hundreds of thousands of freaks,” the Weathermen meant that collectively, alongside third-world parties, the rejected socialist youth of America could destroy the imperialist United States. They ended the letter with a jab at the authorities who were looking for them by saying, “don’t look for us… we’ll find you first.”

About two months later, between the first and second weeks of September 1970, the Weathermen successfully helped famous LSD advocate Timothy Leary escape from Folsom Prison and were paid the sum of $20,000. It is not reported who paid them this amount of money; however, it undoubtedly went a long way for the group. The Weathermen were certainly advocates of Leary’s writings and research, as Leary was a leftist, siding with other socialist thinkers on many issues. This caper proved to be as important a symbol as a bomb would have been, showing that the organization was capable of doing anything and everything, and at any time. It also expressed backlash towards the social control of illegal drug use. The Weathermen were known for their free use of drugs, as were many anti-war and youth groups at the time. After Leary’s escape, the fourth Weathermen communique, written by Dohrn stated that “LSD and grass, like the herbs and cactus and mushrooms of the American Indians and countless civilizations that have existed on this planet, will help us make a future world where it will be possible to live in peace.”

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122 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “Communique #3.”
123 Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “Communique #4,” September 18, 1970, Links to Resources from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Related Groups and...
Weathermen expressed their commitment to freeing “prisoners of war” like Leary, who had been “held against his will and the will of millions of kids” in America.\textsuperscript{124,125} The Weathermen would continue to back prisoners who they believed were being wrongfully held behind bars, standing behind the prison movement of the 1970s that argued against the unjust policies that put a disproportionately large number of African-American men behind bars than whites convicted of the same crime. This was also the last event that Mark Rudd participated in, as he officially left the group shortly after, but remained underground until 1976.

After helping Leary escape from prison, Rudd became more and more disillusioned with the Weather Underground. He no longer held a leadership position and did not enjoy life underground as some other members did. Feeling alone and isolated, Rudd could no longer stand being a part of a group that no longer valued his participation. It was his disagreement with leadership that pushed him away from the organization he helped to found. Rudd has not written about what exactly he disagreed with when it came to the Weathermen’s ideology and methods; however, he discusses being disenchanted with Dohrn and Ayers and blames his leaving on himself, feeling that he had failed by doubting the group and that he was not committed enough to the revolution.\textsuperscript{126} He wanted time to be outside of the organization and reassess what he believed in.

\begin{footnotes}
\item Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, “Communique #4.”
\item This is the final Weathermen communiqué found. It is not known whether or not there are more; however, it is unlikely.
\item Rudd, Undergound, 230-231.
\end{footnotes}
The two bombings that concluded the Weathermen’s 1970 campaign came on the same day: 8 October, 1970. The targets were two different locations, each with its own specific purpose and meaning. First, they detonated a bomb at the Queens Courthouse in New York in solidarity with the New York prison revolts that had recently begun. The second bomb was set off at the Harvard Center for International Affairs to protest continued American involvement in the Vietnam Conflict. It was yet another reminder to the federal authorities that the Weather Underground were in multiple cities and could gain access into any building they wanted to target. The Harvard detonation astonished many members of the media and public as it took place at an educational institution, especially one in which their mother organization, Students for a Democratic Society, had developed. One could argue that to the Weathermen, an institution like Harvard symbolized—just as Columbia had in 1968—the elitism that the organization wanted to tear down.

Before the end of 1970, the Weathermen carried out one more action, one that was non-violent in nature. They released a statement entitled “New Morning” on 6 December. It was sent to those in the underground media that they felt “closest to,” and expressed the continued determination of the group to fight against American imperialism and the overwhelming dominance of capitalist ideology. They further said: “[the] townhouse [explosion] forever destroyed our belief that armed struggle is the only real revolutionary struggle.”\(^{127}\) They describe the motive for their shift in strategy as coming with the knowledge that this new path would keep them morally above the government whose actions they so opposed, a government

that was still murdering innocent civilians in Vietnam and Southeastern Asia every
day. The Weathermen statement implied that revolutionary culture could include
violence not targeted towards human beings, that symbolic actions were just as
important and effective, if not more so, than the death count. Near the end of the
statement, the Weathermen attest that the “hearts of [their] people are in a good
place,” and that they were “building different kinds of leaders and organizations
throughout the country,” that would become a New Nation, band together, fighting
in the coming year.\textsuperscript{128} The entire piece was a symbol of hope by and for the
Weathermen. The title showed this in invoking a new dawn on the horizon, a new
morning that would awaken Americans across the country to rise up and become a
part of the revolution.

