

of the Islamist movement, not a sign of its strength and irrepressible might."

What is remarkable about the Middle East is the rejection of indiscriminate violence. A key event took place on November 17, 1997, in Egypt, whose 71 million people form the largest Arab state. A small band, apparently attached to the Islamic Group, attacked tourists in the courtyard of the Temple of Hatshepsut at Luxor, killing 62 people. Widespread revulsion among the Egyptian public forced the Group to declare a cease-fire, and tourism has long since revived.

Berman's book draws parallels with Europe in the last century. Now how's this for an analogy: What happened in Egypt is as if Germans, even on the right, were so repelled by Nazi violence in the '20s and early '30s that Hitler and his small band of Nazis had to leave the country, hide out in remote mountains somewhere, and launch terrorist attacks from there. Today, the violent Islamists do remain a serious threat, but we are not engaged in a "terror war" against an entire people.

Meanwhile, moderate Islamism is still a major force. Political observers in Egypt say that the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest Islamic organization in the region, would be a significant force in genuine free elections, possibly the largest single party. But the Brotherhood pledged itself to nonviolence back in the '60s, and it has tenaciously stuck to that commitment, even though the Mubarak regime, America's ally, has regularly sentenced its leaders to years in prison, closed its offices, and prohibited its members from meeting. (There was another wave of arrests, including an 80-year-old prayer leader named Mahmoud Shukri, in April.)

Instead of slandering Arabs indiscriminately as fanatics, Berman might have taken a closer look at this remarkable example of courage and restraint. The fall of Saddam Hussein (which took place after Berman finished his book) further undermines his argument. The Iraqi regime was clearly totalitarian, but it did not enjoy the widespread support of masses of people who were "drunk on slaughter," willing to fight to the bitter end.

There is one important exception to the mass repudiation of violence in the Arab world: Israel and Palestine. Suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, although immoral and a violation of

international law, do have popular support, in Palestine and elsewhere. But even here, Berman's analysis is flawed. He assumes Israel is a rational and calm democracy, which is reluctantly and with restraint confronting Palestinians driven insane with hatred. But he totally ignores the violent element in Israeli life, a surprise in a book about extremism. He has nothing much to say about the right-wing religious settlers who are the most aggressive of the 200,000 Israeli colonists in the Occupied Territories that are the biggest obstacle to peace.

A little history would be useful: There were no suicide bombings in Israel during the first Palestinian *intifada*, or uprising, which lasted from 1987 to 1992. Then, in February 1994, a Brooklyn-born Israeli, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, entered a mosque in Hebron, a city in Occupied Palestine, armed with an assault rifle, and slaughtered 29 Palestinians at prayer until the crowd overpowered and killed him. Goldstein had carried out what was clearly in some sense a suicide attack. Palestinian retaliatory suicide bombings started the next month. A year and a half later, another Israeli fanatic, Yigal Amir, murdered Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak

Rabin, just after Rabin had spoken at a peace rally, and other Israeli extremists celebrated Rabin's death. His widow, Leah, said she felt more genuine sympathy from Yasir Arafat than she did from certain leading right-wing politicians in her own country. None of this seems to have stimulated Berman's inquiry into the intellectual roots of violent political behavior.

Instead, he insists that "in Palestine, a mass pathology had broken out," and he excoriates Western liberals who refuse to recognize it. So far, Palestinian suicide bombings, however ugly and illegal, do seem to be still a political tactic that would end once a genuine Palestinian state was established. But if the occupation continues—with the killings, arrests, torture, and illegal demolition of homes—Palestinian violence could spin out of control. But its primary cause would not be the influence of ideas, whether from European fascists or Islamic extremists, but the brutal everyday reality of Israeli colonial occupation. ■

James North has reported from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia since 1975. He lives in New York City.

Terror and Radicalism

By Pat Aufderheide

It's hard for many veteran leftists to uncurl their lips on hearing the phrase "Weather Underground." A homegrown terrorist movement with pretensions to Third World revolution, it

The Weather Underground
Directed by Sam Green and Bill Siegel

grabbed the headlines with bombings punctuating '70s history and stigmatized the entire range of left activism until its leaders surrendered in disarray.

Even for the Weather-weary, though, the new film *The Weather Underground* by Sam Green and Bill Siegel can't help but hold fascination. Green and Siegel, who were both children in the '70s, have made a feature documentary that goes behind the mask of terror. The result is an illuminating footnote on history, and also a

thought-provoking insight into extremist belief communities.

The Weather Underground is not a wide-angle history film; it doesn't even claim to give you movement history. Instead, it provides a platform for its central characters—members of the underground—to recall and reflect on their own lives. The result is character studies that are both uncomplemented and unvarnished, and an insider's tale of group madness. "When you feel you have right on your side," says one-time Weatherman Brian Flanagan, standing in the bar he now owns, "you can do some horrific things." And some ludicrous ones.

