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Words for a Revolution:

An Analysis of the Weather Underground's Communiqués

ABSTRACT: *This article argues that the Weather Underground (WU), a prominent anti-war group in the United States during the late 1960s and 1970s, utilized communiqués as an integral component of its armed propaganda campaign. These documents showcase the Weather Underground's relationship between violence and rhetoric, a point that has yet to be fully appreciated in scholarly discourse. The WU communiqués openly promoted the overthrowing of the U.S. government, fiercely supported the Black Liberation movement and prison reform, and denounced the atrocities of the Vietnam War. For the Weather Underground, communiqués were more than just a means to claim responsibility for a bombing; they were a platform to advocate, educate, and—most of all—criticize the U.S. government for its wrongdoings both within the country and globally.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; United States of America (USA); Vietnam War; terrorism studies; New Left; Weather Underground (WU); student movement; radical; anti-war; communiqué*

Introduction: The Weather Underground

On March 1, 1971, the sound of an explosion at the Capitol building interrupted the early morning hours in Washington, D.C. Two dynamite bombs planted in a men's bathroom blew toilets skyward, destroyed the congressional barbershop, and damaged the Senate Dining Room as well as a painting of George Washington.¹ Moments before the detonation, a switchboard operator received an anonymous phone call instructing everyone to evacuate the building. The caller stated that the ensuing explosion was in protest of U.S. President Nixon's involvement in the devastation of Laos.² In its most zealous act of defiance against the U.S. government, the Weather Underground (WU) had successfully smuggled and set off bombs inside the home of the U.S. Congress. A group of young student activists turned radical, the WU waged an underground war across the United States from 1969 to 1976, aspiring to become an international beacon for anti-imperialism and anti-racism during a time of national and global uprisings.

The Weather Underground emerged as a prominent American radical group in June 1969. After the dissolution of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the WU promised to carry out an underground revolution from within the United States. Originally known as the "Weathermen," later as the "Weather Underground," and finally as the "Weather Underground Organization" or simply "Weather," this group of radicals proposed to topple what they considered the imperialist and racist structures of the U.S. government. They believed that the U.S. government sought to maintain power and control over Third World countries, particularly those attempting to form communist or socialist governments. The WU also vehemently condemned the U.S. government's treatment of underrepresented communities within the United States. Black and Brown communities experienced fewer and

¹ Bernardine Dohrn, William Ayers, and Jeff Jones, eds., *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970–1974* (Seven Stories Press, 2006), 124.

² Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 124.

unequal opportunities, systemic racism, poverty, degradation, physical violence at the hands of police officers, political assassinations, unjust imprisonment, segregation, the denial of fair access, and other types of discrimination supported and enforced by the U.S. government. The WU was certainly not the only group, either nationally or globally, to feel anger and frustration toward the government. The events leading to the Civil Rights Movement, combined with the activism of a growing number of student and radical groups in the 1960s, provided the WU with a fiery passion for revolution.

In its 1969 founding document, "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows," the WU presented the framework for its uprising.³ This 13-point position paper outlined the supposed requirements for an anti-imperialist revolution to take place in the United States, among them a call for the Black community to be the leader of this uprising. As the document's authors explained, "[b]ecause blacks have been oppressed and held an inferior social position as a people, they have a right to decide, organize, and act on their common destiny as a people apart from white interference."⁴ Thus, the real leaders ought to be the Black revolutionaries, while the White revolutionaries should rally other Whites and garner support for the Black cause. The document's authors hailed the Black community as "part of the international revolutionary vanguard," arguing that

"[i]n defining and implementing this strategy, it is clear that the vanguard (that is, the section of people who are in the forefront of the struggle and whose class interests and needs define the terms and tasks of the revolution) of the 'American Revolution' is the workers and oppressed peoples of the colonies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Because of the level of special oppression of black people as a colony, they reflect the interests of the oppressed people of the world from within the borders of the United States; they are a part of the Third World and part of the international revolutionary vanguard."⁵

As the Black revolutionaries were envisioned in this leading role, the WU tasked itself with forming an adjacent revolution out of the oppressed White population. Weather leaders argued that the oppressed White population was the most in touch with the plight of the Black community;⁶ thus, the WU championed this adjacent revolution as the "third path" for White revolutionaries in the United States and deemed it the most opportune strategy for eliminating both imperialism and racism throughout the country.⁷ Above all, the WU advocated for a combination of revolutionary forces, regardless of the respective supporters' social class or racial backgrounds. As the 1969 document's authors proposed, "[i]n every case our aim is to raise anti-imperialist and anti-racist consciousness and tie the struggles of working class youth (and all working people) to the struggles of Third World people, rather than merely joining fights to improve material conditions even though these fights are certainly justified."⁸ Yet, while these viewpoints permeated the WU's fundamental beliefs,

³ Karin Ashley, William Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, John Jacobs, Jeff Jones, Gerry Long, Howie Machtinger, Jim Mellen, Terry Robbins, Mark Rudd, and Steve Tappis, "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows," *New Left Notes*, 4, no. 22 (June 18, 1969): 3–9, Roz Payne Sixties Archive, [online](#).

⁴ Ashley et al., "You Don't Need a Weatherman," 3.

⁵ Ashley et al., "You Don't Need a Weatherman," 4.

⁶ Ashley et al., "You Don't Need a Weatherman," 4.

⁷ Ashley et al., "You Don't Need a Weatherman," 4.

⁸ Ashley et al., "You Don't Need a Weatherman," 6.

there is little evidence that the group had any lasting impact on revolutionizing the working class or the White youth. Admittedly, the WU failed to capitalize on many of the proposals outlined in its founding document and eventually fizzled out of existence after the end of the Vietnam War.

What is most striking about the WU's founding document is its rhetoric, which appears to have impacted the group's later writings, known as "communiqués." Some of these communiqués utilize a similar writing style and split arguments into similar digestible and notable points. The communiqués discussed in this article delve further into the oppression of the Black community and are especially concerned with the carceral system and its unfairness toward Black individuals. The WU's women produced their own pieces of writing and made a concerted effort to include feminist topics as revolutionary issues—a point already mentioned in the group's founding document.⁹ Other communiqués feature details on the U.S. government's activities and state actors' participation in warmongering in Southeast Asia. While the WU's founding document certainly does not account for the group's sudden and momentous decision to go into hiding and conduct a bombing campaign, its rhetoric and advocacy for revolution permeate the subsequent publications issued throughout the group's existence.

Led by Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, Mark Rudd, and Jeff Jones, the WU rallied from June until December 1969 to convince White youth to join its cause. The group's recruitment tactics capitalized on the countercultural zeitgeist and were particularly geared toward working-class youth. Weather members marched through public parks, brandishing Vietcong flags and practicing karate for self-defense. Other members, notably those of the WU's Women's Brigade, spearheaded so-called "jailbreaks," which involved running through high schools and community colleges to distribute leaflets, give speeches, and start fights with school principals and police officers.¹⁰ The WU also aided in the successful 1970 escape of Timothy Leary, a Harvard researcher and self-proclaimed LSD guru, from the San Luis Obispo State Penitentiary, hoping that this act would draw support from the broader countercultural movement and bolster the WU's own legitimacy. Despite the group's boldness and resolve to go beyond the ordinary, few young Americans were eager to join. Even before moving underground, the WU's fighting force across the country amounted to roughly a few hundred. Once underground, many members were either cut out of the movement or left altogether. An accurate membership count may remain a mystery, as internal WU documents have not resurfaced or were destroyed in the process of the group going into hiding.

Even by radicalist standards, the WU's membership requirements were unorthodox. Recruits seldom withstood the pressure exerted by Weather leaders to fully embrace the revolutionary mindset. Criticism/self-criticism sessions and "wargasm" orgies proved to be the group's most demanding requirements. Criticism/self-criticism sessions consisted of singling out members who were then, sometimes for hours on end, subjected to barrages of insults and

⁹ Ashley et al., "You Don't Need a Weatherman," 6.

¹⁰ Jeff Bloodworth, "The Local Is Global: Philadelphia's Weatherwomen Bring the War Home to Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 86, no. 4 (2019): 525.

degrading remarks by their peers. In standard Weather fashion, criticism/self-criticism sessions took their inspiration from Maoist practices of the same name.¹¹ It was believed that these sessions would enable members to rid themselves of any negative personal traits and thereby build comradeship. They also served as purging rituals to expel members who appeared to lack the spirit of the revolution. Criticism/self-criticism sessions were arduous, and it is reported that around a dozen or so members fled the group as a result of them.¹² The WU engaged in wargasm orgies and enacted "smash monogamy" policies under the guise of committing its members to a group mentality. These policies required members to break off any monogamous relationships held prior to joining and participate in sexual orgies with the entire collective. It is unclear whether they were put in place due to male sexual domination over women or as a form of sexual experimentation; at any rate, they were short-lived, as such chauvinistic acts posing as sexual free will did not sit well with many members.

