

YOU DON'T NEED A WEATHERMAN TO KNOW WHICH WAY THE WIND  
BLOWS: THE PRISON BREAK OF TIMOTHY LEARY

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## YOU DON'T NEED A WEATHERMAN TO KNOW WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS: THE PRISON BREAK OF TIMOTHY LEARY

On January 21, 1970, psychologist and researcher Timothy Francis Leary was sentenced to ten years in prison for possession of marijuana, along with an additional ten years he had been given for a separate arrest in 1965. Leary, who was known as a pioneer in the study of psychedelics, a rapidly spreading cultural drug craze, was jailed at the Men's Colony West Minimum Security Prison in California, though he alleged in court that the police officer who had arrested him planted the marijuana. While serving his sentence, the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, a group of proponents and users of the drug lysergic acid-diethylamide (LSD), who followed various paths based on Leary's research, paid the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) \$25,000 to break him out.

Leary's escape from minimum security was presented by the WUO and others in the counterculture movement as a revolt against the constraints of society and violence. Due to his advocacy on the topic, Leary was regarded as a leader, teacher, and cultural icon by pro-LSD and anti-war organizations like the Brotherhood. It was a common belief in these circles that LSD had the ability to open one's mind to egalitarian and pacifist ideas, and that, by using the drug, a

utopian society could be created, or war could be ended, or whichever variation on this ideology one chose to subscribe to. Leary gained national recognition for attempting to prove this idea scientifically, garnering enthusiastic support from the Brotherhood and similar groups within the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Whether or not his prison break was truly revolutionary, as many people within the pro-drug and anti-war movements regarded it at the time, depends on the interpretation of the merit of his psychedelic experiments, and the merit of movements inspired by his research, such as the Brotherhood of Eternal Love. Leary is often regarded as a sort of transcendentalist philosopher who exposed the pacifist power of LSD to the general public as a means of escape from the troubles of mid-century consumerism and imperialism. However, just as a poverty ridden factory worker laboring to support their family could not simply escape to a friend's vacation cabin in Massachusetts, a teenager drafted to Vietnam or a Black student attempting to enter a segregated school could not simply take a tab of acid and permanently forget all of their material struggles. Leary's contributions to the counterculture movement were significant, but almost nonexistent to the revolutionary struggle that the Weather Underground was attempting to start, though the group broke him out of jail.

The first organization in question, the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, operated out of Orange County, California, manufacturing and distributing the hallucinogenic drug LSD to the rest of the United States, in hopes of starting a "psychedelic revolution" and creating a utopian society based on pacifism and community.<sup>1</sup> They wanted Leary out of jail because he had been a

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Ramm, *The LSD cult that transformed America* [document on-line](London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017, accessed 9 March 2020); available from <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20170112-the-lsd-cult-that-terrified-america>; Internet.

pioneer in the use and effects of LSD, which he believed to have significant psychological benefits. Together with his research partner, Richard Alpert, he began a series of experiments to test the effects of psychotropic, or mind-altering, drugs on the human psyche.

Leary's controversial career began when he received his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California, Berkeley. Prior to 1959, he was focusing his area of study in social relationships, and working as a psychotherapist. He and Alpert then founded the Harvard Psilocybin Project<sup>2</sup>, in which they worked with students and volunteers to test and document the effects of hallucinogenic mushrooms on the brain and conscious. Alpert and Leary believed that psychology as a discipline was the study of the relationship between the conscious, the body, and the environment. This meant that it included the study of the effect of various drugs on the brain, and that hallucinogens could have positive benefits for the mental wellbeing of the user. During the Harvard Psilocybin Project, Leary and his partner supposedly took little care in the scientific documentation of their research, often forgoing typical methods of selecting effectively randomized test subjects and control groups. They also often conducted experiments while they themselves were under the influence of hallucinogens. "The experiments were informal and, by modern standards, unscientific in nature. There was often no control group and those administering the experiment would sometimes take the drugs along with the subjects in order to better empathize,"<sup>3</sup> said graduate student Allan Cohen, describing working with Leary and Alpert. He included a recount of an unsettling experience in which he was riding in a vehicle

