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Terrorism Chic

How do those 'daring acts' of the '60s radicals look now?

BY SAM TANENHAUS

In the aftermath of last week's terrorist attack many are saying we have reached a turning point. Everything has changed, the editorials announce. Our country and the world both look different today.

This is true enough. But what needs re-thinking is not so much the present as our understanding of the past and the prominent role terrorism has played in our politics and culture for many years now.

Consider the news reported in the weeks, days, and even hours preceding the horrific events. There was, first, the case of Kathy Boudin, a New Left extremist recenffy demed parole for her onvic-tton m me 1981 Tobbery of a Brmks truck in Rockland County, N.Y., which resulted in.f.be deafbs of four people. That was not an isolated crime. In 1970, Ms. Boudin, a member of The Weather 1Jnclerground, was part of a team that was building ffi'imbs m a Greenwich Village townhouse llefore their bunfling caused an explosion tpat killed two o their own. Thomas Powers, who wrote a searching account at the time of one of those who died in the blast, Diana Oughton, subtitled the book "The Making of a Terrorist."

But blunt language of that kind is distinctly absent from current discussions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. You won't find the word "terrorist" in a story that appeared in the New York Times on Tuesday, Sept. 11, the day of the World Trade Center attack. It was an affectionate profile of Ms. Boudin's comrade-in-arms and Ms. Oughton's boyfriend, Bill Ayers, author of a boastful memoir of his exploits 30 years ago. "I don't regret setting bombs," Mr. AY,ers told the Times interviewer in the livmg room of his spacious Chicago home. "I feel we didn't do enough." Mr. Ayers, wrote the dazzled reporter, "still has the ebullient manner, the apparently intense interest in other people, that made him a charismatic figure in the radical student movement." As if this weren't enough, the Times returned to Mr. Ayers a few days later, in the Sunday magazine, with another fawning interview.

Of course Mr. Ayers's "intense interest" assumed a different meaning when "other people" became the objects of his violent fantasies. The terrorists of his generation would have approved of the targets selected by last Tuesday's smc1de pilots—the World Trade Center is an emblem of American commerg;, the Pentagon a fortress of our military might. In fact. Mr. Ayers gofthere hrst, way back m 1972. "Everythmg was absolutely ideal on the day I bombed the Pentagon," he writes in his memoir. He describes jn detail how the bomb was huj}t and then placed io it Pentagon restroom. Reflecting on the inci-c@ni today, ML Ayei's evades Iespunsiblli-ity. "Even though I didn't bomb the Pentagon - we bombed 1, m the sense that the Weathermen orgamzed it and claimed it." He also helped bomb New York City Police headquarters in 1970 and the Capitol m 1971. Sound nRe terronsm? Not to the Times, which calls these "daring acts." But weren't last Tuesday's suicide missions "daring acts," too?

1969. Mr. Ayers's present wife, Bernar ine Dohrn, once the New Left's mini-skirted Joan of Arc, gushed over another ""darmg act"—the murders cororoitted by Charles Manson and his followers. "Dig



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A Greenwich VIiiage bomb factory, March 6, 1970. *Fawning profiles of the Weather Underground followed right up to Sept. 11, 2001.*

ill'.. sbe told a student audience. "Manson killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in tfie same room with them. then they shoved a fork into a victim's stomach." Nowadays Ms. Dohrn disavows those comments sort of. "It was a joke," she explams. "Even m illy most tnnamed moment I never supported a racist mass murderer." But what'll Mr. Manson had been a racially sensitive mass murderer? Would his "darmg act" then be OK?

The evils of racism no doubt motivated Patrick Dolan Critton, a schoolteacher in Mount Vernon, N.Y. He too appeared in the news on the morning of the World Trade Center attack, after he was arrested for a crime committed in 1971. Mr. Critton is accused of hijacking a DC-9 in Ontario and forcing the crew to fly him to Havana. This came after he robbed a bank, had a shootout with police and then, as a member of a black "liberation" group, assembled pipe bombs in an explosives "factory" on the Lower East Side. Today, the Times reported, Mr. Critton has "the appearance and demeanor of a gentleman," nothing like his earlier self. Nor was that earlier self a terrorist. He was "a revolutionary with a taste for" - yes - "the most daring of crimes."

Why the romantic language? The message seems to be that we must not confuse "good" terrorists, like those who belonged to the Weather Underground, with "bad" terrorists, like those who claimed so1ne 5,000 lives on Sept. 11. But are the two really so easily distinguished? In Europe controversy has lately engulfed the "68ers," student radicals who wrought so much havoc in France, Germany and Ita,ly some 30 years ago and in some instances went on to become establishment figur.es. One such, Germany's current foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, has been under fk·e ever since photographs published in Stem, the popular magazine, captured him and four others engaged in another daring act in 1973-the brutal beating of a policemi).n. Mr. Fischer has apologized for that deeci He has been Jess forthcoming about other items on his resume, however.

