

Fugitive Days

Book review

Luna C.

2003

a review of

Fugitive Days: A Memoir by Bill Ayers. 2001, Beacon Press. 289 pages.

For activists born after the Vietnam War, the common folklore of the 1960s and '70s usually centers around Woodstock, Jimi and Janis, flower children, going back to the land, and burning draft cards. We certainly don't learn about the militant resistance movements from popular media or in American high schools.

So, after seeing the Weather Underground at an independent film festival, I was excited by the courage of these revolutionaries, angered at my lack of education, and convinced that the rest of the peace movement did not go far enough.

Why weren't people still talking about these tightly organized activists who carried out approximately 25 bombings of government buildings without harming civilians? Questions like this and my personal appetite for radical history led me to *Fugitive Days* by Bill Ayers.

Rather than quote Castro and Marx as the collective did in their 1974 manifesto *Prairie Fire*, Ayers' beautifully written book reads like fiction, larger than life. The author lovingly describes his cast of characters, inviting readers to form an intimate relationship with the likes of Bernadine Dohrn and the late Diana Oughton.

Ayers is unapologetic and honest, especially in the disclaimeresque introduction, where he admits "memory is a motherfucker." This is the truth as he recalls it, not necessarily as it happened. *Days* takes readers on a frenetic journey from Ayers' middle class upbringing in the naive nuclear family of the 1950s to his rejection of race and class privilege as an activist in the late 1960s.

Ayers and his peers grew steadily impatient with the inadequacies of the peace movement. When the Students for a Democratic Society dissolved, the Weather Underground ditched the old leftist mold for a more radical approach.

Ayers details the events and breaking points as the reader is driven with him to madness at the atrocities of US imperialism in Vietnam. Not content to sit back, they began a rigorous, boot-camp style training program. As the story unfolded, I felt like I was right there with them, cheering on their victories and mourning their losses.

The reader learns tricks for survival in life underground—the switchbacks, vehicle changes, and the painstaking process of building new identities. Throughout the text, Ayers' motives and passions are heartfelt. It's hard to imagine living through those turbulent times and not carrying out similar actions.

While the Weather Underground's tactics are debatable, careful readers would be hard pressed to argue against the sheer beauty and loving delivery of the writing.

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