

David J. Garrow, "When Domestic Terrorism Raged," Washington Post Book World, 5 April 2015, p. B6.

Days of Rage America's Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence By Bryan Burrough Penguin Press. 585 pp. \$29.95

Nowadays, hardly anyone remembers the epidemic of home-grown terrorism that plagued major U.S. cities four decades ago. "People have completely forgotten that in 1972 we had over nineteen hundred domestic bombings in the United States," retired FBI agent Max Noel remarks in "Days of Rage," Bryan Burrough's comprehensive new history of that era.

Amid all the deadly violence that characterized those years, very few names and events are still familiar. The Weather Underground Organization, often rendered as Weatherman or the Weathermen, transformed itself from a far-flung group of sometimes violent white student radicals into a terrorist organization at a late 1969 "national war council" in Flint, Mich. The Weather Underground's eager embrace of terroristic violence was readily evident in the Flint meeting's mass celebration of notorious California murderer Charles Manson's gory deeds. It also was reflected in how the resulting Weather "collectives" took advantage of the easy, coast-to-coast legal availability of dynamite.

On Feb. 16, 1970, the bombing of a San Francisco police station killed one officer, Sgt. Brian McDonnell. The murderers have never been arrested, but Burrough reports that for decades three top suspects have remained uncharged: bombmaker Howard Machtiger, who now lives in North Carolina; Weather theoretician Jeff Jones, who lives in upstate New York; and Weather's undisputed queen, Bernardine Dohrn, who for more than a quarter-century has lived in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago.

Dohrn and her husband, Bill Ayers, a co-founder of the Weather Underground, are, of course, that era's two most famous names. In the 2008 presidential campaign, Republican vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin zeroed in on Barack Obama's acquaintance with Ayers, accusing the Democratic nominee of being "someone who sees America as imperfect enough to pal around with terrorists." Burrough's deep and sweeping history incidentally highlights how many thousands of Americans have palled around with terrorists without ever knowing it. His wide-ranging and often revelatory interviews with many Weather alumni — Dohrn and Ayers did not speak with him — reveal far more about the Underground than has previously been known.

Yet Burrough bestows anonymity upon several crucial Weather participants, including a close Dohrn colleague who went on to be a prominent San Francisco lawyer and who spoke to him extensively. Weather veterans who did not cooperate are given no such favor. A one-sentence characterization of one such person does not explicitly name him, but I immediately realized that Burrough was identifying a man who has been a selfless and celebrated Midwest policy advocate for many years now, as well as a valuable mentor to a close family member of mine. Only in the now-digitized newspapers of almost half a century ago can one discover the Weather leadership role he played in 1969-1970 or his indictment as one of 15 accused

bombers several years later. (The charges were later dropped on account of government misconduct.) Having visited his home, and having last shared a meal with him only two years ago, I am taken aback by just how easy it is indeed to pal around with terrorists.

The deadly Weather bombing that is most remembered was the accidental detonation of a Greenwich Village townhouse on March 6, 1970. One hundred pounds of dynamite had been brought to the family home of Weather's Cathy Wilkerson so that amateur bombmaker Terry Robbins could assemble multiple devices in preparation for attacking that evening's dance at Fort Dix, an Army base 70 miles south of Manhattan.

Robbins's fatal error — he and two other Weather members, Diana Oughton and Ted Gold, perished in the building's ruins — fortunately averted what Burrough rightly says would otherwise have been “mass murder” at Fort Dix. Wilkerson and her friend Kathy Boudin escaped, but the aftermath of the townhouse explosion led Dohrn to fundamentally alter Weather Underground's use of explosives. Henceforth, the group “would bomb buildings of symbolic importance,” Burrough writes, “but only after warnings, and only at times when the buildings were likely to be empty.”

In 1970, that strategic change went publicly unacknowledged, for Dohrn continued to proclaim that “revolutionary violence is the only way” and that Weather's “job is to lead white kids to armed revolution.” A far more skillful bombmaker, Ron Fliegelman, took charge of Weather's attacks, becoming what Burrough calls the Underground's “unsung hero.” Fliegelman, Wilkerson and Machtinger all spoke to Burrough with apologetic frankness. Fliegelman, now a retired teacher living in Brooklyn, was featured several years ago in a New York Times story on older parents who were raising young children. Wilkerson, also a retired educator in Brooklyn, told Burrough that her challenge, and his, “is to explain to people today why this all didn't seem as insane then as it does now.”

In Burrough's words, the Underground and its record of deadly violence reflected “misplaced idealism, naivete, and stunning arrogance” on the part of young radicals who wanted to be “involved in something bigger than” themselves. Wilkerson, like Dohrn in her rhetoric at the time, emphasizes the degree to which white activists sought to emulate African American extremists who had embraced gun violence in place of nonviolence. “In our hearts, I think what all of us wanted to be were Black Panthers,” Wilkerson told Burrough. “And it was no secret what the Panthers wanted to do, and that's kill policemen.”

Weather was far from alone in practicing domestic terrorism. The Black Liberation Army (BLA), an offshoot of New York City's Black Panthers, assassinated two pairs of New York police officers, the first in May 1971, the second in January 1972. Two of the four dead officers, Waverly Jones and Greg Foster, were African American. Highly mobile BLA members also ambushed an Atlanta police officer, and Burrough's description of one BLA leader “caressing [the officer's] stolen revolver” and remarking, “The pigs got nice guns” poignantly captures how deeply the sickness of firearms worship permeated 1970s black radicalism.

“Days of Rage” thoroughly surveys all half-dozen of that era’s deadly bands. The bizarre Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), best known for its February 1974 kidnapping of young heiress Patty Hearst, might better be remembered for its November 1973 assassination of Marcus Foster, the progressive African American Oakland school superintendent, whose murder the Black Panthers understandably denounced.

Burrough’s rich and important history is a demanding read, for the profusion of groups, the scores of activists and the dozens of killings require frequent efforts to sort out the killers and the murdered. FALN, a group supporting Puerto Rican independence and funded by the Episcopal Church’s National Commission on Hispanic Affairs, turned terrorist and killed four people in the January 1975 lunchtime bombing of a Wall Street restaurant. The Family, an African American band of armored-car bandits aided and abetted by a trio of white radicals, including townhouse survivor Boudin, killed three people in an October 1981 heist in Nanuet, N.Y. Dohrn went to jail rather than testify before the grand jury investigating those murders.

Weather is the rightful centerpiece of Burrough’s valuable account, and Machtinger is the book’s most incisive voice. “The myth, and this is always Bill Ayers’s line, is that Weather never set out to kill people, and it’s not true — we did,” as Machtinger knew from his firsthand experience. “Policemen were fair game,” and the BLA, the SLA and FALN all believed that, too. Six years ago, in the glare of Dohrn and Ayer’s renewed notoriety, Machtinger said what they refused to, writing in *In These Times* that “we were wrong and destructive” and had fatally erred in forsaking militant nonviolence for “fantasies of revolutionary prowess.” Burrough correctly concurs: “The crimes the underground committed overwhelm any altruistic motivations” they might claim, now as well as then.

David J. Garrow is the author of “Bearing the Cross,” a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King Jr. His next book will be “Rising Star: The Making of Barack Obama.”