

‘Vote:’ Yippie funeral monologue

A. C. DiFranco

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Book review: VOTE! by Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman and Ed Sanders, Warner Paperbacks.

“In some way we were responsible for the excesses of youth culture. Some people read ‘Do It’ and concluded they should drop out of everything. They read ‘Steal This Book’ and began ripping off everyone in sight. They read ‘The Family’ and made Charles Manson a subculture hero ... The McGovern campaign offers a chance to encourage people to go home and change their parents’ minds. It is the road back from the Quaalude (Sopor) quagmire of despair.”

Such are the conclusions of Yippie leaders Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, and Ed (Who’s he?) Sanders, in a book about what was, and could have continued to be a mass movement to humanize America.

Although the results of the election have relegated “Vote!” to the “what might have been” category, it continues to be valid today as a chronicle of the subtle but fundamental changes in Yippie philosophy.

As always, the authors perceive big time politics and media to be one in the same. But that same media consciousness that led them into the streets of Chicago in 1968 brought them inside the convention hall in Miami of 1972 to act out the hoped for first phase of a two phase revolution.

The worship of fire gods and trashing are out.

Now they say work within the system to raise hope — any hope — for an end to the boredom and despair of the Nixon corporate machine.

“Our violent demonstrations set the stage. They were necessary. The violence in Chicago in 1968 directly led to the change in Miami in 1972,” they explain unapologetically.

They add that the destruction of the lesser-of-evils Democratic Party would be a bad idea today.

“The idea of ‘the worse, the better’ may radicalize some people, but it also spreads cynicism and fear... We need breathing space, room to move.”

They conted the election of McGovern would have provided (past tense supplied by history, not the authors) such breathing room for revolution, a revolution they predict will be completed within ten years.

Although the book was written before the elections, and is optimistic about a McGovern victory, the grassroots support of McGovern is an “at least” victory for people’s democracy and power, they say.

But the important thing to them is to elect a candidate like McGovern (“sincere, but middle of the road”) and then wait for the failure of his halfway programs.

“McGovern will only increase expectations. History shows that sometimes revolution takes place when things get better, not worse.”

McGovern style lukewarm politics won’t solve America’s big problems, with the exception, perhaps, of Vietnam.

When the peace candidate cops out, or swings to the right, the preliminaries will be completed and a more radical socialization of America will be possible.

The Yippies, they say, and other radicals that jumped on the bandwagon in Miami, will be close to the front of power “come the revolution.”

Unlike other politics/media analysts (which Rubin, Hoffman, and maybe Sanders, deserve to be called) there is no part in their script for revolutionary impotence.

In this sense, “Vote!” is more than analysis. It is a propaganda tract, albeit one with higher credibility to facts than their other works.

The last chapters of “Vote!” have been turned over to Sanders’ preoccupation with Jack Anderson nitpicking and didactic name calling, as he did in “The Family.”

If you like Hoffman and Rubin, tear out the Sanders chapters. You won’t miss anything, and you’ll like Jerry and Abbie better.

Rubin and Hoffman have, in contrast to Sanders, refined their funny/sad style that pays homage to their spiritual leader, Lenny Bruce.

Rubin has said “everything we do is an attempt to turn the words of Lenny into reality.”

Lenny Bruce fought his battles alone. Rubin, Hoffman, and Sanders have some support, but it is dwindling.

By their own analysis, the new reign of Nixon will stifle even more hopes and dreams, and with them, support for a new American revolution.

“Vote!” may be the funeral monologue of the Yippie movement, and the Yippies will become pop art objects of the past like Lenny Bruce.



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