The film is organized chronologically, with flash-forwards to today as middle-aged Weatherfolk—many of them still social activists—retell their memories. The story begins in 1968, with the disillusionment prompted by escalation of the war in Vietnam, assassinations, and splintering of left groups. The impossibly young

activists, still vibrant in the Ektachrome tints of that era's film, glitter with the charisma that Todd Gitlin recalls. He likens them to Bonnie and Clyde, and says, with a shrug: "They were into youth, exuberance, sex, drugs. They wanted action."

It continues with a failed search for the working class; for an end to monogamy through group sex; and an end to the state through bombings. The New York townhouse explosion that killed three Weathermen as they were preparing bombs sends the rest underground and puts a damper on grand terrorist schemes. Until they surrender—lost in America but still outwitting the hapless FBI—they execute publicity-seeking attacks on symbolically rich sites like the Pentagon, State Department, police and state government offices, and ITT and Gulf Oil headquarters.

What propelled them, other than the thrill of attention? They each refer to the revolutionary tenor of the time, and to their revulsion at American empire. "Doing nothing in a period of violence is a form of violence," Naomi Jaffe explains quietly. "The Vietnam War made us all a little crazy," one says, and another seconds it. "None of us thought we were gonna live through it," says Bill Ayers.

No matter what, the filmmakers resolutely avoid commenting on their central characters; they don't contradict, contextualize, celebrate or snicker. And so they build, through the characters revealed in these interviews, a picture of a group whose self-delusion deepened until underground life sealed their isolation. The occasional glimpses of the tumultuous moment—shooting of a Vietnamese in the street, dying U.S. soldiers, presidents pontificating—are gestures to headlines of the times. More importantly, as they exploit the privilege they are so embarrassed by with every media appearance and symbolic act, they testify to the frenetically mediocentric society the Weatherfolk were media stars in.

Bernardine Dohrn was the star of the Weathermen then, and she's the star of this movie. Unrepentant and self-assured, she



Bernardine Dohrn with her son Zayd in San Francisco, 1977.

provides guided tours of once-hot spots, including her first hideout (but doesn't share how she managed to stay underground for a decade). Her husband, Bill Ayers, walks over the ground he once rioted over in Chicago. Like Naomi Jaffe, they are proud of having been part of a worldwide revolutionary movement. But they never explain exactly how they were part of such a movement, other than in their minds. (They do claim more of an alliance with the Black Panthers, but it's more than others would acknowledge.) In this film, as in life, the Weatherfolk speak mostly to each other.

Others live with regret and self-doubt, but in no less of a feedback loop. Mark Rudd, a firebrand student organizer at Columbia University, is now a community college math teacher with a bad conscience. David Gilbert takes solace in not having killed anyone else with their bombs (even though he was part of a holdup in which others died later—an incident the film ignores). The film closes with Brian Flanagan at the site of the New York townhouse ("it never gets any easier") and Rudd saying, "In a way, I still don't know what to do with this knowledge." They may not be much as political analysts, but they are fascinating as survivors of a political cult.

Filmmakers Green and Siegel were both raised in families where politics was dinner-table conversation. Green was attracted as a child to the Weather Underground as part of what he now calls his "false nostalgia" for the '60s. An award-winning filmmaker, Green has focused on dissident, offbeat and criminal characters in other films, such as *The*

Rainbow Man/John 3:16 and *Pie Fight '69*. Siegel (who once interned at *In These Times*) found himself captivated by the puzzle of the "generational cliff" of memory that the Weathermen had tumbled over. "No one younger than me knows who they were," he said at the Sundance Film Festival, where the film was shown before winning the top documentary award at the San Francisco Film Festival. They decided the Weather Underground would make a great subject, and also could provoke some good conversations

about politics, violence and responsibility. The two spent two years meeting with principals, winning their trust, before commencing filming. They also spoke to harsh critics, and read histories of the period.

They were finishing the film (which has major funding from the Independent Television Service, the part of public TV that funds work "for underserved audiences") when 9/11 hit. "That changed the editorial focus," said Green. "It made the whole issue more serious. There was a lot less room for humor."

Bernardine Dohrn, who also attended Sundance, misses the humor. "We blew up a statue of a policeman—a statue! It was a joke!" she says. Bill Ayers, at her side but plugged into a cell phone to receive word from his son of an antiwar rally in Washington, nods. "It was poke-you-in-the-eye stuff," he acknowledges. "It was theater," Dohrn says emphatically.

