

Professor Bill Ayers

University of Illinois, Chicago

- Distinguished professor of early childhood education and senior university scholar, University of Illinois, Chicago campus
- A leader of the domestic terrorist group The Weathermen in the 1970s
- "I don't regret setting bombs. I feel we didn't do enough." (Ayers statement 2001)

Along with his wife Bernadine Dohrn, Bill Ayers was a 1960s radical and leader of the "Weatherman" faction of Students for a Democratic Society, which in 1969 went underground to become America's first terrorist cult. Named from a Bob Dylan song lyric, Weatherman has been described by Ayers as "an American Red Army." In 1969, the Weather Underground issued a formal "Declaration of War on AmeriKKKa" and attempted to incite white student radicals to engage in terrorist activities that would provoke a race war in AmeriKKKa (always spelled with three capitalized "K's"). White radicals would shed their "white skin privilege" to aid Third World peoples in plundering the ill-gotten wealth of the United States. Ayers summed up the nihilism of Weathermen's ideology as follows: "Kill all the rich people. Break up their cars and apartments. Bring the revolution home, kill your parents."⁶⁶

The Weather Underground managed to bomb the U.S. Capitol building, New York City Police Headquarters, the Pentagon, and the National Guard offices in Washington, D.C., among many other targets. In 1970, three of their members blew themselves up in a Manhattan townhouse where they were making a bomb they planned to set off at a social dance for young military recruits and their dates at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

The FBI was unable to catch Ayers, Dohrn and their cohorts who were protected by the networks of the "progressive" Left, including their expensive lawyers, for five years until the organization dissolved through internal conflicts.⁶⁷ They surfaced in 1980 and received no serious jail time for their crimes, being let off on a technicality that they had been "improperly" surveilled.

Both went back to college, where their political comrades, now tenured faculty, helped them to embark on new careers. Dohrn became a law professor at Northwestern University and a prominent member of the American Bar Association. Ayers became a professor of early childhood education and a senior university scholar at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Neither of them modified their political views one iota.

Professor Ayers has written a series of books about parenting and educating children, including: *To Become a Teacher*; *City Kids*; *City Teachers*. His most recent book, *Fugitive Days*, however, is a memoir of his Weatherman exploits. In a chaotic text, Professor Ayers recounts his life as a 1960s radical, his role as an organizer of the 1969 "Days of Rage" riots in Chicago, his tenure as a Weatherman leader, his terrorist campaign across America, and his hatred for the United States. "What a country," Ayers once said. "It makes me want to puke." When interviewed shortly after surfacing from the terrorist underground in a kindergarten where he was already teaching, Ayers commented, reflecting on his fortunes: "Guilty as hell, free as a bird! America's a great country."⁶⁸

A substantial portion of Professor Ayers's book *Fugitive Days* discusses his activities in building bombs and deploying explosives, as though he were writing lessons for radicals to come. Professor Ayers boasts that he participated in all the above-mentioned bombings with the exception of the fateful townhouse explosion in which his girlfriend Diana Oughton was killed. Recounting his bombing crusade, Ayers states, "There's

something about a good bomb... Night after night, day after day, each majestic scene I witnessed was so terrible and so unexpected that no city would ever again stand innocently fixed in my mind. Big buildings and wide streets, cement and steel were no longer permanent. They, too, were fragile and destructible. A torch, a bomb, a strong enough wind, and they, too, would come undone or get knocked down."⁶⁹ So the terrorists who flew planes into the World Trade Center also calculated.

On September 11, 2001—the day of the terrorist attacks—the *New York Times* ran a profile of Ayers to mark the publication of his book. In an unintended irony, the *Times* quoted Ayers to this effect about his own terrorist career: "I don't regret setting bombs. I feel we didn't do enough." Ayers and the Weathermen were responsible for 30 bombings aimed at destroying the defense and security infrastructures of the United States. Of the day he bombed the Pentagon, Professor Ayers wrote in his memoir: "Everything was absolutely ideal... The sky was blue. The birds were singing. And the bastards were finally going to get what was coming to them." When reflecting on whether or not he would use bombs against the U.S. in the future, the Senior University Scholar writes, "I can't imagine entirely dismissing the possibility."⁷⁰

To summarize the academic career of Professor Ayers: An ex-commander of the terrorist Weather Underground was hired, out of all possible candidates, for a faculty position in the Department of Education at the University of Illinois. This required a vote of the entire department. Ayers was then promoted to Associate Professor, a tenured position, and then again to full Professor, each requiring a vote of the entire department. Finally, he was made "Distinguished Professor and Senior University Scholar," an appointment reflecting the endorsement of the University's central administration, and an honor not widely shared. This occurred at a time when, as he made clear to the

New York Times, Professor Ayers was unrepentant about his former terrorist activities and wished he had planted more bombs. Not surprisingly Professor Ayers's "scholarship" reflects these sentiments. Professor Ayers has become honored among peers at Northwestern for books such as *A Kind and Just Parent* (1998), in which he argues that we must overcome our "prejudices" concerning violent juvenile offenders. In another book, *Zero Tolerance: Resisting the Drive for Punishment in Our Schools* (2001), Professor Ayers argues against expelling disruptive children from classrooms, especially if they are black or Latino. In *Teaching Towards Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom* (2004), the unrepentant former terrorist lectures us on "the evocative lessons about education and humanity of Pablo Neruda [a Communist bureaucrat] and Malcolm X," in order to explain what students should be for—"and what they should be against." This pattern suggests either that Northwestern University officials could find no better qualified candidate than an unrepentant terrorist to teach early childhood education and to join the ranks of its tenured faculty (and then to be honored as first among his peers) or that there is an affirmative action program at Northwestern for political radicals.

See also: Professors Berlowitz, Dohrn, LeVine

Research: John Perazzo