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<sup>2</sup> Harvard University, *Timothy Leary (1920-1996)* [document online] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Department of Psychology, no date, accessed 9 March 2020); available from <https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/people/timothy-leary>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel J. Hiatt, "A Trip Down Memory Lane: LSD at Harvard," *The Harvard Crimson*, no vol: no issue (May 23, 2016).

driven by another Harvard professor, in connection with the project, who was suddenly overcome with a psychedelic flashback and began shaking his arm violently and taking his hands off the wheel.

Cohen also explained that “My recollection was that you could choose between taking the final and participating in the psilocybin trials. Not many of us chose to take the final.”<sup>4</sup> This was taken by many of Leary’s coworkers at Harvard as further evidence of Leary’s use of his authority at the school to pressure students into supporting his psychedelic agenda. “I don’t think you can make a case that he was doing really important science, in part because [Leary] decided that these drugs were bigger than Harvard, bigger than science and that everyone should try them,” Michael Pollan, a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute studying the history of psychedelics, said.<sup>5</sup> The rest of the Harvard staff, especially others in the psychology department, quickly became skeptical of the scientific nature of the experiments, particularly how reliable the results could be, considering that Leary and Alpert seemed increasingly sloppy and unprofessional. Harvard staff began to accuse them of promoting recreational use of the drug beyond the clinical benefits they claimed to be searching for, and began imposing stricter guidelines on how they were allowed to set up their experiments. Unsurprisingly, in the spring of 1963, Alpert and Leary were both fired from the university, following an incident outside of school involving LSD and a graduate student, in which they were allegedly found to be distributing the drug for recreational use outside of the project. The Harvard Psilocybin Project was then shut down, with little concrete results regarding the psychological benefits of the drugs. It also brought into question

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

the character of Timothy Leary as a counterculture figure: was he genuinely attempting to open society's mind and improve it, or was he a professor abusing his power to provide students with recreational drugs? Interestingly enough, after Leary and Alpert were dismissed from their teaching positions, a small group of students organized a protest, focused on Alpert's punishment for providing drugs to undergraduates, which violated his contract for the experiments. A 1963 article in the Harvard Crimson, the University's newspaper, reported that "While admitting the University had a "right" to fire Alpert, the students said "Harvard has lost not only a brilliant teacher whose interest in his students is a quality too rare here, but also a man of unusual courage and vision. We as students protest this loss.""<sup>6</sup> While outside forces, such as Harvard authorities and contemporary historians, paint Leary as a professor who used his students to prove an incorrect point at the expense of their drug-free lives, many of those who actually participated in his experiments and knew him personally during his time as a teacher, seem to look back on the project fondly, regardless of its dubious scientific merit. It seems that Leary's lasting impact was not his scientific experiments and documentation, but the attitude he brought to the students and the introduction to the counterculture movement he provided them. While this was important to the students, a shadow was cast over it when his conduct at the university was examined, as shown in the evidence of his botched experiments and abuse of power.

After the Harvard debacle, Timothy Leary continued on in the field of psychedelics outside of the university track. He migrated to New York with Richard Alpert and moved into the Millbrook Estate,<sup>7</sup> where he and other hallucinogenic enthusiasts took drugs, developed

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph M. Russin, "Undergraduates Protest Decision to Fire Alpert," *The Harvard Crimson* no vol: no issue (May 31, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> "Timothy Leary, Pied Piper Of Psychedelic 60's, Dies at 75," *New York Times*, CXLV:50,445 (June 1, 1996), 12.

philosophical theories, and documented the effects of psychedelics on their minds, bodies, and social relationships. The estate was paid for by a wealthy benefactor, with the supposed purpose of continuing research around the new drugs, which were not yet illegal in the United States. Leary experimented with many aspects of the counterculture scene, including evangelism, writing, and running from the law, until his final conviction in 1970 for multiple drug and political activism charges, making a name for himself alongside others such as John Lennon, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, in anti-war and pro-drug activism. Richard Nixon called him “the most dangerous man in America.”<sup>8</sup>