According to The New Republic, Mr. Fischer "attended a meeting of the Pal s-tine Liberation Organization in Algiers back in 1969, at which the PLO adopted a resolution to achieve final victory, which is to say, the destruction of Israel."

Thus do the passions of the New Left mingle with those of the New Fanatics, and the daring acts of good terrorists find common cause with those of the bad. This is not surprising. The "critiques" of America offered by the likes of Osama bin Laden and the Palestinians who jubilantly filled the streets after the attacks on the World Trade Center echo those made ldng ago by the New Left. They, too, branded our nation, leaders and citizens, as warmongering, imperialist and all the rest.

Does the New Left bear any responsibility forTast Tuesday's horrific events? Obvi-oifsty not. l'he point, rather, is that while those crimes may appear to signal the beginning of a new era, t'.Prr should be seen instead as the climax omalign jncboate energies that have been at large, here and atiroad, for a generation now. ever since it herawe not aoly cammaoplace but Casbiou-able to despise the U.S. and all its works in ITie name of radicalism.

Joschka Fischer has come a Jong way. He now supports NATO, another longtime symbol of American "imperialism." Yet how many other veterans of the New Left have owned up to the reality of their app'alling misreading of what the Western dempc-racies have really stood for during the past half-century or more? And how many alumni of the weather Underg:rauoa jc-knowiedge today the part the}' played jn fostering a culture of terrorism in which assaults on the U.S. and its citizens are Wreathed m the glory of "daring acts"?

Mr. Tanenhau.s, a contrih11ting editor of Vanity Fair, is the author of "Whittakrr Chambers: A Biography."

0 ctober 29, 2001

Review & Outlook

Professor Weatherman

Every day the ways in which September 11 changed the culture become clearer, among them a deepening hostility to the glamorization of crime and terrorists. The horrors of that day may have put the final end to what is left of the romance of radical chic, which is finally being seen for what it is: both callous and absurd.

None of that would come as news to New York attorney Sean F. O'Shea, already startled, months back, when he learned that former Weather Underground leader Bernadine Dohrn enjoyed the position of faculty member at his alma mater, Northwestern University Law School. Ms. Dohm was the most prominent leader of the Weathermen, a group whose favored form of political expression was the planting of bombs in government buildings. Her activities during the 1970s catapulted her to an even more prominent position – the F.B.I.'s 10 Most Wanted list. For the next several years she lived underground with William Ayers, a fellow leading light of the Weathermen, whom she later married.

In the days since September 11, Mr. O'Shea has become even more concerned about what he sees as the contempt for the law shown by Northwestern, which has on its faculty someone who could not pass a character and fitness test and who could not be admitted to the bar. The university's representatives point out that membership in the bar isn't a requirement for the law faculty. Dean David Van Zandt issued a statement on academic freedom, saying that the law school's ability to understand and relate to controversial views was one of its strengths and that Ms. Dohrn, director of a family law center, channeled "her energy and her passion into making a difference in our legal system."



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Bernadine Dohrn

Mr. O'Shea wants Northwestern to consider what it means to confer a platform of legitimacy on an unrepentant lawbreaker who – notwithstanding her later general condemnations of violence – never took responsibility for her own crimes. Ms. Dohm (and Mr. Ayers) escaped prosecution when the court threw out evidence on grounds that it was illegally obtained. She served seven months for criminal contempt for her refusal to testify about the 1981 Brinks robbery in New York in which the Black Liberation Army killed two police officers.

Mr. O'Shea's feelings were in no way ameliorated by his discovery that, at the party Ms. Dorhn and Mr. Ayers gave to celebrate Mr. Ayers's recently published memoir, guests were given stick-on tattoos of the Weatherman symbol. Asked if someone might not accuse him of lacking a sense of humor, he responds, "Right. After September 11, I lost my sense of humor about terrorists."

And indeed September 11 has much to do with this story. It has ev rytl ng to do, too, ":ith the lightning speed with which the public now detects all ef.forts Jo rat10nahze acts of terronsm, and with the detestation those efforts provoke. One of the unluckier things to happen to Mr. Ayers was the publication, on September 11, of a lengthy New York Times profile of his life in the Weather Underground. This came complete with a list of the bombings he'd organized – at New York City Police Headquarters, the offices of the National Guard in Washington, D.C., the Pentagon, and more.

Tony & Tacky

Mulligan Man: In 1998, Pope John Paul II made his historic visit to Havana. Less noticed that year was the opening of the Varadero Golf Club. And if the recent issue of FringeGolf is right, the new club is all part of a master plan to look to this most bourgeois of sports to bring in the tourist bucks. The magazine features the famous photo of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, dressed in battle fatigues, on the putting green of a course that, in 1959, would soon be bulldozed over. Today, while the government is working with Britain's PGA for the design of two new courses, greens fees on existing courses are priced in dollars – "a not-so-subtle hint," FringeGolf notes, "that the fairways are for paying customers from abroad." The revolution lives.

