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# '60s hero from UC to defend Nichols

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What a long, strange trip it's been for Michael Tigar, the "spell-binding firebrand" lawyer who defended leftists in the 1960s and will now defend a soldier of the extreme right: Oklahoma City bombing suspect Terry Nichols.

First with a microphone, then with a law book, Tigar starred in now-mythic clashes on the tear-gassed UC-Berkeley campus; in courtrooms where his clients included Angela Davis and the Chicago Seven; and in rallies where he declared that "genocide and imperialism will be stopped in Vietnam and Mississippi and in Georgia."

On a May day 25 years ago, on a Berkeley campus crawling with cops and closed by order of Gov. Ronald Reagan, Tigar told a sea of students and draft resisters that President Richard Nixon was a "war criminal" and America an "international outlaw."

"The issue now," warned the tall, handsome Tigar, who was

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then a UCLA law professor, "is whether you and I will liberate this country from inside or whether it will be liberated from abroad."

The crowd shot to its feet in a standing ovation.

Only four years later, in 1974, he was working for a fancy Washington law firm and defending a wealthy ex-member of the "war criminal's" administration — one-time Treasury Secretary John Connally, who was charged with accepting a bribe.

Tigar's office was decorated with Daumier prints, and his elegant clothes and cropped hair made him look "more like a Young Republican than the spell-binding firebrand he was a dozen years ago," a San Francisco reporter wrote at that time.

The reporter asked Tigar if he

still considered himself a revolutionary. He paused for a long time. "Do I have to answer that question?" he asked. Then he said:

### More conservative?

"The Left doesn't exist here anymore. . . . (It has) been unable to formulate a coherent position supported by a broad spectrum of the people . . .

"It doesn't mean I have gotten more conservative. It means I have come to realize the formidable power the government can wield when it decides to be regressive."

He knew what he was talking about. In the 1960s he had been a brilliant law student at UC-Berkeley — first in his class and editor in chief of the California Law Review — and was offered a post as a U.S. Supreme Court clerk. But the offer was withdrawn after the California Senate Un-American Activities Committee blasted him for attending an allegedly Soviet-influenced film festival in Finland years earlier.



### Colleagues call him brilliant

"I think every American who believes the FBI is fallible would understand the need to have this case defended, and to have it defended in a way that will further the search for truth," Tigar told the Dallas Morning News.

Tigar, who couldn't be reached Saturday, lives in Austin and teaches at the University of Texas Law School. His colleagues call him a brilliant constitutional scholar, who casually quotes from Euripides and Shakespeare.

"There are very few criminal defense lawyers in this country who aren't familiar with Michael Tigar," says Nancy Hollander of Albuquerque, past president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

Tigar's leftist days are largely, but not totally, behind him: He still fights death-penalty convictions on behalf of an Austin-based group of lawyers.

"Sometimes he charges through the office," said an aide there, who wouldn't give his name. "He has incredible energy."

Later Tigar played lead or supporting roles in some of the most dramatic courtroom confrontations of the day, including the trial of the so-called Chicago Seven.

The Seven were accused of disrupting the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Early in the trial, Tigar riled Judge Julius Hoffman and was temporarily ejected from the courtroom, along with another lawyer. On the way out they raised clenched fists in a "power to the people" salute.

He also helped Davis, the black radical philosopher, win acquittal on charges that she had masterminded a shootout that left a judge dead in Marin County.

### High-class clientele

But with time, his highest-profile clientele became richer and — by leftist standards — rather reactionary. Connally was acquitted; so was U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, who had been accused of misconduct while state treasurer. The columnist Murray Kempton reported in 1980 that Connally rewarded Tigar by giving him a prize bull, and that Tigar passed the bull on to Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Tigar also represented John Demjanjuk, who was convicted for war crimes at a Nazi death camp, then released after the evidence against him weakened.

Tigar and San Francisco attorney Dennis Riordan are handling the appeal of Clayton Jackson, once a top Sacramento lobbyist who is serving a 6 ½-year sentence for money laundering, racketeering and offering a bribe to former state Sen. Alan Robbins.

Now 54, Tigar has agreed to represent Nichols at the request of three federal judges. On Wednesday, Nichols, 40, was charged in the April 19 bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

At the time, that made Nichols the second person charged, along with Timothy McVeigh, 27. But on Friday in Oatman, Ariz., authorities picked up a third suspect, Steven Garrett Colbern, 35, who was arrested on a federal firearms charge.