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## History of Terrorism

by Jeff Tosch

(History 1820)

In 1959 a campus-wide organization called Students for a Democratic Society was formed on the basis of peace and civil rights (Students for, 2010). This particular civil rights group would eventually become engrossed with protesting the Vietnam war, and would eventually splinter, leaving behind a terrorist organization called the Weathermen (Green, 2002). The Weathermen came into being shortly before the Days of Rage, the period which would inspire the beginning of their downfall. The Days of Rage set the groundwork for the Weathermen to fail by alienating all of their support throughout the violent four-day demonstration.

In 1962 Robert Alan Haber, the president of SDS, and Tom Hayden wrote the Port Huron Statement, a brief document stating the purpose and goals of SDS (Students for, 2010). This document mainly advocated equal rights and tried to bridge the gap between southern and more liberal northern Democrats. In addition to civil rights, the Port Huron Statement also advocated that “Universal controlled disarmament must replace deterrence and arms control as the national defense goal” (Haber, Hayden, 1962). SDS's numbers grew over time, and in 1965 when the Vietnam War began to escalate, their numbers soared (Students For, 2010). SDS participated in many protests and demonstrations, and in 1965 they held a march in Washington against the war. At its highest point, SDS had around 100,000 members, but around the same time many members became discontent with peaceful means of protest. SDS was therefore split into two factions: the non-violent faction claiming to be the real SDS, and the violent faction that took up the name The Weathermen (Green, 2002).

When the Vietnam War had been continuing unimpeded, despite protest from the New Left, SDS and the recently formed Weathermen held a protest in Chicago called The Days of Rage. The overall goal of SDS during this seminal demonstration was to spread the message of discontent for the imperialist practices of the United States in Vietnam. The Weathermen, however, had their own agenda. Their goals were: to stop the trial of the eight men accused of crossing state lines to start a riot at the Democratic National Convention, give talks in high schools where they would stage jailbreaks, pay homage to Che Guevara, and protest the Vietnam War (Four Days, 1969).

On the first day of the protest the Weathermen gathered in Chicago's Lincoln Park for a few speeches and a bonfire. Subtle signs of violence to come were scattered throughout the gathering in the park. The speakers ranted and raved, firing up the crowd, as they destroyed park benches to feed the fire. They then began to march down the street with violent intent. Supposedly one of their goals that night was to inflict some sort of harm upon the judge from the trial of the eight men, but they were unclear as to how they would do so. Instead, they mainly ran amok through the Loop simply destroying every storefront window they laid eyes upon. On top of destroying as many storefronts as possible, they also attacked police officers and occasionally innocent bystanders. Some citizens even fought back against the marauders by throwing vases or dropping ashtrays upon the mobs from their apartments (Four Days, 1969). Already the Weathermen were starting to lose their base of support due to their violent actions.

The violence was not sanctioned by the 100,000-strong SDS, but only by fellow Weathermen, who numbered only around thirty members. So not only were the Weathermen distancing themselves from their followers by splintering off from SDS, but also from their non-violent followers. On top of losing their non-violent followers, they were losing the respect of the

average citizen. It is very clear that if citizens are using force to defend themselves or their property against protesters, the ashtrays and vases, they clearly feel as if they are being attacked. One SDS member would later say that the citizens thought the Weathermen were engaging in “acts of random violence” (Green, 2002). Here was the first failure of the Weathermen; if the general public thought they were acting violently for no reason, they obviously were not getting their message out, or acting appropriately on it. After the first night was over the police had arrested sixty protesters, and twenty one police officers had been injured (Four Days, 1969).

The next day, women from the Weathermen assembled around the statue of General Logan in Grant Park to recruit women for their plot to blow up the Armed Forces Induction Center. The day's protest did not last very long, however, due to the swarm of police officers that had been waiting for them; but before the protest was broken up the women were able to bring up many of the issues they believed in through chanting and speeches. One chant was not only anti-imperialist but advocated the actual overthrow of the United States Government, while others advocated black power, or idolized Ho Chi Minh. Finally they sang “Stop in the Name of Love” by the Supremes. Once they had voiced many of their tangential ideals, it was time for a motivational speech. Shortly thereafter the police broke up the protest when the ladies tried to march on the sidewalk (Four Days, 1969).

