

Bill Ayers' Comment

From Ayers' online diary on April 6, 2008.

Episodic Notoriety—Fact and Fantasy

Day in and day out I go about my business, I hang out with my kids and my grandchildren, take care of the elders, I go to work, I teach and I write, I organize and I participate in the never-ending effort to build a powerful movement for peace and social justice; now and then (and unpredictably) I appear in the newspapers or on TV with a reference to my book *Fugitive Days*, a memoir of the revolutionary action and militant resistance to the Viet Nam War—the years of miracle and wonder—and some fantastic assertions about what I did, what I said, and what I believe. The other night, for example, I heard Sean Hannity tell Senator John McCain that I was an unrepentant terrorist who had written an article on September 11, 2001 extolling bombings against the U.S., and even advocating more terrorist bombs. Senator McCain couldn't believe it, and neither could I.

My e-mail and my voice-mail filled up with hate, as happens, mostly men with too much time on their hands I imagined, all of them venting and sweating and breathing heavily, a few threats—"Watch out!"; "You deserve to be shot"; and from *satan@hell.com*, "I'm coming to get you and when I do, I'll waterboard you"—all of it wildly uninformed. I've written a lot about the Viet Nam period, about politics, about schools and social justice, and I read and speak about all of it. I encourage people to argue, to agree or disagree, to discuss and struggle, to engage in conversation. I believe deeply in the pedagogical possibilities of dialogue—of listening with the possibility of being changed, and of speaking with the possibility of being heard—and I believe in revitalizing the public square, resisting the eclipse of the public and expanding the public space, searching for a more robust and participatory democracy. Talking to one another can help.

So in that spirit here is another attempt at clarity:

1. Regrets. I'm often quoted saying that I have "no regrets." This is not true. For anyone paying attention—and I try to stay wide-awake to the world around me all/ways—life brings misgivings, doubts, uncertainty,

loss, regret. I'm sometimes asked if I regret anything I did to oppose the war in Viet Nam, and I say "no, I don't regret anything I did to try to stop the slaughter of millions of human beings by my own government." Sometimes I add, "I don't think I did enough." This is then elided: he has no regrets for setting bombs and thinks there should be more bombings.

The illegal, murderous, imperial war against Viet Nam was a catastrophe for the Vietnamese, a disaster for Americans, and a world tragedy. Many of us understood this, and many tried to stop the war. Those of us who tried recognize that our efforts were inadequate: the war dragged on for a decade, thousands were slaughtered every week, and we couldn't stop it. In the end the U.S. military was defeated and the war ended, but we surely didn't do enough.

2. Terror. Terrorism—according to both official U.S. policy and the U.N.—is the use or threat of random violence to intimidate, frighten, or coerce a population toward some political end. This means, of course, that terrorism is not the exclusive province of a cult, a religious sect, or a group of fanatics. It can be any of these, but it can also be—and often is—executed by governments and states. A bombing in a café in Israel is terrorism, and an Israeli assault on a neighborhood in Gaza is terrorism; the September 11 attacks were acts of terrorism, and the U.S. bombings in Viet Nam for a decade were acts of terrorism. Terrorism is never justifiable, even in a just cause—the Union fight in the 1860's was just, for example, but Shernan's [sic] March to the Sea was indefensible terror. I've never advocated terrorism, never participated in it, never defended it. The U.S. government, by contrast, does it routinely and defends the use of it in its own cause consistently.

3. Imperialism. I'm against it, and if Sean Hannity and others were honest, this is the ground they would fight me on. Capitalism played its role historically and is exhausted as a force for progress: built on exploitation, theft, conquest, war, and racism, capitalism and imperialism must be defeated and a world revolution—a revolution against war and racism and materialism, a revolution based on human solidarity and love, cooperation and the common good—must win.

We begin by releasing our most hopeful dreams and our most radical imaginations: a better world is both possible and necessary. We need to bring our imaginations together and forge an unbreakable human alliance. We need to unite to transform and save ourselves as we fight to change the world and save humanity.