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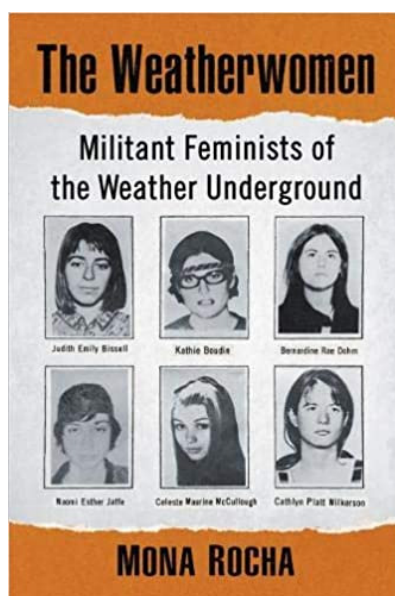
Women of Their Revolution



After an uprising by the female staff, the February 6, 1970 issue of the New York underground newspaper Rat was completely written by women. The lead article was titled “Goodbye to All That” and harshly attacked individuals, groups and movements in the burgeoning counterculture and New Left. Some of its fiercest criticism was leveled at the women of the Weather Underground Organization (WUO). The author of the article, Robin

Morgan, equated the women of the WUO with Charlie Manson's "slaves" and dismissed their identification with what she termed Weather's macho violence. Other radical feminist groups echoed Morgan's criticism, although some, like Boston's Bread and Roses Collective, expressed support for certain elements of the WUO's politics.

This understanding of Weather as being insufficiently feminist has remained in the decades since its existence. No chronicler of the group or the period it existed has challenged this supposition in any deep and meaningful way. That is, until now. A recently published book by Mona Rocha titled The Weatherwomen: Militant Feminists of the Weather Underground rejects the argument that the women of the WUO were merely a ladies' auxiliary to the organization. In making her argument she turns the conventional understanding of feminist history—an understanding that places the feminist movement into three "waves"—sideways. For those unfamiliar with these classifications, a quick summary might be helpful. Most feminist historians place the first wave as being the period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where the focus was on women's right to suffrage. The second wave dates from the late 1950s through most of the 1970s, with the peak being in the early and mid-1970s. This wave focused on obtaining equal rights for women: in the workplace, in the home, in education and in the broader political and economic society. The third wave, according to these historians, is the one we are in now. This wave is virtually synonymous with what is called intersectionality. Essentially, this means that all aspects of oppression—race, class, gender identity, age, etc.—must be considered and included in any struggle for greater freedom and justice.



In her text, Rocha discusses the words and actions of the women in the WUO, arguing that the feminism of Weather was ahead of its time. In other words, much of their feminist understanding was a precursor to the third wave in that it was informed by and insisted on the inclusion of the issues faced by women of color, lesbians, and those in what were known in the 1970s as third world nations. According to Rocha, this position is apparent in their early identification with the women of Vietnam's National Liberation Front. It was further elucidated when they wrote in 1969 "Our liberation as individuals and as women (comes) when it is understood as part of a political process—part of the formation of an armed white fighting force." In other words, merely gaining individual rights in a capitalist and imperialist society was not only selfish; it was not true liberation.

This argument overturns the understanding of feminism currently understood in academia and other arenas where such things are discussed. Rocha argues that not only did the Weatherwomen's take on feminism see much of second wave feminism as self-indulgent; they also often saw it as racist and ultimately supportive of the very system that Weather (and many others at the time) hoped to overthrow. To put it succinctly and plainly, merely fighting for women's right to become part of the system of oppression was not (and is not) liberation; instead, it is closer to surrender. Although the author makes it clear that the second wave of feminism was not purely a liberal phenomenon, the fact that most second wave groups saw men as the ultimate enemy and not US imperialism caused their politics to turn inward. On the other hand, the WUO's consistent left anti-imperialism enabled the Weatherwomen to see beyond their own oppression as women and embrace a feminism that went beyond their own situations.

The Weatherwomen: Militant Feminists of the Weather Underground is more than just a discussion of theory and the Weather Underground Organization. Well-researched and persuasive, it is also a history of the period that describes the role of other militant groups of the period—from the Black Panthers to the Young Lords to the revolutionary feminist organization Cell 16. Although other histories have done this too, Rocha's focus is through a contemporary feminist and leftist lens. Consequently, the writings and actions described and analyzed are primarily those concerning women. I can honestly say that, as the author of an earlier history of the Weather Underground and the reader of most if not all of the rest of them, this is not just a refreshing take on that history, but an important and potentially debate-changing work. The Weather Underground existed in a time when the need to end US imperialism was not only quite obvious, but was understood by

millions in the United States. Its praxis and politics were the result of a constant debate in the organization about external events and internal relations. The history of the group proves their mistakes did as much to seal their fate as did the overall police state repression against the US Left. Nonetheless, the lessons to be learned today are not all negative. Indeed, *The Weatherwomen: Militant Feminists of the Weather Underground* and its particular take on that history is quite instructive for those willing to consider it. In terms of its meaning to the contemporary Left, Rocha's text reinserts the leftism back into feminism (and vice versa) as much as any current discussion on the subject.

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