The first bombing in 1971 did not come until 28 February. It was one of the
most famous bombings by the Weathermen Organization: the bombing of the US
Capitol Building to protest the American invasion of Laos, a country neighboring
Vietnam and Cambodia. It could be argued that their success proved that the
Weathermen still remained at large and capable of penetrating even the most highly
regarded and well-secured government buildings. It showcased the skill and
precision of the organization, able to blow up a wing of the ultimate symbol of
capitalism, still without harming a single human being. This took an incredible
amount of planning, which could explain why there is such a gap in Weatherman
activity for months.

\textsuperscript{128} Weather Underground Organization, “New Morning,” 7.
After the bombing of the Capitol, the Weathermen detonated only one more bomb that year. This came months later on 17 September at the New York Department of Corrections. It expressed outrage over the murder of twenty-nine inmates at Attica State Penitentiary. The murder of famous African-American activist George Jackson by prison guards proved to be the catalyst “for the biggest and most dramatic prison rising in U.S. history.” The Weathermen, who had backed the prison reform movement since its infancy and dedicated a previous bomb in October of 1970 to it, believed that this action would add to the revolt and show the public that there was an ally working in the prisoners’ interest outside prison walls.

The Weather Underground did not resume bombing until May of 1973. The delay was caused by money problems and also internal reorganization. Being on the run from the FBI’s counterintelligence program proved to be expensive. Although they returned to the tactic of bombing in 1973 and did not detonate their final bomb until mid-1975, it was apparent at this time that the Weather Underground was losing steam. They were never more active than during the years 1970 and 1971, with the year 1970 seeing more bombings than any other year.

Final Years Underground (1972-1975)

After the chaotic first two years of the Weathermen’s underground action, the year 1972 seemed to observers above ground like a stagnant break for the organization; however, this was not entirely the case. Although there was only one

129 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 180-181.
bombing the entire year, the Weathermen, in fact, kept themselves quite busy. Working with a small remnant of about fifteen members, a stark contrast to the roughly 150 who went underground in 1970, they continued to trudge on with revolutionary struggle that they still thought to be achievable through symbolic violence.

For the Weathermen, the year 1972 consisted of constant traveling and negotiating. The dismal size of their group required them to seek funding and help from other revolutionary and leftist groups around the country.130 The organization, still being wanted as fugitives of the law by the FBI, would travel discreetly with their fake names and identification. Which exact groups they met with are unknown; however, they used these meetings not only to request cash, but to make up with organizations from which they had once cut themselves off. As a result, the Weathermen tried to build back many of the bridges that they had once burned.

The Weathermen also spent this time anonymously living among the counterculture. David Gilbert remembers taking on a part-time job during 1972 to make ends meet, recounting, “I worked bagging groceries, and the union medical plan afforded me some long neglected dental work... The twenty-five hours a week at the job had the benefit of talking with and learning more about the lives and ideas of other workers.”131 Returning to the above-ground world in a more relaxed, working-class lifestyle, provided the Weathermen with stability and a chance to interact with the working men and women whom they claimed to champion. It

130 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 193.
131 Gilbert, Love and Struggle, 193.
provided them with the opportunity to reconnect with the class that the
organization had once called on for support a little over three years before.

Other than making connections with outside groups across the country, the
Weathermen set off one single bomb on 19 May, 1972, and although it was the only
one of the year, the location captured enough recognition to last until their next.
“Everything was absolutely ideal on the day I bombed the Pentagon,” attests Bill
Ayers in his memoirs, “the sky was blue. The birds were singing. And the bastards
were finally going to get what was coming to them.”\textsuperscript{132} Much like the bombing of the
US Capitol, the bombing of the Pentagon made a lasting impression. It was one of the
three Weathermen “dream targets” (the others being the Capitol and the White
House). Americans could not believe that the small group of Weathermen were able
to scope out the perfect spot: a woman’s bathroom in the Air Force wing. Even
though the Pentagon is a busy place, like all of their other bombings, no one was
killed. The date was also significant, as it was the birthday of deceased North
Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh. The Weathermen claimed that the bomb was for
both this reason and retaliation for the recent US bombing of Hanoi. After the
bombing, the Weathermen would be silent until almost exactly a year later in 1973,
giving them time to travel and regroup. During this short break, with no significant
FBI information on where members were located, the government assumed the
group had disbanded. “For Weather to give up bombings all together, however,
would be to disavow everything it had achieved to that point.”\textsuperscript{133} Thus, they adopted
a new plan: fewer bombings, bigger targets.

