



The Secret Wars of Judi Bari: A Car Bomb, the Fight for the Redwoods and the End of Earth First!

Kate Coleman

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In 1990, a car bomb in Oakland almost killed radical Earth First! leader Judi Bari and her passenger, a co-leader and onetime lover, Darryl Cherney. The FBI accused the pair of transporting the explosive device knowingly as part of a violent campaign of "ecotage." From her hospital bed, Bari charged that the timber interests of Northern California and the FBI had tried to kill her. The car bomb and the competing conspiracy theories about who was responsible made Bari a national figure; but she had long been a legendary figure among California activists. A veteran of the Vietnam War protests of the 1960s who moved to militant feminism and environmentalism after the war ended, Bari was involved in the radical eco-organization Earth First! by the mid-1980s and leading the fight against the logging companies on the Northern California coast. Not long before the attempt on her life, she had summoned young people from all over the country to join her in a crusade to save the remaining redwood forests of the Pacific Coast in a "Redwood Summer" based on the Mississippi Summer of the civil rights movement a quarter-century earlier. The Secret Wars of Judi Bari traces Bari's rise from college activist to a would-be Mother Jones of the Redwoods. Drawing on extensive interviews with Bari's friends, comrades and critics, Kate Coleman describes Bari's long struggle for selfhood against her communist parents and her husband (himself a former member of violent political groups); against those in her movement who felt that she was not radical enough; and ultimately against the FBI and the State of California. Judi Bari's wars continued until her death from cancer five years after the explosion that changed her life forever. In creating a dramatic portrait of a unique American life, Coleman takes the reader inside the radical politics that outlived the 1960s, and into the Earth First! movement and the back-to-nature counterculture of the North Coast of California. This is a world that Coleman has lived in herself and spent her career documenting as a writer. In *The Secret Wars of Judi Bari* she has produced a book that is at once a crime story, a social history, and a compelling biography of a woman at war with her world.

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