The Brotherhood of Eternal Love, Leary’s eventual savior from minimum security prison, was founded by John Griggs in 1969, with the purpose of spreading the alleged psychological benefits of LSD and other hallucinogens, through manufacturing, distribution, and preaching.<sup>9</sup> The Brotherhood followed philosophy and ideas introduced by Alpert and Leary at Harvard, though they took it a step further: they imagined a utopian world where humans had reached their full potential through the usage of LSD, and lived in harmony with each other and nature. The Brotherhood believed that, expanding on Leary’s teachings of the benefits of psychedelics, they could achieve a horizontal and pacifist society, and supported Leary’s experimentation on the topic, leading them to pay for his jailbreak.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> N/A, *The Original Family of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love* [document on-line](N/A: The Brotherhood of Eternal Love, N/A, accessed 9 March 2020); available from <https://the-brotherhood-of-eternal-love.org/the-original-family-of-the-brotherhood-of-eternal-love/>; Internet.

The nature of the group itself that broke Leary out of prison was very different from the Brotherhood. The Weather Underground Organization, also known as the Weathermen or Weather Underground, was a militant leftist organization founded by students at the University of Michigan that operated from its creation in 1969 to its dissolution around 1977. The WUO formed as a radical splinter group from the activist organization Students for a Democratic Society, headed by Bernadine Dohrn and Bill Ayers, two college students who later went into hiding after the group carried out multiple bombing campaigns in New York City. The SDS was active during the 1960s in the movement against the Vietnam War and the fight for a more direct democracy. The Weather Underground came about as a result of the Progressive Labor faction of the SDS, who believed that peaceful protest could not create the results they desired. The WUO was a broadly leftist organization, although it did put emphasis on issues such as class and racial tensions, characteristic of the New Left philosophy that its members subscribed to. It was described by an FBI report as being “inspired by communist ideologies and embracing violence and crime as a way to protest the Vietnam War, racism, and other left-wing aims. “Our intention is to disrupt the empire ... to incapacitate it, to put pressure on the cracks,” claimed the group’s 1974 manifesto, *Prairie Fire*.”<sup>10</sup> The Weathermen also aligned themselves with the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party, citing their militancy and Marxist ideas as inspiration and guidance for their movement. The leadership structure of the WUO was dominated by middle class and affluent white students, who believed that the support of the Black Power movement was imperative to the establishment of a more free society. Following a series of

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<sup>10</sup> FBI: History, *Weather Underground Bombings*, [document on-line] (Washington, DC: United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, no date, accessed 10 March 2020); available from <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/weather-underground-bombings>; Internet.



bombings in New York, the WUO went fully underground in 1974, using guerrilla tactics to escape prosecution.<sup>11</sup> The breakout of Timothy Leary was not the first act of criminal defiance perpetrated by the group.

Though it was treated as an exceptionally dangerous group by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the WUO only set off twenty-five very small bombs during its seven years of existence, many of which did not cause even minor injury to people in the buildings where they were detonated.<sup>12</sup> There were also only about one hundred members, the majority of whom were college students. Despite this, the FBI chose to place many of its members on the Most Wanted List, elevating them to national celebrity status. The FBI severely mishandled the situation:

By autumn 1971—long after they had changed their name to the Weather Underground—it was clear that the FBI had been exaggerating the scale of the Weather threat; yet the Bureau still committed vast resources to pursuing the group. They diverted hundreds of agents and tens of millions of dollars away from fighting traditional crime. This was partly because of the occasional bombings, but also because the sheer presence of all those young Weathermen faces on all those wanted posters year after year constituted a humiliation to the Bureau—and the prestige of the Bureau was part of its power. On the FBI side, then, bureaucratic interests and imperatives, not merely fears for national security, fostered a disproportionate effort to eradicate the group. Yet the fact is that FBI never permanently caught a single major Weatherman figure.<sup>13</sup>