The rallying of White youth occurred in anticipation of the WU's hallmark mass demonstration—the "Days of Rage" protest—set to take place in Chicago from October 8 to 11, 1969, around the "Bring the War Home!" slogan.¹³ Parallel to the ongoing trial of the "Chicago 8,"¹⁴ the WU planned to rampage through Chicago's luxurious Gold Coast neighborhood. Outfitted with lead pipes, baseball bats, bomber jackets, and motorcycle helmets, Weather members and their supporters smashed bank windows and mangled vehicles, all the while fending off and fighting against the police. However, their goal of reaching the Drake Hotel, the residence of Julius Hoffman who was the presiding judge in the trial of the Chicago 8, ended up being thwarted by the police.¹⁵ While it is estimated that 300 protestors gathered over the three nights of unrest, the event was considered a failure and a miscalculation of support for violent mass demonstrations. In total, the Days of Rage caused \$35,000 in damage to public and private property, approximately \$300,000 according to current valuation. The WU suffered more losses than victories with this event, as 287 radicals were arrested and later had to be bailed out. This effectively drained the remaining SDS funds, amounting to \$2.3 million in posted bail alone.¹⁶

What was supposed to be the dawn of the Weather movement marked, in fact, the decline of its public rallies and demonstrations. According to journalist Ron Jacobs, other New Left radicals denounced the WU's acts, but Andrew Kopkind, the founder of the *Hard Times* newsletter, and Eldridge Cleaver, a leader of the Black Panther Party, voiced their support of

¹¹ Bryan Burrough, *Days of Rage: America's Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence* (Penguin Press, 2015), 70.

¹² Burrough, *Days of Rage*, 71.

¹³ A common slogan used by the group during their years of activity, it signified WU's passion for violence and their wish for the U.S. government to focus its attention on the social injustices and violent acts happening on American soil rather than on warmongering in Vietnam.

¹⁴ Rennie Davis, David Dellinger, John Froines, Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Bobby Seale, and Lee Weiner, otherwise known as the "Chicago 8," were charged with conspiracy, crossing state lines with intent to incite a riot, and other anti-war related charges in relation to the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

¹⁵ John Kifner, "That's What the Weathermen Are Supposed to Be ... 'Vandals in the Mother Country'," *New York Times*, January 4, 1970, 182, cited in Bloodworth, "Local is Global," 529.

¹⁶ Burrough, *Days of Rage*, 74.

WU activities and urged others to pick up the gun and join the revolution.¹⁷ Meanwhile, dissenting opinions came from the likes of Tom Hayden and members of the countercultural Yippies (i.e., the Youth International Party), who denounced the WU's actions and claimed that radicals embracing such methods of protest would have a limited appeal to most Americans.¹⁸ With declining membership numbers and increased pressure from FBI manhunts, Weather leaders debated their next big move, namely, going underground.

The sentiment of going into hiding was lingering in the movement throughout November 1969 and came to fruition in December of the same year. After the failed Days of Rage protest and the FBI assassination of Fred Hampton, the chairman of the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party, Weather leaders debated what would be the best strategy going forward. From December 27 to 31, the WU hosted a "War Council" meeting in Flint, Michigan. The decision to move underground was hotly debated among Weather leaders, the group's remaining members, and other New Left radicals. Inside the ballroom, a chorus of debates, singing and dancing, and overtly shocking acts consumed the radicals. In what is now an infamous act, Bernardine Dohrn proclaimed her support for the Manson cult and its Tate-LaBianca murders, while gesturing with a fork, indicating the weapon used in the heinous crime. The meeting culminated in the group's official decision to become an underground movement, and with this, a six-year bombing campaign ensued.

The WU's bombings were symbolic in nature or what the radicals called "armed propaganda."¹⁹ A few of its targets included the White House, the Pentagon, the San Francisco office of the California Department of Corrections, and the New York Police Department (NYPD) headquarters. These and similar buildings were viewed as sites of imperialist power and chosen by Weather leaders for their connection to the United States' war effort in Vietnam. By attacking such well-known symbols of American imperialist power, the WU sought to demonstrate that the government could be disrupted on the home front. Targets like the NYPD headquarters responded to the Attica Prison riot, signifying the WU's effort to connect with America's disenfranchised incarcerated population. Between 1969 and 1975, the group claimed responsibility for roughly a dozen bombings;²⁰ yet, while the bombing of buildings had to be considered inherently violent, the WU emphasized that it did not want to engage in violence against people.

Demonstrating that government buildings could be infiltrated, sabotaged, and destroyed with ease, the WU focused on causing property damage rather than harming or killing individuals. Thus, the group's members showcased that they *could* kill people, if they wanted to, but that they chose not to, and that they did not engage in violence just for violence's sake. Unlike some of its international counterparts, like the West German Red Army Faction (RAF), the WU did not partake in hostage-takings, assassinations, or shootouts with the

¹⁷ Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (Verso, 1997), 35.

¹⁸ Jacobs, *Way the Wind Blew*, 70.

¹⁹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 101.

²⁰ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 23.

police.²¹ Rather, the WU wanted to engage in spectacles of violence by exploding concrete and blowing out windows. Thus, among the radical groups of the time, the WU appeared as one of the calmer and less dastardly outfits, not claiming any lives for the sake of the revolution. The only exception to this was the unexpected loss of three Weather Underground members in 1970.

The Greenwich Village townhouse explosion on March 6, 1970, was a deadly and sobering moment for the WU. In this tragic event, Diana Oughton, Ted Gold, and Terry Robbins lost their lives when an accidental explosion of anti-personnel bombs pulverized the New York City townhouse in which they resided.²² Two Weather members, Kathy Boudin and Cathy Wilkerson, survived the explosion and narrowly escaped before law enforcement arrived at the scene. The event deeply affected the WU, as this was the first time any Weather members had lost their lives in the pursuit of the revolution. It humbled the WU, and from this point forward, no member of the movement and no innocent bystander was harmed in any of the group's bombings. In fact, prior to all its future bombings, the WU called ahead of the explosion to issue an evacuation warning. Thus, Diana, Ted, and Terry remained the only recorded lives lost as a direct result of a Weather Underground bombing.

The WU hoped that its bombings would cause enough outrage that the U.S. government would have no choice but to focus on the issues inside the country and draw down its forces in Vietnam. While there is little indication that the WU alone affected the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the group demonstrated that with enough planning and dynamite, the United States could, at the very least, be dismantled from the inside. Adding to its bombings and endeavors to rally the American public, the WU released communiqués, written statements distributed to press outlets for publication. Each bombing was accompanied by a communiqué, a text providing an explanation for the event and offering a scathing critique of the U.S. government. A central component of Weather's armed propaganda, these communiqués often contained messages that openly denounced the U.S. government, condemned the Vietnam War, and supported the Black Liberation movement. The WU communiqués are at the center of this article, as they are under-researched and have received less scholarly attention than the WU's bombings. Supplemented by the occasional crude Marxist rhetoric, they articulated the supposed need for a violent revolution against a powerful government.

1. A Typology of the Weather Underground's Communiqués

What follows is a discussion of the communiqué and its function in the WU's tactics. Based in French diplomacy, a communiqué is a text that is commanding and unyielding in tone, yet less dogmatic and less verbose than a manifesto. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, a communiqué is "an official announcement or statement, especially one made to

²¹ Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (University of California Press, 2004), 177.

²² Jacobs, *Way the Wind Blew*, 95.

the media."²³ It is more powerful than a written claim of responsibility or a mere letter; rather, it is a serious message that directs its readers to listen, think critically, ask questions, and make demands. A communiqué is different from a manifesto. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines a manifesto as a "public declaration of aims, especially one issued before an election by a political party or candidate."²⁴ Thus, the use of a manifesto implies a political entity's attempt to gain political power. While the WU had the intention to overthrow the U.S. government and increase its political power, it never formed a political representation.

During the WU's underground years, communiqués functioned as the primary form of communication between the group itself and the public. Most communiqués were circulated to the underground press and mainstream news outlets shortly after a bombing had been committed. Underground newspapers like the *Berkeley Tribe*, *Madison Kaleidoscope*, *The Liberated Guardian*, and the *Chicago Seed*,²⁵ as well as mainstream news outlets like NBC and *The New York Times*, received copies of WU communiqués. Historian Dan Berger discusses the distribution of communiqués in his book, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*.²⁶ Berger writes that, "[i]n addition to the high level of technical skill that went into making bombs and conducting actions without injuring anyone while still attacking major institutions, this professionalism carried over into the organization's public relations. Most of the group's communiqués after 1970 were press packets, often seven or eight pages long and as slick as the press releases of the corporate or government agencies being attacked."²⁷ In these press packets, the group relayed information about the act committed, its underlying rationale, and a call for the American public to join the fight against U.S. imperialism.

While the WU produced and distributed its communiqués to mainstream news outlets, the editors of these outlets were the ones who ultimately determined the extent to which they published the communiqués. Even when the communiqués were flashy press releases that included photographs of protests and the Vietnam War, the WU struggled to see more than a few sentences of their communiqués published by news networks. For example, the bombing of the U.S. Capitol building on March 1, 1971, should have sent shockwaves across newspapers, yet much of the latter's coverage focused on the physical damage caused by the bomb and a few quotable lines from then U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell (in office 1969–1972). A *Los Angeles Times* article²⁸ covering the bombing included only three sentences from the 15-paragraph communiqué written by the WU;²⁹ its author quoted the communiqué as follows: "We have attacked the Capitol because it is ... a monument to U.S.

²³ "Communiqué," in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Angus Stevenson, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁴ "Manifesto," in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Angus Stevenson, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁵ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 96.

²⁶ Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (AK Press, 2006).

²⁷ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 175.