It was apparent by their actions that first night, their failures the second day, and their call to violent action in general, that The Weathermen were beginning to lose the citizenry. Their support base began to distance themselves from the meaningless violence after the first night. In fact, Fred Hampton of the Black Panthers said on Thursday, the second day of the four-day demonstration, “We don't support people who are anarchistic, chauvinistic, masochistic, and Custeristic people leading people into confrontations they are unprepared for (Four Days, 1969). Losing the Panthers' support was a clear indication that the Weathermen were severing ties that they should have focused on keeping. They had succeeded in distancing themselves from a group that supported a large portion of the same ideals as they did, and if they could be looked down upon by people who had many of the same ideals, whom also practiced violence, it would be almost hopeless for them to gain new supporters through their violent acts.

The Weathermen failed both in keeping their base of support and gaining the wider support of the public, they also failed at the women's rally that second day. It was almost hopeless for them to have inspired anyone to side with them after they sang and chanted so many different ideals one after another. Granted two of the chants were similar, but they had surely thrown many off by bringing up anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, civil rights, and popular culture one after another. Not to mention the rally was a failure, and was broken up within the hour that it began, rather pathetically, by the police.

Further indication of their failure was their inability to inspire people later that night with more Ho Chi Minh chants. After no one joined in, a few girls also tried Christmas carols and even “Let's hear it for God” to no avail, the crowd refused to partake. Further failure that night was the Weathermen's inability to have the “wargasm” they had called for earlier that day. The Chicago Tribune said “Instead of a 'wargasm' there was a fire in a trash basket and a raccoon in a tree.” (Four Days, 1969). Canceling the “wargasm” showed reservation on the part of the Weathermen. The people who assembled for the “wargasm”, only to find out that it had been called off, must have been largely underwhelmed. The Friday march against the tyranny of the Judicial System was also canceled the next day. In addition to the masses being underwhelmed, the cancellation of Weathermen demonstrations after such an uneventful day indicates them having reservations over their so called Days of Rage.

At a Friday demonstration to expose the exorbitant prices of the Cook County medical system, more uncertainty about the Weathermen arose. After a speech by the Weathermen on unjust hospital prices, a doctor came out and argued that he worked 110 hours a week and could earn more money while working less hours elsewhere, and said the doctors there were “here because [they]

care". Further uncertainty arose when a young woman named Debbie Mitchell asked what would be done when the establishment was done away with. Her questions were answered by the crowd, "the people." She then said ordinary people would not be able to handle such a thing. She even directly voiced her concerns by saying "Be the hell careful! You don't know what you're doing," after which the crowd began to leave (Four Days, 1969, pg. 9). Given the lack of confidence and angry retorts, in general the Weathermen's demonstrations failed to motivate most of their followers.

On Saturday, the final day of the demonstration, protesters were to assemble for a march, but before it could even start, police swiftly arrested five people for crimes committed during the previous days of demonstration. After a few speeches the demonstrators took to the streets and began marching to Grant Park; however, they never made it there. On the way, the Weathermen began to attack police officers and participate in more random destruction of property. All that came of their actions that last night were more arrests (Four Days, 1969).

Unlike the Weathermen, SDS had much more success during the Days of Rage. They remained peaceful throughout their demonstrations and marches, and even drew larger crowds than the Weathermen (Four Days, 1969). The crowd disparity *could* be attributed to the Weathermen being a new group, but it is likely that it was simply much easier for people to get behind a non-violent movement than a senselessly violent one like the Weathermen. The Days of Rage were a failure on the part of the Weathermen because of their violence and unpreparedness.