The simple existence of the WUO, whether or not it was successfully fulfilling its goals, so troubled the United States government that the FBI fumbled and granted them national fame, opening the door to the movement to hundreds of thousands more young, angry activists. The

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Arthur M. Eckstein, *How the Weather Underground Failed at Revolution and Still Changed the World* [document on-line](New York City: Time Inc, 2016, accessed 10 March 2020); available from <https://time.com/4549409/the-weather-underground-bad-moon-rising/>; Internet.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

breakout of Timothy Leary served to grow their national recognition and expand their movement towards idealism and throwing off the chains of the state. The movement to decriminalize drugs was tied to the New Left philosophy that the Weathermen and their supporters preached. Using criminal acts to support the movement was the Weathermen's main strategy, and, as far as the Leary prison break went, was successful in gaining recognition. The act of freeing the LSD guru from jail showed their supporters that they had the means to successfully accomplish such a thing, but also that it was a viable option for members of activist groups. The New Left believed that the prison system was unjust, and that drug criminalization was counterrevolutionary. This act gave an example of how to combat that.

However, the merit of Timothy Leary as a revolutionary figure is heavily disputed, as seen in interpretations of his time at Harvard. A great deal of his life was dedicated to morally gray experiments that did not always have the safety of participants or properly executed data collection in mind. Leary partook in many suspicious activities, and gained a great deal of his fame from an experiment that ended with his expulsion from a prestigious institution, and allegations that he pressured his students to trade their final exams for psychedelic trips. Leary embodied the privileged perspective of a white, college educated man during the New Left era, and seemingly lacked the Marxist perspective of class struggle, instead upholding a fragmented ideology that focused more on distraction over action, as historian John P. Diggins explained:

For one thing, the old epistemological problem divided the hippies from the activists in much the same way it had divided the nineteenth-century transcendentalists from the abolitionists: If feeling determines reality, as the hippies maintained, then the poor and oppressed were merely those who felt poor and oppressed. Salvation lay not in changing conditions but in changing perceptions--and the door to perception was not politics but psychedelia.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>John P. Diggins, *The American Left in the Twentieth Century* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc, 1973) 161-162.

As Diggins suggested, Leary was simply reacting to his own condition at the surface level, in the way of the transcendentalists who suggested running away to the woods as the antidote to the pain of the Industrial Revolution. He was by no means advocating for any sort of massive material shift that the WUO originally wanted. Leary was attempting to solve a long term problem with a temporary solution: LSD could make people happy for a short time, but it did not have the power to end racial or class disparity in the United States. By playing to hippies like Leary, who were not fully class conscious, and advocating pacifism over militancy, the WUO doomed their own organization. The ideological shift as a result of cooperation with the Brotherhood of Eternal Love lost the WUO their insurrectionary capabilities by placating their members with recognition in the counterculture scene and small scale breakouts of disgraced college professors. In addition to turning them away from revolutionary violence, this partnership also exacerbated existing tensions within the organization.

The actual crime in question took place on September 13, 1970. Weather Underground members Mark Rudd and C. Van Lydegraf prepared a truck to pick Leary up from the prison and drop him off at an apartment in the San Francisco Mission District.<sup>15</sup> Both Rudd and Lydegraf were acting upon the decision of Bill Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, and other leaders of the organization. They appeared to see the act as liberating an important figure of the movement, because Leary was a prominent figure in the anti-war and pro-drug movement. While Rudd and Lydegraf were making preparations outside the prison, Leary was inside, physically training to scale the prison's wall, crawl across a live wire, and run a quarter of a mile to the highway where

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<sup>15</sup>Mark Rudd, *My Life with SDS and the Weathermen Underground* (New York City: HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2009) 226.