²⁸ Associated Press, "Conspiracy Doubted in Capitol Bombing: But the 'Weather Underground' Claims Credit for Explosion," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1971.

²⁹ The Weather Underground, "We Attacked the Capitol," in *Outlaws of Amerika: Communiqués from the Weather Underground* (Liberated Guardian, 1971), 41.

domination over the planet ... All over the country, revolutionaries are getting ready for the spring. Our plans can be as creative and indigenous as the bamboo booby traps of the Vietnamese."³⁰ The same article then discussed the improbability that the bombing had been an inside job orchestrated by the FBI and featured a section on the bomb itself and its internal components used for detonation.³¹

Other newspaper articles covering the event largely followed the same pattern. The *Ogdensburg Journal*, a New York periodical, included the same lines from the communiqué quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* but added a few additional sentences from the same communiqué:³² "The invaders of Laos will not have peace in this country ... Young people here will do everything we can to harass, disrupt, and destroy this murderous government."³³ Another New York newspaper, the *Niagara Falls Gazette*, quoted the same lines as the previous two newspapers with little difference in overall content.³⁴ Even after its audacious attack on the U.S. Capitol building, the WU received little attention from mainstream news outlets. However, mainstream news outlets were competing with the underground or radical press, which attracted quite a following in the 1970s. According to Berger, "[b]y 1970, the underground press had a readership as high as 6 million, and studies showed that 70 percent of people in the United States did not believe what they read in the mainstream media."³⁵ While communiqués sent to news networks received little attention there, readers had a choice to find coverage in the underground press and read further messages from the WU and other radical groups.

Admittedly, the WU's tactic of merely hoping that its communiqués would be published by mainstream news outlets was one of its miscalculations. Weather leaders failed to recognize this approach as illusional, which is why the group's communiqués have been largely forgotten—except by academic audiences. For my approach, the quantity of Weather Underground content published in various types of media is not the primary concern. While news networks, both underground and mainstream, contributed to the availability of these texts to the public, the communiqués' content and rhetoric can still be analyzed as an important aspect of Weather history. Thus, the relationship between violence and rhetoric in these communiqués is the focus of this article.

Interlaced with Marxist rhetoric, the WU communiqués detailed specific acts of the United States' warmongering in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and openly criticized President Nixon's "Vietnamization" strategy.³⁶ When the WU's bombings targeted U.S. sites of

³⁰ Associated Press, "Conspiracy Doubted in Capitol Bombing."

³¹ Associated Press, "Conspiracy Doubted in Capitol Bombing."

³² Associated Press, "FBI Isn't Revealing Anything It Knows on Capitol Bombing," *Ogdensburg Journal*, March 3, 1971.

³³ Associated Press, "FBI Isn't Revealing Anything."

³⁴ Associated Press, "No Clues Turned Up in Capitol Bombing," *Niagara Falls Gazette*, March 3, 1971.

³⁵ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 67.

³⁶ Nixon's policies under this practice brought U.S. soldiers back to the United States while increasing the use of air raids and bombings in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The intention was to shift responsibility to South Vietnamese forces while decreasing the number of U.S. troops involved in boots-on-the-ground combat.

oppression like New York's Attica Prison, its communiqués explained how the government was systematically targeting and incarcerating people of color. The WU also involved itself in the broader countercultural movement through texts that did not accompany any particular bombings. These types of communiqués were infrequent in comparison to those that did accompany bombings. Varying in length and topic, they discussed the anti-war movement in general, celebrated countercultural icons, and showcased the group's support for the Black and feminist movements, and they, too, reflected the relationship between violence and rhetoric, the latter of which the WU commandeered with such finesse.

From an analytical standpoint, the WU communiqués demonstrate the group's ability to form a relationship between violence and speech. While the group's bombings did involve violence against buildings, violence against people was not intended. Its bombings were a spectacle, a grand demonstration of what the group could do, but the WU never went further down the path of violence. Rather, it wanted to create a revolution out of words. The WU hoped that its bombings would draw attention to its communiqués and foster a revolution from within the United States. The rhetoric in these texts orders the American people to join the Weather Underground in its stand against imperialism and racism. Thus, the WU communiqués are, quite literally, words for a revolution. Certain passages in these communiqués detail the chemical warfare and carpet bombing in Vietnam, the harsh treatment and starving of disenfranchised and imprisoned communities in the United States, and the disingenuous health and welfare programs offered to women. Reporting on the violence committed by the U.S. government, the communiqués' authors strategically weave a relationship between their rhetoric and the need for a revolution.

While the WU communiqués are routinely referenced as confirmation of the group's bombings or examples of glaring Marxist rhetoric, their role as a component of Weather's armed propaganda campaign has yet to be fully appreciated. Most historical conversations have focused on the WU's activities, strategies, and challenges. Authors like Ron Jacobs, Jeremy Varon, and Dan Berger have captured the movement's overarching story from its 1969 beginnings as Weathermen to its final days in 1976. Berger has gone beyond this by discussing—in considerable depth—the Weather Underground's 1974 publication *Prairie Fire*,³⁷ however, *Prairie Fire* is more of a political manifesto than a communiqué. Berger's research does suggest that the WU communiqués deserve further attention, and he devotes more attention to these documents than other authors; in fact, his analysis of the *New Morning-Changing Weather* communiqué assesses these documents as a part of the Weather Underground's survival strategy.³⁸

Recontextualizing the communiqués as a central component of Weather propaganda positions them at the forefront of the group's history. Much more than mere diatribes laden with Marxist ideology, the communiqués and other written works produced by the WU operated as a space to advocate for revolution and to openly criticize the U.S. power structure. Produced and distributed in hiding, the communiqués enabled the group to

³⁷ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 176.

³⁸ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 145.

remain out of the FBI's reach while still planting bombs. Both directly and indirectly connected to the bombings, the WU championed the rhetoric of revolution and thoroughly critiqued imperialism and racism through the written word. In this article, I draw on terrorism studies, sociology, and cultural studies as areas of research that concern themselves with the communication tactics of pro-revolutionary and violent groups. Researchers in the field of terrorism studies seek to understand the operational strategies of terrorist groups, particularly how these groups rationalize and communicate acts of violence; meanwhile, sociology and cultural studies focus on group formation and tactics. I argue that the WU produced communiqués to form a relationship between violence and the written word, to advance anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideologies, and to establish a site for the production and exchange of knowledge. Evidence for this lies in the rhetoric of the communiqués, their political commentary, and the ways in which the WU communicated violence.

2. Scholars' Voices

In his 2017 monograph, *The Politics of Attack: Communiqués and Insurrectionary Violence*, sociologist and social justice scholar Michael Loadenthal addresses communiqués as a form of political communication.³⁹ He shows that radical groups do not just carry out their revolutionary violence by means of physical acts but also by means of communication. Loadenthal centers his research on the communiqué as a site that demonstrates "the social construction of *both* the act (of 'terrorism') and the discourse (*on* 'terrorism')." ⁴⁰ According to Loadenthal, the communiqué is intertwined with the acts of terror themselves and the pertaining discussions on terrorism. He argues that "[b]y de-sensationalizing the violence, and instead focusing on the movement's political discourse, one [i.e., the communiqué's author] hopes to shift the reader's attention away from the frequency of the bombs, and toward the validity of the critiques."⁴¹ Centering the discussion on the communiqué places less emphasis on the violence *committed* by groups like the WU and more emphasis on how this violence is *communicated*.

The site of the communiqué is what Loadenthal terms "organic intellectualism."⁴² Loadenthal believes that communiqués are sites for knowledge on violent attacks and the socio-political forces that shape the reasoning behind them. In other words, radical groups add to the surrounding discussion of attacks and offer critiques that may not be addressed by mainstream news networks or state-oriented actors. The WU participated in "organic intellectualism," as their communiqués openly criticized the Vietnam War, President Nixon's policies, and the overt oppression of Black citizens. The group's communiqués added to the growing cacophony of anti-war rhetoric while enabling the WU to push its own revolutionary agenda. According to Loadenthal, "[t]he communiqué itself becomes a site of resistance, as

³⁹ Michael Loadenthal, *The Politics of Attack: Communiqués and Insurrectionary Violence* (Manchester University Press, 2017).

⁴⁰ Loadenthal, *Politics of Attack*, 6.

⁴¹ Loadenthal, *Politics of Attack*, 5.

⁴² Loadenthal, *Politics of Attack*, 14.

it is a reaction to structural violence and an urging for additional reactionary violence."⁴³ Loadenthal's arguments provide the basis for my analysis of WU communiqués. By viewing the WU's texts as a central feature of the group's propaganda, attention shifts away from the bombings toward the written word.

It is also significant for my research that the communiqué is situated in the broader environment of communication tactics used by the revolutionary groups of the 1970s. In his 2018 work, *Guerrilla Networks: An Anarchaeology of 1970s Radical Media Ecologies*, cultural studies scholar Michael Goddard argues that film, TV, radio, and the textual documents of the 1970s form what he calls "guerrilla media ecologies," and that the media produced by some of these revolutionary groups do not fit into standard media conventions.⁴⁴ Goddard emphasizes that the ephemera produced by groups like the WU became hotbeds of cultural and political discourse, leading toward an "invention of alternative potential futures, quite contrary to the dominant economic and political ones that actually eventuated."⁴⁵ For Goddard, the media created by revolutionary groups were just as important as their physical acts, even if the intended outcomes discussed in these texts never quite came to fruition.