\textsuperscript{132} Ayers, \textit{Fugitive Days}, 264.
\textsuperscript{133} Burrough, \textit{Days of Rage}, 231.
Two more bombings were carried out in 1973. The Weathermen blew up the 103rd precinct in New York on 18 May, 1973 in response to the police murder of an African-American youth. The building may not have been as large a target as some of the previous ones, but it was a symbol of systemic violence by police in America. The operation was carefully planned over a period of months by the remaining members of the New York Collective.

Four months later, on 28 September, 1973, the organization bombed the International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) Headquarters in New York in response to the US-backed coup in Chile, an action that was not related to the Vietnam Conflict in any way, but merely to communism. The bombing was one of the Weather Underground’s new “bigger targets,” and they took pride in targeting such a large government business.

Also, during this year, because of a recent US Supreme Court ruling making it illegal for the government to use information in court that had been gathered by illegal and unconstitutional means, the government formally requested to have most of the charges against the Weathermen dropped. There was no longer evidence from the FBI's illegal COINTELPRO operations that could be used against Weathermembers. This meant that the majority of the members and former members still underground could resurface and face no criminal charges or any jail time. The US Supreme Court proved the idea that “no matter how much one may disapprove of the movement’s morality or methods, it is certain that those who protested the war were acting within the unmistakable guarantees of the
Constitution.” They would no longer be held criminally responsible for actions that they had committed during the period 1969 to 1971. Nothing from years after 1971 could be prosecuted either, because the Weathermen were never caught in any of their bombings. However, this did not happen.

A little less than six months later, on 6 March, 1974, the Weathermen set off a bomb at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Offices in San Francisco, another big target. The Weathermen did so to protest the forced sterilization of lower class women in the area. It can be argued that targeting a building that involved government functions that aided the working and middle-class may have been counterproductive; however, the message behind the bombing was to call attention to change in the programs that were meant to aid the lower classes, but, at the time, were not providing enough help.

Not long after, the Weathermen would release new literature, designed to pull in a more Leninist audience in a new post-Vietnam-Conflict era. Not a new Manifesto, but more of an addition to “New Morning,” Prairie Fire spoke to an America that had begun to remove itself from a disastrous conflict in Vietnam, and although the last US troops would not leave Vietnam for almost another year, the entire country (and much of the world) knew that the fighting was coming to an end. The left was on the verge of victory. Prairie Fire extensively discussed the nature of post-revolution Vietnam, and how new radical strategy from radical groups in America could still give rise to a tangible revolution. Abbie Hoffman even publicly endorsed the writing, praising the message the Weathermen were sending and

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134 Davis, Spying on America, 156.
saying that every American should own it.\textsuperscript{135} Released on 9 May 1974, the document of more than 150 pages marked a new phase for the organization, a phase in which they believed the war was finally coming home. The document highlights this by stating, "Watergate is a magnificent victory of the struggles of the 60s, a reflection of the war coming home."\textsuperscript{136} The turmoil of the 1970s was proving to be “indicative of serious and fatal weakness in the system."\textsuperscript{137} This turmoil, the Weathermen believed, was something they could turn into a revolution, by taking a different, more old-left Leninist approach (a result of the recent loss in Southeastern Asia and conservative political disasters like Watergate and FBI's COINTELPRO coming to light). The piece would guide the Weathermen’s actions into the later 1970s. They did not know, however, that much like the Vietnam Conflict, the organization would soon be entering into a slow decline, before eventually, a gradual fade out.

On 31 May, 1974, after the release of \textit{Prairie Fire}, the Weathermen resumed bombing. This was both another protest as well as a statement of intent to follow through with what they had outlined in their latest publication. This time the target was the Office of the California Attorney General; the group intended to demonstrate their outrage over the killing of six Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) members. It is unknown whether or not the Weathermen had any connection with the SLA at this time, although it is unlikely because of the SLA’s outward opposition to the Weathermen. Much like the Black Panthers, the SLA did not take the

\textsuperscript{135} Marty Jezер, \textit{Abbie Hoffman: American Rebel} (1992), 258-259.
\textsuperscript{137} Dohrn, Ayers, Jones, \textit{Sing a Battle Song}, 257.
Weathermen seriously as a revolutionary group and did not believe it was committed to real struggle.

