

Jacqueline Girouard
Dr. Hanson
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Patty Hearst and the S.L.A.

In 1974, Patricia Campbell Hearst, an heiress to William Randolph Hearst's newspaper fortune, was kidnapped from her apartment while attending UC Berkeley. According to Hearst, her kidnapers, who identified themselves as the Symbionese Liberation Army, kept her in a closet for two months both blindfolded and gagged, and subjected her to physical and sexual abuse. Her parents tried to negotiate with her captors and met their demands, but the S.L.A. still failed to return their daughter. About two months after Patty Hearst was kidnapped, she was spotted robbing a bank brandishing an assault rifle. Information released later showed that she had become a member and strong supporter of the S.L.A., under the pseudonym "Tania."

The mystery of Patty Hearst pertains to whether or not she was willingly involved with the S.L.A. Despite a few opportunities to escape her captors, Patty Hearst not only chose not to escape but seemed to really want to be a part of the S.L.A.'s mission. According to the F.B.I., in May of 1974, Hearst fired shots into a store in order to save fellow S.L.A. members Emily and Bill Harris from being caught by authorities. It is likely that the couple and Hearst were friends within their organization.¹ Following this event, the Federal Bureau of Investigation called Patty Hearst "an armed and dangerous fugitive."² All of this evidence up to the point of her arrest and trial seems to support the theory that Patty Hearst was willingly involved with the S.L.A., her kidnapping, and the bank robbery. However, her attorney claimed that she had been brainwashed, and that she wasn't in her right mind because of it. This however cannot be proved or disproved

without details of her time in captivity. Some say that “conditions of prolonged stress, fatigue and demoralization may quite rapidly produce alienation from friends and family and finally oneself.”³ Her parents for example did not believe that she had become a member of the S.L.A. by choice.⁴ In the end, this defense did not work and Hearst was put in prison. Just a few years later however, she was released after her sentence was commuted by President Carter and later received a full pardon from President Clinton. To this day, the circumstances surrounding the story of Patty Hearst are unclear.

¹ Lacey Fosburgh, “Couple Hunted With Patricia Hearst Are Called Revolutionaries With Ties to Wealth,” *New York Times* (23 May 1974): 27. Available from: ProQuest, New York Times Historical Collection, Menlo School Lib. <http://library.menloschool.org> (accessed 30 March 2006).

² Jon Nordheimer. “Miss Hearst Called ‘Dangerous Fugitive’; F.B.I. Charges Due in Machine Gunning,” *New York Times* (20 May 1974): 65. Available from: ProQuest, New York Times Historical Collection, Menlo School Lib. <http://library.menloschool.org> (accessed 5 April 2006).

³ Jon Nordheimer. “Miss Hearst Is Now Tania, But How and Why?,” *New York Times* (26 May 1974): 160. Available from: ProQuest, New York Times Historical Collection, Menlo School Lib. <http://library.menloschool.org> (accessed 30 March 2006).

⁴ Jon Nordheimer. “Miss Hearst Called ‘Dangerous Fugitive’; F.B.I. Charges Due in Machine Gunning.”