It is at this point that Goddard's and Loadenthal's views on the communiqués and radical media of the 1970s converge. Goddard argues that these forms of media are not mere "ephemera of the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy," but that they remain "vital resources to be reactualized when possible."⁴⁶ In other words, the WU communiqués are not just rhetoric-filled anti-imperial ramblings. Rather, they offer a body of knowledge on the thoughts, sentiments, and actions of the radical group itself. This is similar to Loadenthal's perspective that, instead of relegating communiqués to the "trash heap of revolutionary ephemera," they form a "precise revolutionary canon."⁴⁷ In conjunction with one another, the arguments of these two researchers form the foundation of my analysis of the WU communiqués.

In his 2014 dissertation, "Dissent through Destruction: American Political Activism and the Utilization of Property Disruption as Protest,"⁴⁸ political scientist Lawrence J. Cushnie articulates that, "[i]f property is the right to exclude, destruction served as forced inclusion of and attention to underrepresented voices."⁴⁹ Through targeting and disrupting sites of global and local power, the WU rallied for those who did not have the political ability and means to speak for themselves. Cushnie provides case studies of American revolutionaries who used the destruction of property to shed light on systems of oppression and control. He recounts the Boston Tea Party, the Underground Railroad, and the figurehead of the temperance

⁴³ Loadenthal, *Politics of Attack*, 221.

⁴⁴ Michael Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks: An Anarchaeology of 1970s Radical Media Ecologies* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 11.

⁴⁵ Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks*, 21.

⁴⁶ Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks*, 21.

⁴⁷ Loadenthal, *Politics of Attack*, 27.

⁴⁸ Lawrence J. Cushnie, "Dissent through Destruction: American Political Activism and the Utilization of Property Disruption as Protest" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2014).

⁴⁹ Cushnie, "Dissent through Destruction," 50.

movement, Carry A. Nation. Cushnie's case studies situate property disruption not as haphazard actions taken by enraged activists but as methodical and deliberate demonstrations of political protest. Similar to the interventions of historical activists, the bombings committed by the WU were planned actions, targeting specific sites of power.

In developing my approach for this article, I have also benefited from studies on the organizational structures of terrorist groups as well as the utilization of communiqués in the 1970s, respectively. Political scientist Brian J. McFillen's 2013 dissertation, "Shadow Boxing: How the Risk of Government Intervention Shapes Terrorist Organizational Structures," showcases how different New Left radical groups structured their organization in accordance with the pressure applied by governmental forces.⁵⁰ McFillen's work addresses two key aspects: the organizational component as structured by the group itself and the intervening forces of government monitoring and infiltration. McFillen posits that the availability of a safe haven, either foreign or domestic, directly affects how a group is organized and whether they are successful in committing attacks.⁵¹ McFillen's analysis of group structure is useful when incorporating the communiqués into the broader narrative of the WU. Due to a multitude of organizational factors, including its existence as an underground cellular model and the presence of governmental forces, the WU was forced to cut ties with its supporters. This led to the proliferation of fiery rhetoric in the WU communiqués, as these documents were the only channels of communication between the group and any potential supporters.

In their 2024 article, "Balancing Act: How Militant Groups Manage Strategic and Ideological Resources," criminologist Hannah Chesterton, counterterrorism expert Tricia Bacon, and public affairs scholar Thomas Zeitzoff distinguish between four different types of militant groups: violent militants, militant opportunists, professional militants, and disciplined militants.⁵² They categorize the WU as "disciplined militants" who "emphasize ideological resources and engage in targeted violence."⁵³ They argue that, although this adherence to targeted violence made the WU actions successful, it also cut them off from their constituents and therefore left the group to drift off into internal disunity.⁵⁴ The continued reliance on bombings plunged the WU deeper into hiding. Constantly on the run from the FBI, the WU became increasingly disconnected from the anti-war movement.

Terrorism studies, cultural studies, and sociology all concern themselves with the political functions of communiqués, how militant and terrorist groups structure themselves in the face of adversity, as well as the importance of analyzing the documents produced by violent groups. I incorporate this research into the story of the WU and their communiqués. By shifting the attention away from the WU's physical acts and toward its various writings, I hope to recontextualize the communiqués into the broader history of the Weather Underground.

⁵⁰ Brian J. McFillen, "Shadow Boxing: How the Risk of Government Intervention Shapes Terrorist Organizational Structures" (PhD diss., University of Indiana, 2013).

⁵¹ McFillen, "Shadow Boxing," 40.

⁵² Hannah Chesterton, Tricia Bacon, and Thomas Zeitzoff, "Balancing Act: How Militant Groups Manage Strategic and Ideological Resources," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 18, no. 2 (2024): 8.

⁵³ Chesterton et al., "Balancing Act," 10.

⁵⁴ Chesterton et al., "Balancing Act," 14.

While often replete with Marxist ideology, these texts communicated a precise and distinct critique of the U.S. power structure.

While differing in methodology and focus, all major historical works concerned with the WU follow a distinct pattern of capturing the group's trajectory between 1969 and 1976, as they endeavor to understand the presence of the WU in America's tumultuous history with anti-war and revolutionary uprisings during this time. The first major study, journalist Ron Jacobs's 1997 monograph, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground*, sets the stage. Jacobs traces the beginning, middle, and end of the WU's lifecycle, dedicating ample time to each phase of the movement. He begins with a brief overview of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and their shift from participatory democracy to action theory. He attributes this turn in strategy and rhetoric to the 1968 protests at Columbia University and the ensuing mass arrest of protesters.⁵⁵ Columbia's planned construction of an allegedly segregated gymnasium in a Black community of Harlem drove SDS-ers to overtake multiple campus buildings. Their demonstration was also a response against Columbia's partnership with the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA), a program by which the U.S. government used university facilities to conduct weapons research, riot-control studies, and counter-insurgency tactics.⁵⁶ The Columbia protests fueled the already growing tension between student activists and state actors and set the course for the SDS to become radicalized.

Jacobs then follows the SDS's trajectory as the organization split into warring factions. The 1969 SDS National Convention in Chicago gave rise to two main factions: the Progressive Labor Party (PL), and the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM).⁵⁷ From June 18 to 21, PL and RYM debated over who should take charge of the radical movement and which ideological path would work best to revolutionize the American public. Once the heated debates had ceased, the RYM officially expelled the PL from the larger caucus and took control over the SDS's national office in Chicago. After this initial power grab, the RYM became the Weathermen movement. From this point on, Jacobs's monograph closely follows the WU throughout the remainder of its lifespan. Key events in the WU timeline receive ample attention, including the Days of Rage protest, the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion, searches conducted by the FBI, feminist concerns regarding Weather's sexist conduct, and the years of bombings committed by the radicals.

Ron Jacobs's study stands out in the academic conversation on the WU because it covers the group's story and events extensively, thereby providing a framework for all future analyses. Subsequent scholars have expanded upon Jacobs's work by utilizing interviews with Weather members, documentaries, and previously classified government documents. The research of Jeremy Varon, an American historian, broadens the conversation on the WU by taking a rare

⁵⁵ Jacobs, *Way the Wind Blew*, 8.

⁵⁶ Jacobs, *Way the Wind Blew*, 8.

⁵⁷ The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) comprised two different groups, the RYM I and the RYM II. The RYM I eventually became known as the Weathermen Faction and then as the Weather Underground (WU), the Weather Underground Organization (WUO), and simply Weather. The RYM II separated and fell in and out of relevance until 1985 when the group officially disbanded.

international approach and comparing the WU with the West German Red Army Faction (RAF), a Far-left militant group active between 1970 and 1998. According to Varon's 2004 monograph, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, the internationalism of the New Left consciousness is an underdeveloped area of research and provides an opportunity to analyze the scope of countercultural sympathies and ideas.⁵⁸ While the WU and the RAF were spatially separated, the two groups found common ground with their anti-war rhetoric and revolutionary ideologies. Both groups originated out of the broader student and anti-war movements, took violence as their main form of protest, and catastrophically became the catalysts of their own downfall.

Varon states: "As both a cause and a symptom of broad-based crises of legitimacy, their [i.e., the radical groups'] violence constituted an important episode in the histories of their nations, of the developed West as a whole, and of global conflict."⁵⁹ In addition to deepening our understanding of the WU and the RAF, Varon posits that comparing these extreme cases of New Left violence shifts the conversation from an analysis of isolated movements to one of global patterns and attitudes.⁶⁰ Varon meticulously addresses where the WU diverged from and converged with the broader New Left movement—not just in the United States but also as a global phenomenon. He discusses the actions of left-wing activist Sam Melville and his New York collective of radicals, the Vietnam Moratorium Committee's October 1969 demonstrations, and the "March Against Death" protest in November of the same year.⁶¹ Varon's comparative approach marks a departure from Jacobs's research on the WU, and his analysis of other radical movements adds an important dimension of New Left activity. For Varon, the rapidly changing sphere of radical activity was a deciding factor for Weather's hardening into a militant organization.⁶² In the final part of his book, Varon discusses the Flint War Council, the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion, and the ensuing bombing campaigns.⁶³ Unlike Jacobs, Varon is less concerned with the WU's bombings and more interested in the reactions of the New Left. While Varon's work excels at capturing the broader sentiments felt across the country, it lacks the detailed analysis of Weather's longest period of activity—especially when compared to Jacobs's study—and only returns to the bombings for a brief moment in his conclusion.⁶⁴ That said, Varon's research on the WU has played a formative role by expanding the conversation into the broader narratives of both American and international radicalism during the 1960s and 1970s.

