

William Ayers

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A left-wing radical and terrorist

William Ayers was tapped by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley to shape that city's now nationally-renowned school reform program. Since 1999 he has served on the board of directors of the Woods Fund of Chicago, an anti-poverty, philanthropic foundation established in 1941. This became controversial in the 2008 United States presidential election, as Barack Obama had served on the board until 2002, with overlapping times of service with Ayers.

Radical history

Ayers became involved in the New Left and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). He rose to national prominence as an SDS leader in 1968 and 1969. As head of an SDS regional group, the "Jesse James Gang", Ayers made decisive contributions to the Weatherman orientation toward militancy.

The groups Ayers headed in Detroit and Michigan became one of the earliest gatherings of what became the Weatherman. Between the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and the June 1969 SDS convention, Ayers became a prominent leader of the group, which arose as a result of a schism in SDS.

"During that time his infatuation with street fighting grew and he developed a language of confrontational militancy that became more and more extreme over the year [1969]", former Weatherman member Cathy Wilkerson wrote in 2001. Before this time, Ayers had become a roommate of and strong influence on Terry Robbins, who was two years younger and "came to idolize

him", Wilkerson wrote. From the summer of 1968 to summer 1969, the pair worked closely together, "appearing inseparable at most SDS conventions and meetings", she wrote. The two competed over things small and large, "including the ability to come up with quick one-liners, quirky names, sexual conquests, street fighting ability, and eventually the ability to talk tough", she wrote. As Ayers started glorifying violence more and more, Robbins was affected by it. "But while Ayers, according to what he writes, knew that his language, which increasingly glorified violence, was just show, Robbins was one of those who really believed all of it." Robbins would later be killed in a famous Weatherman explosion

In June 1969, the Weatherman took control of the SDS at its national convention, where Ayers was elected "Education Secretary".

Later in 1969, Ayers participated in planting a bomb at a statue dedicated to police casualties in the 1886 Haymarket Riot. The blast broke almost 100 windows and blew pieces of the statue onto the nearby Kennedy Expressway. The statue was rebuilt and unveiled on May 4, 1970, and blown up again by Weatherman on October 6, 1970. Built yet again, the city posted a 24-hour police guard to prevent another blast. He participated in the Days of Rage riot in Chicago that October, and in December was at the "War Council" meeting in Flint, Michigan.

The following year he "went underground" with several associates after the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion, in which caused the death of Weatherman member Ted Gold as well as Ayers' close friend, Terry Robbins, and Ayers girlfriend, Oughton, were killed while a nail bomb was under construction. Kathy Boudin and Cathy Wilkerson survived the blast. Ayers was not facing criminal charges at the time, but the federal government later filed charges against him.

While underground, he and fellow member Bernardine Dohrn

married, and the two remained fugitives together, changing identities, jobs and locations. By 1976 or 1977, with federal charges against both fugitives dropped due to prosecutorial misconduct, Ayers was ready to turn himself in to authorities, but Dohrn remained reluctant until after she gave birth to two sons, one born in 1977, the other in 1980. "He was sweet and patient, as he always is, to let me come to my senses on my own", she later said.

Ayers and Dohrn later became legal guardians to the son of former Weathermen David Gilbert and Kathy Boudin after the boy's parents were arrested for their part in the Brinks Robbery of 1981.

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