Many of the Weathermen's failures during the Days of Rage, as well as in the subsequent years before their demise can be attributed to their ideological standpoints. One of the main influences of the Weathermen was Carlos Marighella and the Uruguayan terrorist organization the Tupamaros (Law, 2009). Marighella, who was also influential over the Tupamaros, advocated that rebel organizations have a disadvantage in terms of arms and training, but their sense of moral justice would ultimately lead them to prevail. But the Weathermen would suffer from committing Marighella's fourth sin of urban guerillas, which states revolutionaries must never exaggerate or overestimate their strength (Marighella). In a 1974 political statement the Weathermen stated:

There are many faces to militant resistance and fighting...An examination of recent history points to: acts of resistance...draft card burnings, sabotage in the military, on the job, in government, and attacks on the police; mass demonstrations...Marches on the Pentagon, Stop the Draft Week, African Liberation Day rallies, International Women's Day marches, Chicano Moratorium Marches; demands for control and power through seizures of institutions...community control of hospitals and schools, occupations of land such as Wounded Knee, or symbols such as the Statue of Liberty...Days of Rage. These are connecting lines between these different forms of fighting...Together they constitute the fullness of revolutionary war (Political Statement, pg. 165).

Clearly the Weathermen were committing Marighella's fourth sin by overestimating their power. They essentially listed off any and every possible act against the government and then said that they were all part of revolutionary war. Granted, it could be said that all those causes *were* forms of revolutionary war or resistance, but the Weathermen made it seem as if they supported every cause listed and were in turn also supported *by* each cause. Either they were trying to appear like they had more support than they actually did, or they actually believed every cause they supported also supported them; if the latter was true, they were extremely foolish. Just because the Weathermen supported things like the International Women's Day marches did not necessarily mean that the people who supported the International Women's Day marches also supported the Weathermen's vast amount of causes. Whether the Weathermen were trying to seem like they had more support than they actually did or whether they had made they made the mistake of

overestimating themselves, they had committed Marighella's fourth sin.

The Weathermen thought they had public support for their actions during the Days of Rage, but they had instead lost public support. During the Days of Rage they had tried to rally the public, but since they did not have enough support, the public saw their violence as nonsensical and even offensive. If the Weathermen were to have only attacked police officers instead of the occasional innocent bystander and had not destroyed so much private property, it would have been harder for the public to write them off like they ultimately did.

Another revolutionary they were influenced by was Che Guevara (Law, 2009). Guevara believed in a theory he called focalism. This theory preached that fast-moving dedicated groups could place themselves in the center of a political struggle and pull the public's views towards revolutionary ideals. One main point of Guevara's theories, though, was that they could only be effective against totalitarian governments (Guevara), which is why many of The Weathermen's tactics failed. A reasonable assertion as to why the Weathermen would be influenced by ideals that would not work for their cause is that they actually saw the United States government as totalitarian. They went wrong by arguing that the United States was a totalitarian regime with respect to the war in Vietnam. Surely the Vietnamese thought of the United States as totalitarian, but the general American public did not. The general American public was not being oppressed, and the Weathermen made the mistake of assuming they would subscribe to tactics meant to liberate them.

Granted, there were many Americans who were oppressed, specifically African Americans, but again the Weathermen made the mistake of losing their support. First, the Weathermen no doubt lost the favor of the Black Panthers after Fred Hampton claimed not to be aligned with them after their violent antics during the first night of the Days of Rage. Furthermore, they made it difficult for anyone to align with them due to their hodgepodge of ideals listed in their political statement. If they had focused their ideals on specific issues, and had not attempted to group all revolutionaries together, it would have made people more susceptible to their cause. Instead they made it so only people already against the establishment would agree with them. It is far easier to convert someone into believing in certain things such as civil rights or anti-imperialism than to try to convert a whole society into having a brand new set of ideological beliefs when the majority of them are not being oppressed.

After the Days of Rage, the Weathermen continued to take action against the government through violent means until their demise shortly after the Vietnam War ended (Green, 2002). On March 3, 1971, they bombed the Capitol Building because they said it was "the worldwide symbol of government [in the United States] and in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and [they saw it as] a monument to U.S. domination over the planet." (Letter Claims, 1971). This attack had the potential to be meaningful, but it was not due to a lack of support. Since the Weathermen had lost support during the Days of Rage, they did not have the necessary support for the general public to think of the act as rebellious instead of just terrorist. Without the support of the public, their bombing ended up being something that distanced them from the public more.