The next bombing credited to the Weathermen Underground was just two weeks later at Gulf Oil’s Pittsburg Headquarters on 17 June, 1974, to protest US actions in Angola in which the company was directly linked. It was not as large a target in America as the Pentagon, Capitol, or ITT Headquarters had been, but bombing Golf Oil nevertheless sent a message to the large corporations that benefited from military escalation in an American capitalist system.

The next bombing occurred more than six months later, on 28 January, 1975, and was one of the final bombings claimed by the Weathermen. It took place at the US State Department, and one can argue that this bombing was one of their more significant, dwarfed only by those at the Capitol and the Pentagon. Although the Weathermen would never be able to complete their aforementioned “dream list” of top three targets, they came quite close. This bombing came in response to final escalation in Vietnam, the last bit of fighting that was conducted before American troops left in April.

The final Weathermen bomb was placed in the Banco de Ponce in New York on 16 June, 1975, two months after America had completely pulled out of Vietnam. The organization targeted the location to show their solidarity with Puerto Rican cement workers who were on strike at the time.\(^{138}\) It served as the perfect example of how removed from the Vietnam conflict the group had become now that the war

\(^{138}\) Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 214.
had ended. This final bombing would signify a new era for the Weathermen, one of disillusionment and abandoned revolution.

Resurfacing: The End of the Weather Underground (1976 and Later)

The 16 June bombing in 1975 proved to be the final bombing by the Weathermen. After this, the Weathermen remained underground for seven months with no evidence of any communiques or actions of any sort. As 1976 began Weather Underground members began a slow transition to the above ground world they once knew. The bombing was over and despite the continued dominance of US imperialism around the globe, the Vietnam Conflict was over. The organization had been setting off bombs for over six years, and contrary to their original goal, their bombs did not result in the ending of the Vietnam Conflict. The Weathermen may have been a contributing factor in some sort, but if so, not by much. They had few followers or hardly any audience. The weakening of their organization led to the only possible outcome: a slow decline of the organization and eventual dissolution.

Between 1976 and 1980, most of the Weathermembers who had gone underground resurfaced. The reemergence of some is not documented, simply because not all members are open to discussing this period of their life, but many were. The beginning of this trend began with Mark Rudd in 1976. Rudd may not have been the very first member or former member to resurface, but he and his wife Sue were the first to document their transition back to the above ground world. As a husband and father, Rudd could not imagine facing multiple FBI charges. Quietly living in New York, Rudd describes the difficult process, stating “my biggest worry was prison. I decided that I could handle up to two years’ time if I had to, though I
didn’t know how I’d cope with more.”\textsuperscript{139} He was pleased to learn that he would face no criminal charges because all of the evidence against him was judged to have been illegally obtained under the FBI’s COINTELPRO operation. Shortly after Rudd’s transition back to a normal middle-class life, J.J. resurfaced as well, reconnecting with Rudd.\textsuperscript{140} J.J. ended up living in New York with Rudd and his family until around the end of 1976. Thereafter, Rudd and Sue lived quietly and peacefully in New York.

For Kathy Wilkerson, the decision to return to a middle-class life was not an easy one. Wilkerson made the decision in 1979, three years after Rudd and his wife. She and Dohrn had been the leading women of the organization. Giving up on an ideology she had worked to promote for a decade was not something that she had envisioned. After years underground, she wanted to come back to an above ground life in which she would no longer be on the run. Her memoirs are titled \textit{Flying Close to the Sun}, which in and of itself is an illuminating title, for she knew she had reached the peak of her radicalization, and that it had to come to an end. Needing a way to survive and also wanting to be a part of the women’s liberation conversation, she believed she could no longer remain in hiding. As Wilkerson says in her memoirs, “I realized I needed to be a part of a broader discussion if I was to continue to reconstruct new ideas about change... as long as I was isolated and on my own, I would never be able to even afford the newspaper.”\textsuperscript{141} Resurfacing just before Ayers and Dohrn in 1979, she was one of the few Weathermen to serve jail time. After prison, Wilkerson studied electrical engineering technology, believing that science

\textsuperscript{139} Rudd, \textit{Underground}, 290.
\textsuperscript{140} Rudd, \textit{Underground}, 280-284.
\textsuperscript{141} Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close}, 385.
and math were essential to understanding the "critical and political economic decisions of the day."\textsuperscript{142}

Most of the members who resurfaced during this period (1976-1980) only received small fines if they paid any penalty at all. This was the case for Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn. Although this sounds surprising given the fact that Dohrn had at one time been on the FBI's Top Ten Most Wanted list, COINTELPRO let her and Ayers off the hook for most of the criminal actions they had committed. Dohrn and Ayers had maintained a romantic relationship for many years, and like Rudd, they had a small child to consider when it came to maintaining a life underground. In 1980, the couple turned themselves in to authorities in Chicago. Dohrn faced some charges and even some prison time, but ultimately served less than a year in jail before returning to her family to resume a middle-class lifestyle in the Midwest.