he would be picked up by Rudd and Lydegraf's truck, along with other Underground comrades to help him get to the mission district. Surprisingly, the plan went without a hitch, Leary was extracted from the forest surrounding the jail on the night of September 13, 1970, and spirited away to San Francisco with a makeover to conceal his identity. Declassified FBI files relating to the incident report a redacted informant describing that, before leaving the prison, Leary had taken the time to rub his escape in California Governor Ronald Reagan's face, stating that:

“...LEARY had cut out a newspaper clipping which quoted Governor RONALD REAGAN as saying that LEARY was not a security risk and should be placed in minimum security prison. [REDACTED] stated that, on the night of his escape, LEARY cleaned out his possessions from his foot locker and then took the newspaper clipping, underlined REAGAN's remarks in red, and taped the clipping to the top of his foot locker so it would be found after his escape.”<sup>16</sup>

The same informant also testified that, from the moment he was imprisoned, Leary knew that he would escape, and took measures such as isolating himself from the press, with whom he usually enthusiastically interacted, in order to show Governor Reagan that he was not a threat, and should thus be placed in minimum security. This allowed the WUO an easier shot at freeing him. Leary knew that personally taunting Reagan would make his case stand out, and the humor could gain him support from the wider audience of the counterculture scene. By making his escape personal and working with the WUO, Leary began to bridge the divide between the militant left and the idle hippies, hoping to utilize their numbers and affluence for a joint agenda.

The WUO joined the counterculture scene in recognizing Leary as a revolutionary icon after they successfully extracted him from the prison. Using his breakout as the basis for a new press release, Bernadine Dohrn and other leaders began calling for other prisoners serving

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<sup>16</sup> United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Los Angeles 100-73358* (LA-100-73358: Isla Vista, 1971), Ronald Reagan: 4713.

political or drug related sentences to be liberated as well. Mark Rudd described the aftermath in his memoir:

The leadership worked with him on writing a joint statement, which the organization immediately distributed via the alternative press... 'Listen Americans. Your government is an instrument of total lethal evil.' I noted what a nice line that was. For our part, Bernardine added to the communiqué that Leary was a political prisoner for his revolutionary drug views, and, naming black revolutionary prisoners like H. Rap Brown and Angela Davis, she pledged the organization to 'the task of freeing these prisoners of war.' I don't recall any other prisoners ever freed by the Weather Underground, especially any black revolutionaries; they didn't tend to be held in minimum-security lockups.<sup>17</sup>

The WUO emphasized the idea of an alienated youth, and built their movement around appealing to young people who felt dissatisfied with the way they were treated by their government, at the surface level with the Vietnam draft, and at a more philosophical level with the state of society as a whole. Leary's claim of the title of political prisoner fit nicely into this narrative: he was being punished for something that should not have been a crime. Breaking him out of prison not only opposed the criminalization of marijuana, a prevailing conflict even today, but also the perceived limiting of the mind: LSD and other psychedelics were targeted by the government because they opened people's eyes to idealism, how humanity could exist without the constraints of the state and capitalism. However, the WUO did lack the perspective of many other marginalized groups and classes who could not shed their material oppression by opening their minds, and could not wait for the revolution to naturally come about by freeing acid gurus from minimum security. This was another indication of the beginning of the end of the WUO: they had begun to see the counterculture movement and radical leftism as sharing the same ideology. This was a serious misconception: where the WUO had previously taken credit for

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Rudd, 229.

several bombings, resulting in property destruction, and called them acts of war on capitalism and the military industrial complex, the hippies experimented with drugs, sex, and the Summer of Love, mostly with little regard for the larger political implications of their actions. Abbie Hoffman's Youth International Party, also known as the Yippies, similarly attempted to appeal to the affluent, white demographic of counterculture, but, in the end, hippies simply wanted out of society; they did not feel the need to create change, only to extract themselves.