Historian Dan Berger's 2006 monograph, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*, aligns with earlier scholarship by examining the WU's entire

⁵⁸ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 12.

⁵⁹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 13.

⁶⁰ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 14.

⁶¹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 96–105.

⁶² Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 113.

⁶³ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 124–134.

⁶⁴ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 250.

lifespan.⁶⁵ Unique to his approach, Berger utilizes interviews with the (then) imprisoned Weather member David Gilbert as a throughline in his work.⁶⁶ While covering many of the same topics as previous researchers, Berger offers a detailed discussion of the Weather Underground's 1974 publication *Prairie Fire*, which he considers both a critical success as well as the beginning of the end for the movement.

The FBI's role in the history of the WU—particularly its tactics of subversion and illegal spying—has been the focus of two recent explorations, namely, Bryan Burrough's 2015 book, *Days of Rage: America's Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence*,⁶⁷ and Arthur Eckstein's 2016 book, *Bad Moon Rising: How the Weather Underground Beat the FBI and Lost the Revolution*.⁶⁸ Burrough's monograph offers a comprehensive analysis of New Left radical groups and their relationship with the FBI. Similar to previous works, it follows the timeline of the WU and traces how the FBI affected the movement. Meanwhile, Eckstein's monograph focuses on the WU, utilizing newly released FBI files and government documents. Both authors' research is valuable in discerning how government intervention shaped the formation of the New Left movement in general and the functioning of the WU in particular. While they are valuable in this regard and to Weather's overall academic narrative, my research is less concerned with the involvement of state actors and more with the WU's written political statements.

Recent academic work on the WU has directed its attention toward more specific aspects of the movement. Historian Cristina Mona Rocha's 2014 dissertation, "Militant Feminism and the Women of the Weather Underground Organization," focuses on the WU's feminist characteristics, arguing that the WU's women were interested in the burgeoning second-wave feminist movement.⁶⁹ Rocha writes, "The WUO criticized the role of women in the home, was concerned with the subordination of women to men, attacked the gender pay gap, and supported female bodily integrity."⁷⁰ She emphasizes the position of women in the WU's leadership and their achievements of bringing feminist concerns to the attention of other Weather members. In doing so, Rocha shifts the focus from Weather's violent tendencies toward the ways in which women transformed parts of Weather's ideology and rhetoric by integrating both themselves and feminist concerns into the main body of Weather leadership. Similar to Rocha's approach, my research attempts to shed light on a largely understudied area of the WU's history, namely, its communiqués.

⁶⁵ Berger, *Outlaws of America*.

⁶⁶ David Gilbert was sentenced to 75 years in prison for his role in the 1981 Brinks robbery and the killing of three individuals. In August 2021, Governor Andrew Cuomo granted Gilbert clemency, reducing his sentence to 40 years. By November 2021, Gilbert was granted parole and released from his incarceration.

⁶⁷ Burrough, *Days of Rage*.

⁶⁸ Arthur M. Eckstein, *Bad Moon Rising: How the Weather Underground Beat the FBI and Lost the Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2016).

⁶⁹ Cristina Mona Rocha, "Militant Feminism and the Women of the Weather Underground Organization" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2014).

⁷⁰ Rocha, "Militant Feminism," 2. Rocha refers to the WU as the WUO (Weather Underground Organization).

3. *The Weather Underground's Communiqués of Violence*

The first communiqué to accompany a Weather Underground bombing was issued on June 10, 1970, and distributed to *The New York Times* and the Associated Press.⁷¹ Referring to the previous day's attack on the NYPD headquarters in Manhattan, its opening lines state, "Tonight, at 7 p.m., we blew up N.Y.C. Police Headquarters. We called in a warning before the explosion. The pigs in this country are our enemies. They have murdered Fred Hampton and tortured Joan Bird."⁷² This excerpt demonstrates two patterns of the WU: warning calls before explosions and the use of the word "pig" to denote police officers, government officials, and anyone else opposed by the WU; the latter established an "us versus them" dichotomy, a tactic intended to create revolutionary zeal among the youth.

The communiqué's remainder establishes the extent of violent acts committed by radicals across the country. The Weather members who authored the text comment on the destruction of ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) buildings on university campuses and the closing of schools due to student strikes against President Nixon's involvement in Cambodia.⁷³ The communiqué closes with the following lines: "The time is now. Political power grows out of a gun, a molotov, a riot, a commune ... and from the soul of the people."⁷⁴ With this statement, the WU embraced a rhetoric of violence, calling for radicals to exert forceful revolution by means of throwing firebombs and burning buildings. The WU hoped that its engaging in various forms of violence would convince other radicals and supporters of the movement to do likewise. This is a key principle of WU rhetoric and one the group used frequently. In comparison to later communiqués, *Headquarters* is low on ideological jargon, but it showcases the WU's willingness to appraise violence as a political tool.

In October 1970, the WU launched several successive bombings within the span of just a few days—the first, on October 5, against the Haymarket Square police statue in Chicago (the group's second attack on this particular monument); the second, on October 8, against the Marin County Civic Center in northern California; and the third, on October 10, against the Long Island City courthouse in Queens, New York. These bombings caused extensive damage; they were a bold demonstration of the violence the WU could inflict; and they represented the spectacle of violence that the WU was now openly propagating. The WU followed each of these bombings with a communiqué, and I focus my attention here on two of them. The WU communiqués *Hall of Injustice* and *Criminal Courthouse* provide insight into the group's struggle against American racism and the injustices of the prison system. In contrast to *Headquarters*, these two communiqués are not laden with countercultural zeal. Rather, they are softer in tone, offering feelings of sympathy and strength to the Black Liberation movement.

⁷¹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 109.

⁷² Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 109.

⁷³ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 109.

⁷⁴ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 109.

Both *Hall of Injustice* and *Criminal Courthouse* display a sense of comradeship and common struggle. The authors of *Hall of Injustice* announce: "We dedicate this act to the prisoners of San Quentin, Soledad, and New York, and to all black prisoners of war ... We dedicate it to the heroic prisoners of O Wing and the other inmates of Soledad Prison ... and to the incredible courage of the brothers who seized and held the prisons of New York."⁷⁵ This dedication draws attention to two of the WU's signature concerns, namely, prisons as institutions of systemic racism and the suppression of Black communities. Thus, the communiqué goes beyond engaging head-on with physical violence and becomes a voice for those who are trapped under state-sponsored oppression. Its rhetoric demonstrates the WU's ability to recognize that revolutionary struggle is not just waged by means of bombings or even direct harm to individuals, but also by supporting communities that are most affected by the oppressive practices of the state.

In its themes, *Criminal Courthouse* resembles *Hall of Injustice*. Expanding upon the latter's dedication to prisoners, the Weather members repeat their attack on the American prison system by stating: "This week, in the concentration camps of New York City, the courage and humanity of the people broke through the fortress of the pigs ... Soledad, the Tombs, Long Bihn, and Con Thienh, the final solution of the Amerikan state—machines for breaking men and women, and filth, rats, isolation, brutality, and torture."⁷⁶ The WU's critique of incarceration systems from around the world demonstrates a strong commitment to aiding the Black Liberation movement, Third World communities, and those mistreated by their government captors. Critically different from earlier communiqués, *Criminal Courthouse* presents a scathing critique of the prison system. The authors label prisons as America's equivalent to "concentration camps" and the "final solution of the Amerikan state."⁷⁷ The following year, in August and September 1971, the WU continued its rampage against America's carceral state with bombings in California and New York.

On August 21, 1971, George Jackson, a Black activist and co-founder of the Black Guerilla Family prison gang, was shot and killed by guards at San Quentin State Prison. The guards claimed that he was armed and attempting to escape; however, the pistol that was allegedly in Jackson's possession was never found.⁷⁸ One week later, the WU bombed the San Francisco office of the California Department of Corrections and the Office of California Prisons in retaliation. The accompanying communiqué, *George Jackson*, opens with the following lines:

"On Saturday, August 21, 1971, George Jackson, black warrior, revolutionary leader, political prisoner, was shot dead by racist forces at San Quentin. Murdered for what he had become: Soledad Brother, soldier of his people, rising up through torment and torture, tyranny and injustice, unwilling to bow or bend to his oppressors. George Jackson died with his eyes fixed clearly on freedom."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 115.

⁷⁶ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 116.

⁷⁷ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 119.

⁷⁸ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 128.

⁷⁹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 128.

