

Thoughts on Subversion: From Two Yippie Elders

Contents

anarchist sunrise 6

Stew Albert and Judy Gumbo were founding Yippies, activists in support of the Black Panther Party and militant participants in the anti-war movement of the Sixties. Judy was an early feminist. They are both portrayed in the video/dvd version of "Steal This Movie.", A bio-pic based on the life and times of Yippie Abbie Hoffman. Judy and Stew live in Portland Oregon, where they continue to be active in the good fight.

Stew, for the benefit of our readers, could you give us a quick synopsis of your background in radical politics and describe what led you to become a founding member of the Youth International Party:

I started marching and protesting against the Vietnam War in 1964. In 1965 I joined the Berkeley based Vietnam Day Committee (VDC) and was involved in marches, demonstrations and at least one riot. The group was beginning to lose energy in 1966 and was knocked out for good by an unsolved right-wing bombing of its headquarters. But it provided an example and a militant model for the national student based antiwar movement.

The Black Panthers started out in Berkeley and Oakland and I was an early supporter of this organization. I worked to create alliances between the Panthers and the Yippies. I was involved in a number of major protests against the war and racism, including the Pentagon sit-in and the 1968 Chicago riots.

Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, myself and others started the Yippies because we believed that the passions and ideas of young rebels, hippies and anarchists were not being represented by the old Left and pacifist leadership of the peace movement. We looked out at the crowds at peace demonstrations and they were mostly wild looking and young and then we looked at the speakers platform and everyone was mostly middle aged and middle class. It didn't make sense.

I know from my readings on the Sixties Counterculture that many Yippies considered themselves "psychedelic anarchists" and the anarchist influence is obvious in books like "Do It" and "Revolution For The Hell Of It" but I was wondering if you could clarify for us just where the Yippie movement was coming from politically and what its relationship to anarchism was. What was it that made the Yippies different from the rest of the New Left and what were your long term goals as a movement?

We called ourselves Yippies, in part because we didn't want to use any of the preexisting labels. But it's true that our views and actions were more anarchistic than anything else. We certainly were not interested in reforming the state bureaucracy. We wanted to replace the State with Community. Abbie Hoffman said that the Yippies were creating a Woodstock Nation that opposed and sought the destruction of the Pig Empire. I used the term "Soulful Socialism" - to juxtapose us to Marxism-Leninism or what was called "Scientific Socialism." In our style and tactics we were influenced by the Surrealists, especially when we threw money at stock exchange brokers, or when we ran a pig (Pigasus) for president. We were also influenced by the Dutch based Provo anarchist movement.

We American Yippies did run into some trouble with French anarchists, because they thought we were too pro-Castro and Ho Chi Minh but we felt that these guys might not be perfect, but because of their positive achievements and the enemies they made, we thought they were very worthy of support. So we weren't perfect anarchists but I've never been perfect at anything.

When we talked up in Portland in January, you commented on how interesting it was to you that so many younger anarchists were deeply immersed in the study of anthropology, while many of the radicals of your era were focused on studying psychology and the workings of the human mind. This was fascinating to me, as I consider an understanding of group psychology absolutely essential to subverting the dominant paradigm. Could you

explain to us how your knowledge of psychology benefited you as a revolutionary and maybe give us some examples of how it was utilized by the Yippie movement?

By 1967 we realized the war wasn't going to go away nor the boring oppressive bureaucratic conformist society that spawned that brutal imperial adventure. We started thinking about how we could broaden our influence. Change people. Win them over. We knew the media was screwing us. Misrepresenting us when they were not ignoring us completely. We started thinking up ways of both getting around the media and using it. We started our own weekly newspapers all over the country. It was called the underground press. But we were determined to get people's attention by any and all means including TV and the mainstream press. We knew that if we just lectured people about morality, if we tried to make them feel guilty, we knew they would ignore us. After all they had their parents and teachers to make them feel guilty. Why did they need us? We also knew that America was becoming an entertainment based society and that if our tactics were boring and repetitive we would turn people off. So we took on the techniques of what would someday be called performance art — and also a little from Brecht and Artaud — mostly we wanted to do surprising things that made people pay attention. We wanted to touch people's emotions but also their sense of humor. We wanted to put out a message that the best and most worthwhile time in America could be found in the rebel movement. And we wanted to create events that were so visually interesting that CBS would be forced to put us on the 7 o'clock news. So running a pig for President and getting arrested with that Pig. The Chicago police threw us all in a police wagon, Phil Ochs, Jerry Rubin, me and others and also our candidate Pigasus. The images went out all over the global village via TV- and all over the world people were laughing at the American election and the police. And thinking we were a great bunch who they would like to emulate. And many did.