Leary gained even more fame in the counterculture scene for his escape, and the WUO managed to avoid prosecution for the act. However, it did contribute to growing divides within the group. Many members, like Mark Rudd, became disillusioned with the core philosophy of the group: they claimed to be fighting for the liberation of all people and a more democratic and horizontal society, but within their group there was secrecy and strict hierarchy. It was also made up of mainly white, upper middle class college students, a very privileged class, who lacked the perspectives of marginalized groups such as Black activists, and had a tendency to focus more on the view of the group in popular culture and its public image, rather than achieving concrete results in favor of its philosophy. Some members believed this prevented them from conducting actions that actually gained some benefit for the movement, and that the WUO continuously became less and less effective at delivering the revolutionary message.

Leary left San Francisco to hide out in Algeria with Eldridge Cleaver, one of the prominent leaders of the Black Panther Party, and many other American exiles and refugees of the Black liberation movement. Cleaver and Leary, however, did not get along particularly well, especially over the issue of drugs. Algeria was just coming out of conflict with France, in which Algeria won its independence from France and began decolonizing itself. Decolonization

movements across the world aligned themselves with leftist philosophy and the idea of class liberation that the WUO preached. Many members of these liberation groups were aligned with the WUO and Black Panther Party. From 1954 to 1962, the Algerian National Liberation Front waged guerilla and diplomatic warfare against their French colonizers, eventually becoming victorious and beginning the process to rebuild their nation. The disconnect between the Algerian liberation movement and Leary during his time there perfectly encapsulated the weaknesses of the American psychedelic activist movement: at home, Leary was regarded as a revolutionary and a leader, however, when encountering an actual material shift in society caused by revolutionary action, he was painfully unqualified. He had failed to prove any benefits of psychedelics during his Harvard study, and had been locked up in minimum security for marijuana possession. Where Eldridge Cleaver and the ANLF's leadership was built on armed defense, socialism, and racial justice, Leary's leadership was built on abstract ideas of open mindedness and psychedelic trips. Leary was rejected by the Black liberation movement in Algeria because he lacked actual class consciousness, the driving force behind their ideology.

Cleaver and other members of the movement in Algeria did not want drugs coming into their country, especially during such a crucial point in their nation's history, despite Leary's claims that they had psychological benefits. In addition, a *New York Times* article published soon after his escape explained that "Diplomats familiar with Algerian affairs said that the revolutionary Government headed by President Houari Boumediene has frequently granted asylum to political fugitives...however...it had been quietly divesting itself of revolutionary "splinter" groups and accepting only exiles with serious credentials. They suggested that Leary

and his wife might not fully meet such standards.”<sup>18</sup> Leary was made to leave the country over the issue, after there were multiple instances of his inappropriate drug use and distribution, and travelled around the world with his wife, Rosemary, making stops in Egypt, Afghanistan, and Switzerland. In 1973, he was apprehended by American officials, where he confessed every detail of his escape, including the involvement of the Weather Underground, and the names of the people who had helped him. Despite his confession, no arrests or charges came of his capture because he was not seen as a credible witness due to his extensive drug use and unreliability. The Weather Underground, no matter the actual consequences of setting the acid liberation advocate free, managed to get away with the jail break and continue its operations, though the group had already set itself on a downward spiral.

The WUO could not escape its internal conflicts, even after separating from the Students for a Democratic Society. Former member of the SDS and then the Weathermen, Mark Rudd, explained feelings of resentment regarding the breakout of Leary:

Breaking Leary out of prison was a perfect accompaniment to the song Jeff and Bernardine had been singing since May, about Weatherman being a part of youth culture, not outside it. To them, youth culture—being about drugs, music, having a good time—was inherently revolutionary *and* political. I tended to see it differently: We were opportunistically glomming on to the counterculture. For years SDS had stood to the side, criticizing the hippies for not being political enough.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the apprehension around the philosophy of the act, Rudd also explained that “Leary’s religious and business associates—manufacturers and distributors of LSD,

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<sup>18</sup> “Timothy Leary Gets Asylum in Algeria,” *The New York Times*, CXX:41,178 (October 21, 1970), 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 226-227.



known as the Brotherhood of Eternal Love—put up twenty-five thousand dollars for expenses (we scored a decent profit on the deal).”<sup>20</sup> This brings into question the nature of the jailbreak: was it an act of political unrest, or a job carried out for profit? On the one hand, the money was given for expenses and Leary was a prominent figure in the counterculture movement, however, on the other hand, was it moral for the WUO to carry out illegal acts when offered money, and not of their member’s own volition? Questions like these sent many members, like Rudd, into turmoil over the actual intentions of the group.

