

into the Pentagon in 2003. New, imaginative, and creative tactics are called for, and are in fact being devised all the time, including courageous nonviolent ones. On the one hand, it's not helpful to pretend that the level of repression and surveillance isn't frightening. On the other, it's important to know that resistance movements have survived and been effective under the most ghastly repression, including slavery, extermination camps, prisons, and military conquest. We still have a lot of room to move, and we are called upon to take some risks and sacrifice some privilege.

The connection between the potential power of people's struggles, and how badly racism and other oppressions can mess them up, is that the only way to figure it out and get it right is in the day to day practice of organizing, movement building, protesting, and resisting. I am deeply sorry that my generation didn't leave more of a path for yours. We all now have to make the path as we go. There is no other way except to make mistakes. The enemy is ruthless, we will pay a high price for them. Those who don't want change will use this to tell you it's futile, it's a waste of your life, it's a ridiculous joke to think you can overthrow the most powerful forces in the world. But some of the people who have made the greatest sacrifices are there to say that the chance to play a part in building a better world is worth everything. When you hear the political prisoners, including two in the movie, Laura Whitehorn who did 15 years and David Gilbert, who is doing a life bid at Attica, say this, you get a sense of how much courage, strength, and inspiration are possible when you are part of a people's movement for justice. Another world is possible, we were lucky enough to come close to it, it is STILL possible, and I believe that living your life for it is still the only game in town.



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**This essay is available online at  
<http://www.upstatefilms.org/weather/jaffe.html>**

# **“WE DIDN'T SET OUT TO MAKE A MOVIE, WE SET OUT TO MAKE A REVOLUTION”**

***Naomi Jaffe on  
the Weather Underground***

**First , I want to acknowledge that these are strange, abnormal and frightening times**

We didn't set out to make a movie, we set out to make a revolution. Some of us are still trying to make a revolution. The horrors that the Weather Underground movie shows, that impelled us to go underground, brutal war against other countries, and ruthless repression at home, are worse today than they were then.

An old bumper sticker says if you're not outraged, you're not paying attention. Today, if you're not grief-stricken, you're not paying attention. If you're not terrified, you're not paying attention. But I also think if we're not hopeful, we're not paying close enough attention.

To me, the interesting and important question is, what is useful to building a movement today from the experience of the Weather Underground and other radical movements of the 60's and 70's?

There are two main things from my experience in the WUO that I'd find interesting to discuss in the context of building a multi-racial, multi-issue resistance to war, racism, fascism and repression. The first is the optimism that comes from seeing the strength and the potential for victory of people's resistance movements for justice. We were really lucky to live through a time of the tremendous upsurge of people's power. I think it helped at least some of us be able to see what the forces in power are trying to cover up that people's resistance never stopped for 500 years, and it continues to exist today. It is and has always been a real threat to the existing structures of power.

A couple of inspiring examples from our own time: 1. The people of Puerto Rico threw the Navy out of Vieques! 2. The Free Mumia movement, in which I'm active, while it hasn't yet succeeded in freeing Mumia from prison or from Death Row, has prevented Pennsylvania from killing him as they obviously would have done. And 3. The global outpouring of tens of millions of people all over the world in outrage against the Iraq War. Although we didn't stop the war on Iraq, I remember that we didn't know until years later how much impact our Viet Nam anti-war protests had on the warmakers. I think that's more true of all our protests than we realize.

One thing that's happened around this movie is it's been an occasion for the elites and the corporate media to try to rewrite the history, to trivialize, ridicule, and demonize not only those movements back then, but even more, the movements of today. The energy they put into doing that is one strong piece of evidence that people's resistance was and is a force to be reckoned with.

The second thing I hope will be discussed is that the foundation of the strength of people's movements is opposition to every kind of oppression. Racism and white supremacy are central. The 60's and 70's were a time when a lot of people's eyes were opened to see white supremacy as the way oppression and exploitation are organized globally and that people of color were leading the struggle against injustice. I think our Weather Underground line was a strong statement of this awareness. Our practice was something else altogether. We had an all-white organization with vanguard aspirations and no accountability to people of color. That's not the way to do it.

Some of the questions asked us by young activists in the wake of the movie: How do you do accountability to people of color in practice? Is Marxism-Leninism still relevant to building a global justice movement? What's the role of violence and non-violence in building a resistance movement? And most of all, what should we do to build a strong and just movement that can successfully challenge the global power of capitalism/imperialism/racism?

The answer to the last question is, when I find out, I'll let you know, and you do the same for me. If we knew how to overthrow the system, we'd all be in a very different place today. But some lessons, positive and negative, might be helpful.

The simplest answer to the question of accountability is, if you are a white person, talk with people of color and hear what

they say. There is no substitute for actual human contact. Desegregate one's life; don't tokenize; put oneself in situations of mutual respect; don't intervene; find places to be in the minority. Support the separate organizing of people of color when that is happening; this is not in contradiction to being in other places, organizations, and personal scenes where white people are not dominant.

Marxism-Leninism was useful in some ways and an obstacle in other ways. The most important way it was an obstacle was lack of democracy in our organizations. In this respect, today's movements are way ahead. I think it was useful in three ways: it led us to serious study; it helped us be disciplined and focused revolutionaries; and it strengthened our understanding of the leading role the oppressed nations and people of the world. This may sound like a contradiction because Marx and Lenin were both European men. But Lenin wrote powerfully about the progressive role of oppressed nation nationalism; and my generation was profoundly influenced by Marxist-Leninist writers of color - Cabral, Mao, C.L.R. James, DuBois, Ho Chi Minh, Che, and others. Yes, women are missing from the list - a key weakness of Marxism-Leninism and of our movement.

Let's look at the question of violence and non-violence from two perspectives, moral and tactical. On a moral level, the violence of the U.S. government, military, and economy, and in particular its targeting of people of color in the U.S. and globally, are the defining and overwhelming violence in the world. Activists of color often point out that the luxury to decide between violence and nonviolence is not present in their communities - only the choice between resisting genocidal violence and being buried by it. In the face of that, I refuse to wring my hands over damage to some empty imperialist buildings. Human lives are another matter, which I would approach with MUCH greater caution and humility, from a moral point of view, than I personally did in the past. Nevertheless, I still feel challenged, as a white person in a world in which white people are inflicting daily death and violence on people of color, to consider a full range of responses in trying to stem the genocide.

From a practical and tactical point of view, I feel strongly obligated to say to today's younger activists that the conditions under which our movements operate today are very different than they were in the 1960's and '70's. Many of the militant tactics used in that period are impossible today. No one is asking you to go out and commit suicide by trying to bring a bomb