Some members of the Weather Underground refused to give up on the group or their goal of toppling American imperialism easily. David Gilbert was one of these cases. He argued in \textit{Love and Struggle} that resurfacing would not help to strengthen the movement, but rather, would tear it apart. Eventually realizing he could not save the organization, he joined with another underground group of white activists called the Revolutionary Armed Task Force (RATF). In October of 1981, RATF, working with the Black Liberation Army, robbed a Brinks secure money transporting vehicle in New York. The robbery got out of hand and the ordeal resulted in a shootout.\textsuperscript{143} Gilbert, being an accessory to this crime, has been in prison ever since, not eligible for parole until 2056. Even though the robbery was not tied to the Weathermen in

\textsuperscript{142} Wilkerson, \textit{Flying Close}, 387.
\textsuperscript{143} Gilbert, \textit{Love and Struggle}, 277-278.
any way, from prison, Gilbert has released multiple books on the Weathermen and
his involvement in the group, as well as starred alongside Dohrn, Ayers, Rudd, and
other members in a Weathermen documentary which was released in 2003.

In an interview conducted in 2006, Mark Rudd remarked that the
Weathermen “didn’t even try to keep the organization together” at the end. They
“were a part of the problem, not the solution.”144 The end of the Weather
Underground was a gradual and steady decline. It had fizzled out rather than
coming to a cumulative climax. By 1980, most members had come out of hiding,
although a few still remain underground to this day. Regardless of this fact, the
organization had come to an end. The Weather Underground Organization was no
more. After the Vietnam Conflict concluded in 1975, the Weathermen were
outdated. Even though there were other battles to be waged, such as the prison
movement and anti-racism, Vietnam had been their fuel since SDS. Without this
major problem, the group did not have the same effect on the public as they once
had. By 1975, Americans had gotten used to the Weathermen’s symbolic bombings,
knowing there was no risk to their life. Other violent revolutionary groups emerged
in the 1970s as well, such as the SLA and the RATF, who conducted many bombings
stretching into the 1980s, disregarding human life along the way. In a way, these
groups discredited the Weathermen, who were tame in comparison. The
Weathermen no longer seemed to serve the same purpose in a post-Vietnam
Conflict America. Even without the Weathermen, the underground notably

144 Sina Rahmani. "Anti-imperialism and Its Discontents: An Interview with Mark Rudd,
Founding Member of the Weather Underground." Radical History Review no. 95 (Spring 2006): 115-
127. America: History & Life, EBSCOhost (accessed May 9, 2017), 123.
continued on. The underground press and other revolutionary and Leftist groups continued to act. The Weather Underground's absence, however, created room for more violent and deadly actions by newer organizations that echoed the symbolic violence of Weathermen.
CONCLUSION

By 1980, Weathermen activities had subsided and many groups along with them began to fade out of the public eye. The Vietnam Conflict had been over for half of a decade. Ronald Reagan was running for president and had heavy support. Those who began participating in protests and the counterculture in the mid-1960s were now mostly middle-aged adults and needed a way of supporting themselves (and often their families). A new generation was growing up in an American society without the same type of political unrest as their parents had, at least on the surface. It was as if the Weathermen had never existed. Even when buildings were still in the process of repair from the group’s bombings, however, the name of the Weathermen had faded out of the memories of the American citizens by 1980. Political and cultural upheaval seemed to have gone silent. This seemingly natural return to a capitalist status quo raises the question of whether the Weathermen made any lasting impact on America, and if they did, what was that impact and how has it influenced post-Vietnam Conflict America?

Over the course of almost a decade, the Weathermen remained resilient, constantly jumping over the many barriers that inevitably faced them, until their disintegration. Those who participated in the Weathermen bombings were doing so in the belief that their actions could change America, and even the world. That alone gives their actions some value because of the sheer effort and dedication that they had.