Most contemporary literature is critical of Leary, mainly based on his treatment of students while at Harvard and his dubious drug experiments, perhaps rightfully so. Diggins embraced the viewpoint of many, that Leary was an irresponsible professor turned drug dealer, pushing a specific agenda and making use of the convenient cultural movement that happened to be taking place at the time. Even members of the WUO movement itself, as seen above, were hesitant to support Leary and the organization’s sudden dive into the hippy scene. It seemed random to many, and they questioned the merit of playing to the audience of drugged up rich kids and creepy college professors. However, Ron Jacobs, author and counterculture expert, presented a unique answer to the paradox of their cooperation: “The plan to help Leary would not only test Weather’s underground network, it also proved the sincerity of its expressed desire to link up with the counter-culture.” Jacobs explained:

The beginnings of an alliance of ‘Leary’s upper middle class white following...with the militant whites, the blacks, and the Hispanic lower

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

and middle class' was in the offing. Both Weatherman and the Cleaver wing of the Panthers had been working hard to effect such a coalition, especially after the two organizations realized they shared similar analyses of the revolutionary situation in the United States. The Leary escape marked the beginning of a new strategy for Weather. The deaths in the March 6 townhouse explosion forever "destroyed their belief that armed struggle is the only real revolutionary struggle." In its place was a new strategy which...did not exclude armed struggle but accepted its use only "when it was forced upon us".<sup>21</sup>

This view, that the collaboration was executed with the purpose of drawing in support from the wealthy white hippies, answers many of the questions posed above and by historians: the WUO saw the benefit in employing this demographic, because they had power in society and the unrest that came with affluence during the era. They knew those people were volatile, and offered them a revolutionary outlet for their frustration and feelings of helplessness. Despite this, Dohrn's ideological shift from a militant organization preparing for the coming class war to using violence only when forced, draws again into question the revolutionary merit of the act. With the acceptance of a paid job, rather than the careful planning of an ideology-based strike against the state, signified the shift from revolutionaries to figureheads. This abandonment of targeted violence could be taken as a resignation, and the beginning of the end. Without revolutionary struggle, their movement would stagnate. The breakout of Leary was a job done for money, with no real ideological purpose other than an attempt to garner support from the hippies. As the WUO began to disregard political principals and instead pander to this faction of the counterculture movement, they began to lose their revolutionary drive and the loyalty of their members.

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<sup>21</sup> Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (New York: Verso, 1997) 119-120.

The WUO was an enigmatic organization whose strategies and actions significantly affected the anti-war and anti-capitalist movements of the 1960s and '70s. In order to fully understand the impact of this era on American society, one must examine the activism of militant leftist groups such as the Weather Underground Organization. Their acts of defiance against the state, like the breaking of a famed LSD and anti-war advocate out of prison, brought about conditions so near to those needed for a massive, long-awaited shift, and then, seemingly disappeared. This mysterious disappearance can be attributed to the failure of the group to keep hold of their ideology: appealing to the white upper class became their main concern, rather than building a multiracial and class conscious movement. The trajectory of their organization offers insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the New Left during this tumultuous time. In addition to its aftermath, one must wonder how a coalition of students like the WUO came to be organized and cohesive enough to successfully execute such a feat. The WUO and radical leftist groups like it were important to the counterculture movement, attempting to create tangible societal change in a time of disregard for the material struggles of many. They, along with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the time, critically shaped protest in the United States, and understanding this can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the true and perceived meanings of the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s.

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