

Steal This Archive? Abbie Hoffman's Papers Become a College Collection

Thousands of letters and other artifacts from the life of the radical prankster of the counterculture are sold to the University of Texas at Austin.

Joseph Berger

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Abbie Hoffman arrives for a 1968 hearing at the Capitol Building in Washington, where he was arrested for wearing a shirt made out of the American flag. Credit...Associated Press

There are notes and letters from other icons of the 1960s. Cards from John and Yoko. A letter from Allen Ginsberg, the poet, offering to help him raise defense money. A plea by Norman Mailer to the governor of New York, seeking executive leniency on his behalf.

The papers of Abbie Hoffman, the puckish activist who gained a national reputation as a radical hippie, make clear the extent to which the tumult of that era regularly swirled around him: the showering of the New York Stock Exchange with dollar bills, the nomination of a pig as a presidential candidate, the turbulent demonstrations that rattled the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Now the trove of letters, manuscripts, photographs, F.B.I. surveillance reports, Christmas cards and thousands of other papers that memorialize Mr. Hoffman and his contentious role in American history have been sold to the University of Texas at Austin by Johanna Hoffman Lawrenson, his third wife and companion for the last 15 years of his life.

They will be housed at the university's Dolph Briscoe Center for American History where some of the items are to go on display Tuesday after a ceremony to mark the acquisition. Later, after much sorting and cataloging, the rest of the collection will become available to scholars and students.

"Abbie Hoffman has not gotten his proper due historically," Don Carleton, executive director of the Briscoe Center, said. "He really was a pathbreaking guy in terms of the street theater approach to gain attention for the causes he advocated, particularly the anti-Vietnam War movement."

Mr. Hoffman, whose infamously anarchic work, "Steal This Book," included tips on how to shoplift, might be amused to have his papers end up in so solemn a setting as a university research library. He was arguably the most emblematic figure of the youthful protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, a man who helped coin the term "Yippie" and co-founded the group that took that name. But he was

always more of a comic provocateur than an ideologue, specializing in thumbing his nose at institutions and formalities in zany ways.



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<[nytimes.com/2019/10/27/arts/abbie-hoffman-archive.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/27/arts/abbie-hoffman-archive.html)>

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