Three years later they bombed Gulf Oil Corp.'s international headquarters in sympathy of the Symbionese Liberation Army; the act was said to be in accordance with the SLA's anti-capitalism ideologies (Bomb Rips, 1974). Given the lack of public support the Weathermen had, their continued use of violence only distanced them even more from the public. They made it difficult for people to accept their actions, since they were engaging in terrorist activities for the sake of an extremely small movement. Terrorism is accepted more amicably when there is an end to justify the means (Law, 2009), but trying to support an unpopular movement through violence only hurt their standing with the public.

The worst rebellious act they carried out, in respect to alienating the public, was their 1970 jailbreak of Timothy Leary (Leary Tells, 1974). This jailbreak was pointless; the only people who would respect breaking an LSD guru out of jail were people who already were part of the

counterculture, which is who funded the jailbreak. Essentially, breaking Leary out of jail was the Weathermen preaching to the converted. Given that LSD and Timothy Leary were very controversial topics, anyone who disagreed with drugs in general, which was a fair portion of the population, could easily write the Weathermen off because of their ties. Furthermore, they were paid to do so, making them not just a rebel group, but mercenaries.

In general the Weathermen continued to lose public support through their actions after the Days of Rage because they did not have the public support they needed to justify their actions. If they had been popular enough, any act against the government would have been reaffirming their power, but because they lacked support they were merely making the public like them less. Not to mention they made it difficult for people to get behind them due to not only their hodgepodge of ideologies, but also their menagerie of rebellious acts. The bombing of the Capitol Building carried a clear message, and could have been a success if they had more backing from the people, although a sympathy bombing for the unpopular Symbionese Liberation Army and Timothy Leary's jailbreak only hurt them. Because The Weathermen aligned with such small groups of people, who were largely not publicly supported, and committing violent acts for the sake of supporting them, the public almost had no choice but to dislike the Weathermen.

Once the Vietnam War ended, the Weathermen became irrelevant. Many members began to think their actions were pointless and many turned themselves in (Green, 2002). Because the government could no longer be portrayed as evil, very easily at least, without the war going on, the Weathermen had no way of gaining any sort of public support for it to be overthrown. Challenging a government that is putting people in the line of fire for imperialism is supportable, but if there is no source of public discontent, a rebel group has to create it. Given the lack of support the Weathermen had while the war was fueling their revolution, it would have been nearly impossible for them to convince people that they needed a new government when it is taken into consideration that they failed, more often than not, at coordinating government discontent when it was abundant.

The point of being violent against the authorities is to get them to retaliate in inhumane ways to show the people who the real monsters are, but the Weathermen failed to do that (Law, 2009). Letting the government be more violent than the revolutionaries is key to getting the public on the side of the rebels; this tactic worked quite well for the civil rights movement. There are not many images more powerful than seeing dogs and fire hoses used on peaceful protesters for no obvious reason; however the Weatherman did the opposite of what they should have, they were the ones who were unnecessarily violent. The Days of Rage should have been the pinnacle of the Weathermen's career, but instead it was a focal point in their demise. Many of the failures that took place during the Days of Rage are due to the Weathermen's misuse of the revolutionary ideals they were influenced by, but also by their attempt to gain public support through violence, which only alienated their support base more. By running around attacking police, and especially innocent bystanders, they made it easy for the public to see *them* as the problem, a group from whom their government needs to protect its citizens. After their initial loss of support from the Days of Rage, their continuance of violent acts against society were almost hopeless. A former Weathermen member said he realized "Americans think violence is not okay unless it is sanctioned by the government." (Green, 2002). This is true, the Weathermen failed to demonstrate that the government was unusually cruel or oppressive, and that the government, and not the Weathermen, were the obvious threat. Unfortunately, the Weathermen lost any chance of showing the government as a threat during the Days of Rage; they themselves became the threat to society while the government played the role of protector of the people, ultimately making The Weathermen's goals unobtainable.

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