Duty, Honor, Country: What a difference a terrorist attack makes. Over the past few years, we've written about political opposition to bids to have schoolchildren recite passages from the Declaration of Independence, the opponents arguing that the men who wrote the famous document were racist, sexist or both. But this Veteran's Day President Bush has not only issued the standard holiday proclamation but also asked all American schools "to invite a veteran to speak" as part of what the Senate has designated to be National Veterans Awareness Week. A handy new teacher's guide (available at www.va.gov/vetsday/[1]) offers information on everything from the history of America's wars to how to fold the flag.

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November 9, 2001

Review & Outlook Taste

Miss Olson Regrets

Sara Jane Olson is right: This is not a good time for aging radicals.

Not that long ago people might not have paid much attention to former Weather Underground leader Bill Ayers saying "I don't regret setting bombs." But when the quotation is published in the New York Times the same day that Osama bin Laden's men level the Twin Towers, folks take notice. Likewise, Mr. Ayers's wife and fellow Weatherperson, Bernardine Dohrn, found her prestigious slot at Northwestern University's Law School suddenly attracting some unwanted attention in this new era. And earlier this week Ms. Olson – a.k.a. Kathleen Soliah of the Symbionese Liberation Army – found herself before an angry Los Angeles Superior Court judge, Larry Fidler, who asked her what the heck she thought she was doing by pleading guilty and then walking outside to hold a press conference proclaiming her innocence.

The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, she told the newsmen, would have a "negative effect" on her trial. As her attorney put it, his client "is truly a victim of Sept. 11."



Leave aside the monstrous insensitivity of equating her predicament with the innocent families who lost their loved ones in the rubble of the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Ms. Olson did not spend more than two decades underground because of her politics. She went underground because she was wanted for the attempted murder of two Los Angeles policemen who were lucky that a pipe bomb under their patrol car didn't explode; among the evidence pointing to Ms. Olson is an order for fuses in her handwriting. Prosecutors say the bomb was retaliation for the spectacular shootout with police that killed six SLA members just two weeks earlier. And they also have evidence linking Ms. Olson to the SLA bank robbery/felony murder of Myrna Lee Opsahl a few months before.

All along, her attorneys had declared that the case against her was thin. But her cries of a "witch hunt" notwithstanding, Ms. Olson has never really been eager to make her case in a place where it would count: a court of law. Instead, she transformed herself into a progressive cause celebre, even publishing a fund-raising cookbook that treats the whole thing as a lark ("Serving Time: America's Most Wanted Recipes"). The irony is that if she hadn't sought postponement after postponement, she would have already had the fair trial she now says America cannot give her.

Oh, yes. Does it also tell us something about the atmosphere before Sept. 11 that among the sterling character witnesses listed on the Sara Olson Defense Fund Committee are William Ayers ("distinguished professor of education") and Bernardine Dorhn?

Now, we would agree that the public mood has changed. But if Americans these days have less of an appetite for radical chic, it's not because they're growing more narrow-minded. It's because they're finally paying attention.

That is, on the very morning of the terror attack on America that killed thousands, readers could find Mr. Ayers's announcement that he had no regrets about the bombings he had planned and helped execute. They could also read that, asked whether he would ever do such a thing again, Mr. Ayers answered, "I don't want to discount the possibility." It was not the best of times to expound on the worth and importance of the motives guiding terrorists, and so it remains today.

As for Mr. O'Shea, he says he seeks better answers from Northwestern and plans to contact the school's trustees for help. In the meantime, the school will be returning a donation check he sent earlier this year. It will now go, he says, to the fund for victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

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Home for Aging Rads: The Campus, of Course

In response to your Oct. 29 editorial "Professor Weathem1an," about the anger ofNew York attorney Sean F. O'Shea when he learned that former Weather Underground leader Bernadine **Dohrn** enjoyed the position of faculty member at his alma mater, Northwestern University Law School:

Only in postmodern academe are unprosecuted, unindicted criminal acts and rank sedition a "controversial view" whose diversity must be respected. Weatherman bombs killed six people and orphaned nine children -- all lives as precious as those of Sept. 11. In their days of glory Bernadine **Dohrn** and William Ayers organized the vandalism spree called the Days of Rage, praised Charles Manson and urged followers to "Kill all the rich people. Bring the revolution home; kill your parents."

Some of us do not remember those days with the romantic boomer nostalgia of the New York Times and Chicago Tribune. Legal educators always wrap their unpopular decisions in the tired cloak of free speech, but Ms. Dorhn and Mr. Ayers have lived, educated themselves, their children and Kathy Boudin's son openly and freely for more than 25 years in the country they still call unjust.

Northwestern alumni should expect more of its deans: morality and judgment, not historical elision.

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