Today, the Weathermen stand as a symbol of the power of political protest. They may not have been able to overthrow the government of the United States, but
they are a strong example of the kinds of messages even the smallest of groups can send to a political body that is assumed to be all-powerful. Through their use of symbolism in each bombing, it can be argued that they will remain a symbol themselves for decades to come.

In addition to their symbolism of the right to and power of protest, the Weathermen show the importance of a participatory democracy in America. Without voices to speak out against the wrongdoings of a government, there would be no purpose of having a democracy. It can be argued that before the 1960s, this strong of pushback to government decisions had not been seen since draft riots during the Civil War. For over a decade, “the U.S. created an elaborate environment for terror in Vietnam, and terrorism became the way of the war every day.”145 After the Vietnam Conflict, due to push back for this very same reason (the draft), it can be argued that the draft may never be used again. The Weathermen likely played a role in securing this, both as a part of SDS and as a separate group themselves. Their support of what would eventually become the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, giving the right to vote to those age eighteen to twenty-one years old, also helps to highlight their lasting impact on American political and social culture. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment, passed in March of 1971.

The Weather Underground’s effectiveness must not be measured by whether or not they were able to overthrow the United States Government and create a communist system in America. To assess the organization’s success in such a manner dismisses the very nature of the group. They are idealistic to a fault—and openly so.

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145 Ayers, Fugitive Days, 272.
Their desire was always to aim for much loftier aspirations than they could ever possibly achieve in the hopes that this would help ignite a new political consciousness in the working public and students. Although they did not topple the federal government, they certainly left a lasting mark on the American public consciousness. Their contribution to history is symbolic, just as their work. When studying the organization and its accomplishments, the importance almost overwhelmingly must lie in the Weathermen’s symbolic achievements, rather than the fact that they did not successfully create a communist revolution. This thesis rests on the argument that although the Weather Underground’s actions were violent and disruptive, when studying them both historically and sociologically, they cannot be considered terrorists.

The Weather Underground does not qualify as a terrorist group according to the criteria laid out in this study. Terrorism is the use of violence or threat of violence to induce fear in non-combatant civilians in order to promote a political agenda. Thus, the criteria include terrorism being a (a) tactic that is (b) constructed through actors’ own socialization and uses the (c) threat of violence to (d) induce fear on (e) non-combatants in order to (f) advance a political agenda. The Weather Underground did have (a) tactics to promote their agenda, it was (b) constructed through the members individual socialization, and they did (c) use violence to (f) promote the political agenda or communist revolution. However, the Weather Underground’s goal was not to merely (d) induce fear, nor did they attack non-combatant civilians. The organization may have planned to do so in their Manifesto, and even tried to during the Days of Rage, but it ultimately realized that this was not going to accomplish radical change in America. Instead, through the targeting of those guilty of injustice,
the Weather Underground symbolically bombed locations that represented American capitalism and imperialism. By not taking part in criteria explicitly laid out in the conceptualization of terrorism, the actions of Weather Underground cannot be considered terrorist in nature, thus, making the Weathermen uncategorizable as terrorists.

Nonetheless, if there was still merit to an argument that the Weather Underground was in fact a terrorist organization, based upon the criteria set up for moral justification of terrorist acts, the organization would be morally justified for its actions. The “targeting of the innocent violates the fundamental moral intuition that innocent persons ought not be targets or victims of violent physical attack.” When you take this element away, moral justification is possible, therefore destigmatizing the Weather Underground’s actions and its members.

The Weathermen must simply stand as an example of how a counterculture can turn violent against the social order in which they were raised. Civilian lives are accounted for in the sociological definition of terrorism and as a result, their actions are not, *strictly speaking*, terrorist in nature. Without this important addition to the definition of terrorism, the Weather Underground could almost certainly be considered a terrorist group; however, they never directly targeted innocent civilians and never directly intended to cause fear in the hearts of the general public. Their targets were benign, and they even warned residents of the buildings before detonations would occur. Their quarrel was with the US government and as a result, their bombings were chosen to convey significant symbolic messages while

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146 Corlett, “Can Terrorism Be Morally Justified?,” 165.
minimizing the loss of human life. As a result, the Weathermen must be disqualified from the label of terrorist group and recategorized as something different. Their use of symbolic bombings remains an interesting topic of discussion, one that requires the conceptualization of a new term: “symbolic terrorism”. This term could open the door to a plethora of studies designed around separating actions that are indeed terrorist and those that are mistakenly categorized as such. When there is no harm to human life or the quality of it, the idea of violent actions as terrorism fades away, and what remains is a new enigma of radical action.
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