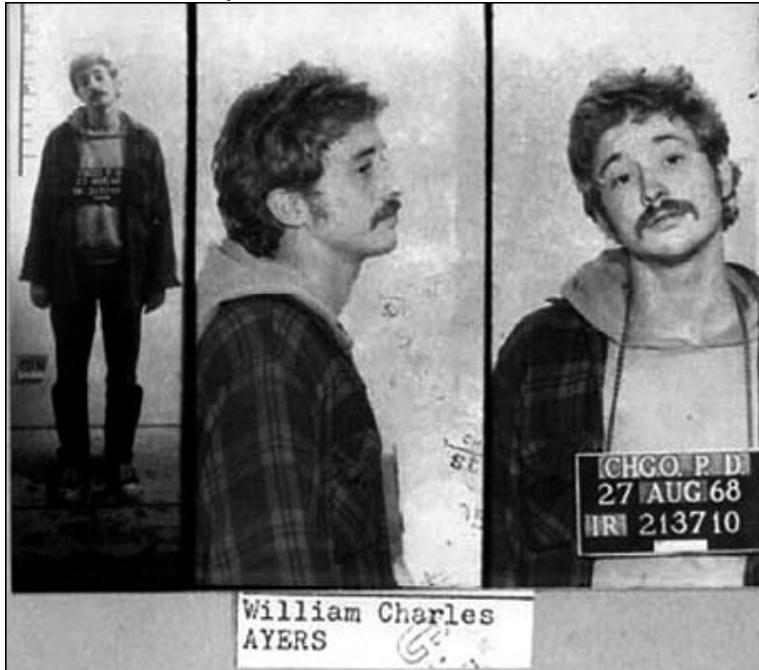


**PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT  
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS  
DUE FRIDAY, JANUARY 9, 2009**

## I. Obama's "Weatherman" Connection

Posted on February 19, 2008 at 6:00 AM ET



Chicago Police photos of William Ayers in 1968

There has been a sudden spate of blog items and newspaper articles, mainly in the British press, linking Barack Obama to a former member of the radical Weather Underground Organization that claimed responsibility for a dozen bombings between 1970 and 1974. The former Weatherman, William Ayers, now holds the position of distinguished professor of education at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Although never convicted of any crime, he told the *New York Times* in September 2001, "I don't regret setting bombs...I feel we didn't do enough."

Both Obama and Ayers were members of the board of an anti-poverty group, the Woods Fund of Chicago, between 1999 and 2002. In addition, Ayers contributed \$200 to Obama's re-election fund to the Illinois State Senate in April 2001. They lived within a few blocks of each other in the trendy Hyde Park section of Chicago, and moved in the same liberal-progressive circles.

Is there anything here that raises questions about Obama's judgment or is this just another example of guilt by association?

### The Facts

The first article in the mainstream press linking Obama to Ayers appeared in the *London Daily Mail* on February 2. It was written by Peter Hitchens, the right-wing brother of the left-wing firebrand turned Iraq war supporter, Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens cited the Ayers connection to bolster his argument that Obama is "far more radical than he would like us to know."

The Hitchens piece was followed by a Bloomberg article last week pointing to the Ayers connection as support for Hillary Clinton's contention that Obama might not be able to withstand the "Republican attack machine." Larry Johnson, a former counterterrorism official at the CIA and the State Department, predicted that the Republicans would seize on the Ayers case, and other Chicago relationships, to "bludgeon Obama's presidential aspirations into the dust."

The *London Sunday Times* joined the chorus this weekend by reporting that Republicans were "out to crush Barack by painting him as a leftwinger with dubious support".

The only hard facts that have come out so far are the \$200 contribution by Ayers to the Obama re-election fund, and their joint membership of the eight-person Woods Fund Board. Ayers did not respond to e-mails and telephone calls requesting clarification of the relationship. Obama spokesman Bill Burton noted in a statement that Ayers was a professor of education at the University of Illinois and a former aide to Mayor Richard M. Daley, and continued:

*Senator Obama strongly condemns the violent actions of the Weathermen group, as he does all acts of violence. But he was an eight-year-old child when Ayers and the Weathermen were active, and any attempt to connect Obama with events of almost forty years ago is ridiculous.*

In the short term, the person who has most to gain by speculation about Obama's acquaintance with a former terrorist is Hillary Clinton. The former First Lady likes to present herself as "tested and vetted" after years of exposure to Republican attacks, in contrast to Obama, a relative newcomer to hardscrabble presidential politics. Such arguments resonate with Johnson, the counterterrorism expert, who told me that he is a Clinton supporter, although not involved with the campaign.

But the Obama-Ayers link is a tenuous one. As *Newsday* pointed out, Clinton has her own, also tenuous, Weatherman connection. Her husband commuted the sentences of a couple of convicted Weather Underground members, Susan Rosenberg and Linda Sue Evans, shortly before leaving office in January 2001. Which is worse: pardoning a convicted terrorist or accepting a campaign contribution from a former Weatherman who was never convicted?

Whatever his past, Ayers is now a respected member of the Chicago intelligentsia, and still a member of the Woods Fund Board. The president of the Woods Fund, Deborah Harrington, said he had been selected for the board because of his solid academic credentials and "passion for social justice."

"This whole connection is a stretch," Harrington told me. "Barack was very well known in Chicago, and a highly respected legislator. It would be difficult to find people round here who never volunteered or contributed money to one of his campaigns."

Original article posted at

[http://blog.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2008/02/obamas\\_weatherman\\_connection.html](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2008/02/obamas_weatherman_connection.html)

## **II. Written Assignment – Questions**

*Answer the following question in complete sentences on a separate sheet of loose-leaf paper.*

1. When was this item posted on the Internet?
2. What is the significance of the time it was posted?
3. What damaging thing did William Ayers say, and when did he say it?
4. What do you think of what he said?
5. Why did Christopher Hitchens make the connection between Obama and Ayers?
6. Why did Larry Johnson say about the connection?
7. How did Obama spokesman Bill Burton respond to the controversy?
8. How might Hillary Clinton have benefited from this story? What undermines her advantage on this issue?