The communiqué continues by speaking critically of what the radicals believed to be the for-profit prison system, comparing its functions to those of slavery and involuntary servitude. Its authors argue that similar to what occurred during slavery, Black citizens are being torn from their families and communities to be “incarcerated in slave labor camps.”⁸⁰ To further demonstrate their point, the communiqué’s authors express their views on inhumane prison policies and the treatment of prisoners at length:

“Inside are those who have fought back against the white armies which occupy their communities, those who have experienced the slow death of heroin, those who have not accepted hunger, unemployment, and racism as a normal way of life. Fifty percent of the prison population of California is Black and Brown. There are more Black men in prison than in college. Once in a jail, the point is to keep them there. Thousands of prisoners are serving indeterminate sentences—one year to life is the required California sentence for robbery. There is a high price for parole—that of utter subservience to daily racism and indignities. Prisoners must accept arbitrary transfers, denial of visitation rights without explanation, inhumane medical treatment, atrocious food, overcrowding, and rampant brutality ... The masters would have us believe that violence is a choice in the world, that the best of us choose non-violence as a means of change, and that deviants choose violence. The loudest cries for restraints and non-violence come from the very throats of those bent on violence as a means of control.”⁸¹

In its subsequent examination of the disproportionate violence committed against oppressed communities, the communiqué highlights the malnutrition and lead poisoning of Black babies, the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women, and the periodic assassinations of Black leaders like Malcolm X, George Jackson, and Patrice Lumumba.⁸²

The *George Jackson* communiqué shows two integral processes. The first is the WU’s commitment to supporting both the Black Liberation and prison reform movements of the 1970s. The second and more subtle process is the establishing of the communiqué as a site to inform and educate others on the symptoms of imperialism and racism. The WU’s persistent documentation of the various methods of oppression forms a distinct pattern in the group’s rhetoric. There is a fixation on highlighting the violence that is happening to both local and distant communities in the hope that sympathizers of these causes will engage in direct and oppositional violence alongside the WU. The WU expanded this process in its future writings and restructured its rhetoric to create a repository of writings that demonstrated the violence committed against others at the hands of the U.S. government. This relationship between rhetoric and violence reframed the communiqué from a presumptuous shouting of jargon into a text designed to inform, educate, and produce an anti-imperialist and anti-racist fighting force among the white youth of America.

The process continued on September 17, 1971, in a communiqué titled *Attica*. In response to the state’s brutal reaction against the Attica Prison riot a few days earlier, the WU attacked the office of the New York Department of Corrections. *Attica* forcefully advances the narrative of state violence across different sectors of American society by highlighting the killing of Black students during protests in South Carolina and Mississippi, the riots in Newark, Detroit,

⁸⁰ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 129.

⁸¹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 132–133.

⁸² Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 130.

and Watts, and the assassination of Black leaders.⁸³ In the communiqué's remainder, the WU vehemently supports prison reform and advocates for the oppressed communities of America. In addition to its support for prison reform, the WU passionately supported the anti-war movement and those international communities plagued by American warmongering. The WU demonstrated this through communiqués that focused on the Vietnam War and President Nixon's war strategies.

Earlier in the year, on February 28, 1971, Weather had released *The Bombing of the Capitol*, a communiqué set to accompany the attack on the home of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C. The issue with this particular incident was that the first bomb's detonation sequence did not reach completion. With the communiqué already in the hands of the press, the WU reacted quickly, placing a secondary bomb on top of the first one to complete the detonation. Weather members hoped that by creating a grand spectacle and demonstration of violence—namely, by bombing a building replete with American iconography and symbolism—they would motivate even bigger and more violent acts from their supporters. In its communiqué, the WU also furthers the narrative of violence unleashed by the American military. The authors cover the deployment of chemical agents used to defoliate the Vietnamese countryside. They comment that whole swaths of land and crops are being damaged beyond repair, that pregnant women are at risk of having children with birth defects, and that the people of Vietnam are being forcibly relocated to a free-fire zone.

In their reactions to the Vietnam War, the WU communiqués create a sphere of rhetoric in which the U.S. government is held responsible for its wrongdoings. Loadenthal's take on communiqués as a form of discourse offers a useful lens when analyzing the WU's statements. By bringing attention to the injustices and atrocities of the war, the WU attempted to create a space for readers to become not just informed but also radicalized. While this was not uncommon in terms of Weather Underground procedure, it demonstrates the group's adeptness at linking violence, rhetoric, and the means of communication available to them in the 1970s. These communiqués allowed the WU to capitalize on its armed propaganda campaign. The discreteness of writing and publishing while in hiding proved especially useful for the Weather leaders.

By May 1972, President Nixon's military position in Vietnam was steadily deteriorating, and in response, he started replacing American foot soldiers with planes and bombing attacks. For its part, the WU acted on May 19, Ho Chi Minh's birthday, by detonating dynamite in the Pentagon's Air Force section.⁸⁴ A communiqué, titled *The Bombing of the Pentagon*, details the powerful resistance of the Vietnamese while being overshadowed by the American war machine. Recounting prior times of Vietnamese resistance, the WU discusses the Vietnamese victory over Japanese and French forces in 1945 and their successful defeat of the French occupation of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.⁸⁵ At the same time, the authors include details of Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy. This war strategy operated on three fronts: withdrawing

⁸³ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 133.

⁸⁴ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 134.

⁸⁵ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 135–136.

American combat troops to ease tensions within the United States; providing aid to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam to muster support of pro-U.S. forces; and increasing the U.S. air and naval presence.⁸⁶ While this gave an impression of U.S. withdrawal, Nixon was merely redirecting military power and presence to regain control during a losing battle. The WU concludes its communiqué by urging readers to reflect on the Vietnamese and their culture:

"The world has been changed forever by the struggle in Viet Nam. Despite all of the U.S. bombs, all the vicious escalation, all the criminal acts of this government, the people of Viet Nam continue to fight, continue to build their society. These are the people we are taught to hate. Look into their eyes, see how they raise their children, how they greet one another. Read their songs and poetry. Reflect on how they face this terrible war machine, how they transform bomb craters into fish hatcheries, how youth brigades mobilize to rebuild bridges and roads as quickly as they are bombed. Try to understand how they persevere. There is a difference between Richard Nixon and Ho Chi Minh, William Porter and Madame Binh, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Nixon may be murdering for his pride and his power but the Vietnamese are fighting to be free and to live as human beings in a different kind of world. And because of this, the eyes of the people from every land are focused on Vietnam."⁸⁷

Thus, this communiqué continues to advance the WU's unrelenting rhetoric. By 1973, the frequency of the WU's bombings began to slow, due in part to the steady de-escalation of the Vietnam War. The group committed only two recorded bombings that year, namely, an attack on New York's 103rd Police Precinct and an attack on the headquarters building of the International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) corporation, also located in New York. While both attacks were accompanied by communiqués, I focus here on the latter of the two, as it highlights the involvement of international corporations in war.

On September 28, 1973, the WU phoned in a warning to the night supervisor at *The New York Times*, noting that a bomb was set to go off at the ITT-American Building fifteen minutes later.⁸⁸ The caller reasoned that the attack was in retaliation for ITT's connection to the subversion and overthrow of the President of Chile, Salvador Allende. In a change of tone, the communiqué's authors offer an "indictment" of both the ITT and the U.S. government, implicating the corporation in an attempt to subvert Chile's elections; in a collusion with the Anaconda and Kennecott copper companies to steal wealth and subsistence from the Chilean people; in a successful economic blockade sanctioned by the U.S. government; and in a whole host of other ploys intended to disrupt Chile's socialist society.⁸⁹ What we can learn from this communiqué does not come from the text per se, but rather from how it is presented. Its intentional design as an "indictment" gives this communiqué a humorous touch and illustrates Goddard's concept of "radical media ecologies." Alongside subsequent communiqués that also criticize the U.S. involvement in Chile, this text represents a domain in which the WU dictates the conversation and specific narratives on violence.

Between 1973 and 1975, the WU went on a two-year hiatus from its bombing campaigns and published only a handful of statements, among them its 1974 book *Prairie Fire*. With the anti-

⁸⁶ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 136.

⁸⁷ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 141.

⁸⁸ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 159.

⁸⁹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 160.

war effort dwindling, political bombings lost their popularity among the New Left. It was not until June 16, 1975, that the WU laid claim to another bombing, namely, an attack on the Banco de Ponce in New York, targeted for its connection to Ferré Enterprises, a multimillion-dollar cement company in Puerto Rico which controlled the bank. In the accompanying communiqué, *Victory to the Ponce Cement Strike*, the WU expressed its support for the 500 cement workers who had endured a five-month-long strike against the company.⁹⁰

The shift in revolutionary focus became a hallmark trait of the WU's later communiqués. While continuing to support the Black Liberation movement as well as the anti-war effort, the WU now demonstrated its support for the socialist movement in Chile. This, of course, was a reflection of the times the radicals found themselves in. At home, the lack of eagerness on the part of radicals to engage in bombings and mass demonstrations was challenging the WU's ability to rally support for its own cause. This was compounded by the end of the Vietnam War, a key focus of Weather's revolutionary ideology. To position themselves as leaders of the underground front, Weather members sought to keep up their attacks on what they believed to be global imperialism. Further impacting the movement, Weather members and leaders began to resurface in the hope of resuming normal lives. Because of this, both the targets of attack and the accompanying communiqués increasingly lost their bravado and showed signs of an already waning revolutionary front. In a final attempt to keep the revolution alive, the WU laid claim to a final act of bombing on September 5, 1975.

The attack's accompanying communiqué, titled *Weather Underground Organization Bombs Kennecott Corporation*, constitutes the group's final statement in connection with a bombing. Weather bombed the national headquarters of the Kennecott Copper Corporation in Salt Lake City, Utah, in retaliation for what they believed to be the company's ongoing control of copper mines in Chile, its role in overthrowing the country's Unidad Popular government, and its exploitation of workers in the United States.⁹¹ The communiqué details Kennecott's actions in Chile and is reminiscent of Weather's "indictment" of the ITT in a previous communiqué. The communiqué is indicative of the movement's decline, as its authors' rhetoric of violence lacks strength in comparison to earlier statements.