Both praise the film for its "no nostalgia, no axe to grind" approach, but they hate the ending. "It ends with sadness for the loss of three people. But tragedy pulled us back from a very dangerous strategy," says Dohrn. "I look back and say, this was a very restrained movement. We weren't wrong about the U.S. power internationally, about the jailing of black people. We were doing our work in a way where we didn't kill people."

Still, Ayers likes how they were portrayed. "This is a film about people who were in earnest, maybe too earnest, about being engaged. It is a cautionary tale about only listening to yourselves." That's not a mistake Green and Siegel intend to make. ■

Continued from back cover

In the cab back to the hotel while I was trying to figure out what to say to you, the cabbie volunteered, with no prompting—and I have noticed that Chicago cab drivers are much more philosophical than New York cab drivers, which I think has something to do with the superior condition here of the surface of the roads—the cabbie said, and I'm not making this up, "If there's a supernova 60 light years away from here the world will be totally wiped out, we don't stand a chance." I asked him if there was any hope that this might happen before next Wednesday, which is the opera's opening night. He doubted it.

But he gave me something to think about, namely the fact that life, each individual life and our collective life on the planet, is a teleological game. It is not infinite, like Bush's justice; it has an ending, and so the future you put your faith in is not, in fact, limitless; and

given the catastrophic failure here and abroad of the

Kyoto global warming accords,

given our newfound post 9/11 imperialist exuberance,

given the sagging of the world's economy and the IMF-

directed refusal to see any solutions beyond making

poor people suffer even more than they always do in

the hopes of reviving a market that only ever revives

Classifieds

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...I miss the good old days! Bobwhite

long enough to make the rich even richer, given the eagerness in Washington to explore new and tinier kinds of nuclear bombs —well, it's sort of optimistic to believe it's a supernova that's going to get us, when it's clear that what's much more likely to get us, if we are got, is our present condition of living in a world run by miscreants while the people of the world have either no access to power or have access but have forgotten how to get it and why it is important to have it.

And this is what I think you people have gotten your education for. You have presumably made a study of how important it is for the people—

the people and not the oil plutocrats,
the people and not the fantasists in right-wing think tanks,
the people and not the virulent lockstep gasbags of Sunday morning talk shows and editorial pages and all-Nazi all-the-time radio ranting marathons,
the thinking people and not the crazy people,
the rich and multivarious multicultural people and not the pale pale greyish-white cranky grim greedy people,
the secular pluralist people and not the theocrats,
the metaphorical imaginative expansive generous sensual rational people and not the sexual hysterics, the misogynists, Muslim and Christian and Jewish fundamentalists,

the hard-working people and not the people whose only real exertion ever in their whole parasite lives has been the effort it takes to slash a trillion-plus dollars in tax revenue and then stuff it in their already overfull pockets

—whatever your degree, you have presumably read history and thought about justice and freedom and the relationship between ideas and action, and you know how important it is for the sizable community of decent sane just egalitarian people, comprising many minority communities constituting if not a majority then a plurality, a substantial, smart, let's say 40 percent plurality community (more than large enough in a pluralist democracy, which for the time being the United States still is) if it uses its brains and works together,

to wield decisive power, power for enfranchisement and economic as well as racial justice and gender justice and sexual political justice and environmental sanity and in the name of

a real globalism,

a real internationalism,

a real solidarity with all the peoples of the world,

to wield power infused with the knowledge that democracy is created not by military machines, not by MOAB bombs and smart bombs but by smart, peaceable people, fed people, educated people—democracy is created by making an aggressive determined and long-term effort at eradicating the real axis of evil: poverty, homelessness, no health care.

You have read and studied and thought and argued and you all know that it is important for the people to have power, and now you must go out into the world and get it, snatch it back from where it lies, tangled in the bushes, and then use it well, for the community, for the common good. That's the next

bit of bravery we demand from you heroic people. When the supernova comes to get us we don't want to be disappointed in ourselves. We should hope to be able to say proudly to the supernova, that angel of death:

Hello supernova, we have been expecting you, we know all about you because in our schools we teach science and not creationism, and so we have been expecting you, everywhere everyone has been expecting you—except Texas—and we would like to say, supernova, in the moment before we are returned by your protean fire to our previous inchoate state, clouds of incandescent atomic vapor, we'd like to declare that we have tried our best and worked hard to make a good and just and free and peaceful world, a world which is better for our having been here, at least we believe it is.