By analyzing and recontextualizing the Weather members' bombing-related communiqués, I have highlighted the relationship between them, the spectacles of violence they engaged in, and the rhetoric they created. These communiqués demonstrate Weather's propensity for violence, both in physical and in written form. They provide alternative narratives on imperialism and racism, both globally and within the United States. Because the Weather Underground could not lead the movement in mass demonstrations and protests, it found it sufficient to inform, educate, and radicalize America's youth through the written word.

⁹⁰ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 169.

⁹¹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 169.

4. The Weather Underground's Communiqués of Radical Perception

I now turn to the WU's non-bombing communiqués or, as I call them, the group's communiqués of radical perception. These statements did not accompany particular bombings but, rather, focused on building connections between the WU and its above-ground constituency. The WU produced texts that addressed broader concerns of the New Left, the anti-war effort, and American society in general. While one could argue that these communiqués offer less in terms of revolutionary zeal, they articulate Weather's attempt to garner support from the American public. Not intended to induce violence, they display a commitment to the counterculture and to the New Left, a sphere of influence that the WU hoped to dominate. In this section, I analyze statements from the WU that demonstrate not only the group's critiques of the American imperialist system but also its production of a formalized piece of media or, as Weather would put it, armed propaganda. These communiqués forged a path for the group to rely less on physical acts of violence and thereby draw more supporters to join the New Left's anti-war and anti-imperialist efforts. This is especially true for the final two pieces of media created by the WU before the group dissolved in 1977.

The WU's last two major publications, namely, its 1974 book *Prairie Fire* and the 1975 documentary film *Underground*,⁹² break away from the structure of the communiqué in favor of more lengthy and experimental forms of communication. While they are not communiqués, I shall address them further below because they functioned as grand statements and signified a dramatic change from the group's previous tactics. Despite being released toward the end of the group's lifespan, *Prairie Fire* is the most cohesive piece of Weather ideology. It is divided into six parts, each focusing on a different aspect of Weather's critiques of American imperialism and the revolution's changing tide. Meanwhile, the documentary film *Underground* demonstrates Weather's willingness to experiment with alternative communication tactics utilized by revolutionary groups in the 1970s. Its 87-minute runtime features interviews with Weather leaders, interlaced with footage of various demonstrations, protests, and speeches from the 1960s and 1970s. However, before I turn my attention to *Prairie Fire* and *Underground*, there are a several earlier communiqués that need to be addressed.

The WU communiqué *New Morning-Changing Weather* is written in a solemn and reflective tone, which sets it apart from other texts of this format. Released on December 6, 1970, it was the WU's first public statement regarding the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion on March 6, 1970. It states: "The death of our friends ended our military conception of what we were doing ... this tendency to consider only bombings or picking up the gun as revolutionary, with glorification of the heavier the better, we've called the military error."⁹³ Deeply affected by the event, which had taken the lives of Weather members Diana Oughton, Ted Gold, and Terry Robbins, the WU challenged its own idea of what fosters an underground

⁹² Emile de Antonio, Mary Lampson, and Haskell Wexler, directors, *Underground*, documentary film, Action 75 Inc., 1975, streaming, [online](#).

⁹³ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 118.

revolution. From this point on, the group diligently called in warnings to switchboard operators, allowing occupants to evacuate buildings targeted for bombing before detonation. In addition to this shift in practice, the WU adjusted its viewpoint on violence and refined its communiqués, henceforth utilizing them as spaces to advocate and educate.

With the release of *New Morning-Changing Weather*, the WU began to overhaul their communiqués and relied more on the creation of propaganda, a transition that signified a change in Weather practices and rhetoric. Goddard recognizes this shift when he explains that, "[i]n some respects, the communiqués were of more significance than the bombings or, rather, the latter served mainly to draw attention to the former."⁹⁴ Goddard also states that the WU transformed into a "type of underground media organization,"⁹⁵ a point especially true in light of the eventual release of the *Underground* documentary film. The remainder of *New Morning-Changing Weather* addresses the state of the revolutionary movement and the direction the radicals should take from here on out, and it is signed—for the first time—with the group's moniker: Weather Underground.

The WU communiqué *Common Victories* was published on February 23, 1973, one month after President Nixon had announced a ceasefire agreement with the North Vietnamese. It reexamines the war, highlighting the progress the anti-war effort has made since 1961 and what it is still aspiring to achieve. The text's authors appropriately cover the war years in Vietnam, using common anti-war slogans like "Hell No, We Won't Go!," "Bring the Troops Home!," and "Stop the Draft!" as headings throughout the text. Each heading is followed by a discussion of successful acts of resistance that, according to the WU, had aided in the disruption of the war effort. Talk of draft-card burning, the wisdom gained from the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements, and an inquiry into inhumane war tactics like the deployment of napalm fill the pages of this communiqué. The main point of interest here is the strategic construction of the text as a curated piece of propaganda. The Weather members break away from their usual rhetoric and, instead, use the first page of the communiqué to showcase a poem written by "a sister in the underground."⁹⁶ A few lines of this poem read as follows:

"Thi Binh came victorious // her flesh torn and blistered // singed hair skin coarsened // from prison lye, barelegged work in the deltas. // She covered her mudcaked body // with crimson ao dai // dipped in // the blood of women // warriors // sacred red."⁹⁷

The poem commemorates the women of Vietnam for their courage while fighting against the might of the U.S. military. It also points to Vietnamese traditions like the *áo dài*, a formal dress worn by both women and men. The use of poetry to convey solidarity with the women of Vietnam shows the WU's dedication to understanding the global political climate as well as the attitudes of others affected negatively by U.S. policy and actions. By creating a text that is purposeful both in terms of content and design, the WU bridges the gap between

⁹⁴ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 123.

⁹⁵ Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks*, 123.

⁹⁶ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 139.

⁹⁷ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 139.

rhetoric and strategic propaganda. *Common Victories* steps away from the overtly Marxist jargon and the countercultural zeal that the WU is known for; instead, it offers thoughtful reflections on the anti-war movement and the victory of the Vietnamese people:

"The intention of the U.S. government has been total war and genocide against Vietnam. This intention has been countered and defeated. The Vietnamese people have driven an invading army from their country. For the first time in over one hundred years, Vietnamese soil will be free of foreign soldiers. Article No. 4 of the Agreement says: 'The U.S. will not continue its military involvement or intervention in the internal affairs of Vietnam.' The full force of U.S. wealth, the cream of computerized technology, the racial arrogance of Empire has been defeated by an ancient Asian nation, a people who began this stage of their revolution thirty years ago armed with a two thousand year tradition of resistance and bamboo poles sharpened at the ends. The significance of the ceasefire agreement is that the strength of people—in Vietnam, around the world, and inside the U.S. itself—was pitted against a handful of men who control technological power and the means of violence. A small poor country can defeat the largest richest power in the world, provided its people are united and its cause is just. What an ominous message for the American empire. What an inspiration and comfort for all people. The Vietnamese have experience with the forked-tongue of the American government; we are reminded of the trail of broken treaties and the greed which has accompanied peace-and-honor words before."⁹⁸

From a rhetorical standpoint, *Common Victories* demonstrates Weather's developing sense of armed propaganda, a responsible decision to refrain from fervent rhetoric and, instead, engage readers with thoughtful prose and a celebration of the Vietnamese people. By producing a communiqué in this fashion, the WU participated in what Goddard has labeled a "media ecology."⁹⁹ The WU produced a refined piece of media that articulates the concerns of the anti-war effort while also engaging in the creative construction of propaganda. Goddard adds that, "[i]n this context, increasingly sophisticated media management techniques and a guerrilla or radical use of the media also assumes a crucial importance in any field of political struggle."¹⁰⁰ Goddard's argument here is useful for assessing Weather's armed propaganda position. The communiqué becomes an integral component of understanding the political struggle and the socio-political confines within which the creation of media takes place. In the 1970s' constant whirlwind of ideologies, critiques, and statements, the communiqués of the WU synthesize the barrage of voices into a singular act of resistance.

The next two communiqués, *A Collective Letter to the Women's Movement*, and *Health Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women*, were written by the Weatherwomen and are expressly concerned with the issues of feminism and their place in the revolution. Released on July 24, 1973, *A Collective Letter* reframes the WU's outmoded and, quite frankly, sexist stance on women's involvement in the revolutionary struggle. Describing the communiqué as a letter that "bridge[s] the space between us,"¹⁰¹ the Weatherwomen address the exclusion of women who are not fully committed to the ideology of violence as political protest. The communiqué's authors argue that, for the past three years, the Weatherwomen and the New Left have failed to recognize that women, when empowered to command their lives, are

⁹⁸ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 142–143.

⁹⁹ Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks*, 58.

¹⁰⁰ Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks*, 58.

¹⁰¹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 149–150.

fundamental to any revolution.¹⁰² Admitting that the WU was in part responsible for the shunning of feminism and women as leaders in the revolution, the communiqué is one part apology on behalf of the Weatherwomen and one part attempt to entwine the ideals of the radical New Left with feminist causes.

The communiqué's authors write: "The purpose of this letter is to mark a change—to commit ourselves as women to the cause of women. We believe that the struggle against sexism demands the destruction of the American state, and that the immediate personal nature of sexism requires struggle against men who enforce that oppression as well as its institutions."¹⁰³ A distinctive change from previous communiqués, the Weatherwomen reflect on the position of women within the New Left as well as other facets of social movements. They discuss female revolutionary fighters in Vietnam, the resistance and progression of Black women in the United States, the fight for bodily autonomy, and the ease with which all of their efforts can be taken away. *A Collective Letter* planted the seed of feminism to grow within the WU; however, the Weatherwomen did not capitalize on this until almost one year later with their next communiqué.

In *Health Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women*, circulated on March 6, 1974, the Weatherwomen attack the government-funded Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), today known as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In their critique, the authors state that the "HEW keeps us below subsistence—not enough food, not health care but health-care-delivery-systems, not decent jobs but endless cycles of dependency and anguish."¹⁰⁴ Utilizing a—by then—standard Weather Underground tactic, the communiqué analyzes the perceived systems of oppression in American society by listing the ways in which the HEW program has continuously degraded women: the financing of between 100,000 and 200,000 sterilizations predominantly affecting women of color; the rising cost of food combined with the increasing number of single-mother families living in poverty; and the mismanagement and monopolization of the program's \$80 billion in funding.¹⁰⁵ The Weatherwomen argued that both the men and the women of the underground needed to commit to change. While they were raising the fundamental issues that women were facing in American society, the New Left's revolutionary zeal of armed propaganda was waning. To remedy this, the WU wrote and published its most audacious piece of communication yet: *Prairie Fire*.

Prairie Fire is the culmination of the WU's hardening ideology over the course of the group's lifespan. Published in May 1974, over 40,000 copies of *Prairie Fire* were distributed, and it has come to be lauded as the Weather Underground's magnum opus.¹⁰⁶ The book is divided into six sections, each combining Weather's revolutionary rhetoric with a synthesis of what the group considered to be America's long history of imperialist systems. In their most thorough

¹⁰² Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 151–152.

¹⁰³ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 163.

¹⁰⁵ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 164.

¹⁰⁶ Jacobs, *Way the Wind Blew*, 160.

critique of the U.S. government, the Weather members argue that the struggle against imperialism is also a struggle against capitalism and the consumerist markets of the American way of life. They maintain that the citizens of the United States no longer have the power to control and shape their lives; rather, that power lies in the hands of government officials, military programs, and U.S.-controlled corporations that all subvert the growth of an underground revolution.¹⁰⁷ *Prairie Fire* displays the WU's ability to analyze and critique perceived imperialist structures. Even though *Prairie Fire* is not a communiqué, it is a lasting piece of Weather ideology, a grand demonstration of the group's rhetoric molded over the course of the previous five years. In the words of Loadenthal, *Prairie Fire* is part of an "organic intellectualism,"¹⁰⁸ a piece of writing that intelligently communicates the need for revolution.

In addition to covering the history of the student movement of the 1960s and Nixon's path to war in Southeast Asia, *Prairie Fire* recontextualizes the history of the United States and its relationship with violence. It does so to demonstrate the WU's interpretation of imperialism and racism as constant instruments to subordinate the poor and people of color. Harkening back to Christopher Columbus and the enslavement of Indigenous people, the WU argues that slavery was a two-pronged system meant to imprison those who were thought to be inferior and bolster the white ruling class.¹⁰⁹ The authors explain that "[t]he institutionalizing of white supremacy created a structure to divide the white worker and small farmer from the Black slave. Coupled with the economic bribe of white privilege, it is the cornerstone of U.S. history, the rock upon which capitalism and imperialism have been erected."¹¹⁰ *Prairie Fire* traces this position through the dispossession of the North American Indigenous people, the Civil War, and the two world wars. Up until this point, the WU's propaganda had focused primarily on the anti-war effort and the support of the Black liberationists, not the inheritance of a nation built upon the backs of slaves and the exploitation of the common worker. Thus, *Prairie Fire* is Weather's most ambitious piece of media articulating the group's rhetoric.

Prairie Fire became a brief flicker of hope for the WU. Its publication spawned an above-ground subdivision of the WU, the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (PFOC). The PFOC operated as a support network for the underground members, putting together conferences and holding learning sessions to educate above-ground radicals on revolutionary tactics. However, similar to the SDS's PL and RYM factions, the PFOC and the WU clashed over the issue of who should control the movement. Without substantial progress in the New Left movement and the PFOC, the WU's time as a revolutionary group was coming to an end.

Between fleeting moments of success and crushing defeats, the Weather leaders decided on one final push to display their commitment to the revolution. In 1976, the documentary film *Underground*, directed by Emile de Antonio and Haskell Wexler, was released as the WU's last grand communication. It features interviews with Weather leaders Jeff Jones, Kathy Boudin, Cathy Wilkerson, Bernardine Dohrn, and Bill Ayers, interlaced with footage from New

¹⁰⁷ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 179–180.

¹⁰⁸ Loadenthal, *Politics of Attack*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 209.

¹¹⁰ Dohrn et al., *Sing a Battle Song*, 209.

Left protests and demonstrations. The documentary film's bulk covers much of what the WU had been talking about since its early days as a radical group. At the same time, however, *Underground* embraces a new mode of communication not yet utilized by the WU. Digital Humanities scholar Matt Applegate talks about this in his 2016 article, "Urban Guerrillas on Film: Mediatization, Guerrilla Filmmaking, and Guerrilla Seeing in Emile de Antonio's *Underground*."¹¹¹ According to Applegate, "it is precisely through the guerrilla's media campaigns—this is, its insistence on producing manifestos, ephemera, and eventually a film—that it extends itself, pushes itself to its limits, and brings unrealized potential to the fore."¹¹² Much to Weather's surprise, its documentary film came and went without making much—if any—difference with regard to the New Left's support. Thus, instead of ending with a cacophony of explosions and a fiery attitude, the WU sputtered to a standstill, leaving behind a legacy of bombs and an unforgiving rhetoric documented throughout its history.

Conclusion

It has been my goal to reposition the communiqués of the Weather Underground as texts that are fundamental to the functioning of this radical group. I argue that the WU produced communiqués and writings to advocate for and engage in the spectacle of violence; to further the ideology of anti-imperialism and anti-racism; and to establish a site that was suitable to educate and inform. The majority of Weather's lifespan as a movement was spent underground, cut off from its constituency. To remain hidden from law enforcement while maintaining an image of revolutionary leadership, the WU engaged in a five-year-long stretch of attacking what it regarded as U.S. sites of imperialist power and global domination. To accompany each act of bombing, the group produced and circulated written statements openly denouncing what it believed to be the imperialist and racist structures of the U.S. government. As demonstrated by both the communiqués of violence and the communiqués of radical perception, the WU hoped that these statements would revolutionize the minds of the American people.

It has also been my goal to interpret the WU communiqués as a necessity for the advancement of an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology. Through communiqués like *George Jackson*, *Attica*, and *Common Victories*, Weather members heavily aligned their motivations with the causes of Black Liberation and Third World struggles. While academic discourse thus far has focused primarily on the WU's acts of bombing, I have demonstrated that the WU communiqués became the muscle of the group's armed propaganda campaign. As the WU progressed in its bombing attacks, its communiqués became longer, detailing the symptoms and underlying causes for its attacks. Weather members expanded their thinking, providing commentary on topics like prison reform and the question of feminism in the revolutionary movement. Statements like *A Collective Letter* and *Health Education and Welfare* expanded Weather's approach to women in leadership as well as its examination of how women were affected by the oppressive systems of American society. According to my

¹¹¹ Matt Applegate, "Urban Guerrillas on Film: Mediatization, Guerrilla Filmmaking, and Guerrilla Seeing in Emile de Antonio's *Underground*," *Cultural Critique* 93, no. 1 (2016): 59–85.

¹¹² Applegate, "Urban Guerrillas," 71.

analysis, communiqués became the focus and site of Weather’s revolution, while bombings served primarily to draw attention to their accompanying communiqués.

Last but not least, the WU communiqués served as a platform to educate and inform. They apprised the American public of various topics that were of interest to the WU. Thus, they became repositories that highlighted social and political injustices, educating the American youth on the extent of war, poverty, racism, and oppression both in the United States and globally. Their scathing critiques of President Nixon’s wartime strategies of “Vietnamization” and air raids on Southeast Asia documented the war as a present-day tragedy. By the 1970s, the youth and young adult population of America were viewing the violence of World War II as a thing of the past. The atrocities of the Vietnam War, however, were happening in the here and now, a fact of life that the youth and young adult population of America had not yet experienced in such a personal manner. To shape their impressionable minds, the WU created documents to educate the radically curious on the extent of the Vietnam War as well as the oppression of Black and Brown citizens in the United States.

My research challenges the academic disinterest in the WU communiqués. While scholars reference these communiqués as admissions to the bombings, they largely neglect to analyze the WU’s use of the written word. Researchers have begun to remedy this by addressing the WU’s feminist stances and how the Weatherwomen’s narratives contributed to the group’s functions; however, they do not focus on the communiqués as historical documents and tools of political protest. Meanwhile, in the realm of terrorism studies and communication studies, communiqués are already being viewed as implements of organization and communication—an approach that I have applied to my analysis in this article. In historical scholarship, this approach should be expanded to include the communiqués of the entire New Left movement to enhance our understanding of the importance and function of these texts for radical groups in the 1960s and 1970s.

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