Years ago I wrote a children's play and in it there's a poem of which I was reminded by the cabbie's information about the supernova. I want to conclude by reciting it for you:

The universe exists because of opposites and tension,
A fact we sometimes overlook, but here deserves a mention.
For every action there's another action to oppose it:
It's common sense, for life is tense, and everybody knows it.
The white hot heart of every star, its radiant extrusion
explodes as atoms, cracking up, cause thermonuclear fusion.
Hydrogen to helium—a force that pushes out:

Ten Billion Years Of Blowing Up is what a star's about.
The star could not exist, it would be blown to smithereens,
With so much inside pushing out lest something intervenes,
And something does, for pulling in is gravity, of course,
Which does the trick of holding in the thermonuclear force.
So one force pushes out, while one is pulling in,
And let's all thank our lucky stars that neither one can win!
For when the tension ceases and the totter doesn't teeter
We'll all be painfully aware we've lost our solar heater.
We will either freeze to death or get blown to Jehovah—
Depending if the sun becomes a Black Hole or a Nova.
And on that day I'm sad to say all life abruptly stops;
but there's five billion years before it shrivels or it pops.
So don't despair; instead reflect upon the stellar state
and on the fundamental fact that stars illuminate.
From grains of sand to giant stars all things share one
condition:

the world we see would never be, except for opposition.

And now I must get back to my cave. Thank you again for showing me the light! Your light! And a million billion mazes to you all. The supernova is coming, but let's not rush things. Go forth and be powerful. Change the world. ■

Playwright **Tony Kushner** is currently working on a production of *Homebody/Kabul* that opens in July at the Steppenwolf theater in Chicago.

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Arundhati Roy addresses issues of democracy and dissent, racism and empire, and war and peace in this collection of new essays. Fully annotated versions of all Roy's most recent essays—including "Confronting Empire," her January 2003 speech from the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil—are included in *War Talk*.

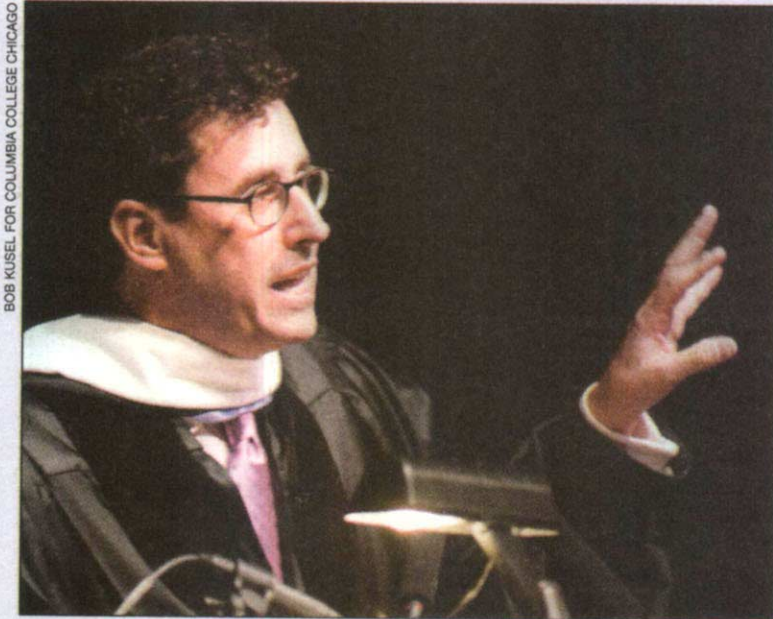
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Go Forth and Be Powerful

By Tony Kushner



BOB KUSEL FOR COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

Tony Kushner delivering the commencement address at Columbia College in Chicago.

On June 1, Tony Kushner gave the following commencement address at Columbia College in Chicago.

Thank you for this beautiful honor, and thank you for freeing me from the dark cave I've been sitting in all week—and by dark cave I mean a theater, I've been in the dark all week watching a director and designers and singers and crew try to put together an opera double bill for which I provided the English-language libretti. Thank you for releasing me for the afternoon from that dark and anxiety-filled cavern of illusion and bidding me welcome to the bright daylight dazzle of your commencement, your impressive achievement: Forget going overseas to fight in Bush's infinite war against terrorism, the really heroic thing in this country is managing against so many odds to get yourself educated. Thank you for letting me share, even though it's unearned, a little of the reflected effulgence of the brilliant sun of your aspirations, your intentions, your ambitions. Thank you for sharing with me your faith in the future.

I was trying to decide what to say to you today. It's never a problem that there isn't much to talk about, but rather that there is so much to say and such a short time. I was told I should speak for 3 to 7 minutes, and all week long I've been pondering the mystical significance of those numbers, 3 and 7, prime numbers, the Holy Trinity and the number of days it took God to make the world. Last night after sitting all day in the dark, in the cab afterwards, heading back to the hotel and my midnight tech-week ritual of eating 11 Hershey bars (11, another prime number!) before passing out in front of more awful, awful nightmare news on CNN—last night it was footage of Dubya and Laura touring Auschwitz, Dubya apparently saying only two things while he was in the concentration camp, "Look at the baby shoes" and, to the tour guide, "Does anyone ever challenge your statistics?"

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