Many revolutionaries active during the 1960's and 70's (including yourself) felt the full iron heel of fascism in the form of the F.B.I.'s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). In fact, your generation were the ones who first exposed COINTELPRO to the larger public and you were also the first to analyze the Grand Jury system and to develop effective strategies for dealing with it, and other forms of state repression. What sort of security advice do you have for younger activists who might not yet be familiar with the history of state repression in this country?

The first thing would be to become familiar with the history of American repression — the home grown Iron Heel. There are plenty of books — there's lots to read. The FBI files are very important to read - and there is lots of good stuff to search out on the web. I think the first thing is, to grasp a truth about the American system. It only tolerates freedom — when freedom is not a threat to its rulers. That was true in Chile when the US overthrew a legally elected socialist government and imposed a violent dictatorship. It's true now in Columbia where labor leaders are being murdered and it becomes true here in America to the extent that we radicals are being effective. The last presidential election ended in what some call a velvet coup. I'm sure that if there was a strong national movement against the coup — the velvet would have been taken off - and the iron heel would be its replacement. So we have to understand the system without illusions.

I think that those who are full time involved in fighting against global capitalism need to take security more seriously. To protect their homes and offices and selves and yet it's important to do this without being paranoid — if protection is over done it will frighten people away. So a balance must be struck. And look, some stuff seems improperly categorized — like people tell me that wearing bandannas protects them. But the truth is (the way the police work) wearing a bandanna may keep your face out of the papers, and it's great revolutionary theater for sure, but who do you think will become a candidate for being followed home? Or to a bar? Or wherever. Its better to learn how to find electronic bugs or develop mail drops or learn how to lose a tail or like the Panther's to learn enough law to protect

yourself, a little bit, against the law. That can help you. But bandannas? They are a great way to express Zapatista solidarity but I don't think they give any protection.

How were issues of gender inequality, male privilege, and patriarchy approached by the Yippie movement? Where if anywhere along the continuum of priorities of the movement was women's oppression situated? How willing were men to listen to women about these issues, and further educate themselves on women's history and subjugated role in society?

From Judy Gumbo Albert: What's interesting about what we called the women's liberation movement is the myth that's come down from 30 years ago, and the reality. Everyone experienced their own sixties but what comes down today as historical facts are predominately tales of sexism, oppression, patriarchy (although we didn't call it that back then) and even rape. It's true that Eldridge Cleaver glorified rape as an insurrectionary act in his book "Soul On Ice". It's also true we were asked to make coffee, roll joints and do menial tasks. But to believe only that the sixties was patriarchal and oppressive to women is to buy into a myth — a partial totality. For the Yippie women — myself, Anita Hoffman, Nancy K., Genie Plamondon, Robin Morgan and many others the experience of being leaders, movers, shakers, speakers, rioters, revolutionaries, guerrilla theatrical performers and producers, writers, editors, flower children, anarchists and sexually liberated beings was as much if not more part of our experience as sexism and patriarchy. Plus, we were not wimps. When Yippie women came up against sexism, we fought back. We took the term "women's liberation" from the liberation movements that surrounded us — black people, Vietnamese. We knew that women had to be free and formed our own liberation movement. Freedom, in Janis Joplin's words was just another word for nuthin left to loose.

How did the guys take it? Not well — at least at first. Every Yippie relationship, including Stew's and mine, broke up in the height of the women's movement. After all, how could I love a sexist oppressor? Did Stew change his behavior? You bet. Did I? Absolutely. We were lucky because we both came to understand that behavior had to change — both the sexist oppressor and the victimized oppressed. And that both our behaviors affected each other. (We were reading Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" at the time.) Eventually Stew & I we were able to re-build our relationship — which isn't true of any of the other Yippie relationships from that time.

What is most important about that period that we women learned to do things that we never had access to before — from repairing VW engines to controlling our reproductive lives, to conquering our fear of facing down the pigs. We learned to be leaders and to stand up from the core of our being for what we believed in. I know for a fact that the commitment to feminist self-determination that we learned from being part of the Yippies stayed with all of us Yippie women as we proceeded down the rest of our lives — each in our different way.

To what extent did an ecological agenda manifest within the Yippie movement? What was the nature of the discourse on matters such as the (un)sustainability of industrial civilization, the relative ecological harmony of "primitive societies", population growth, the culturally constructed historic role of modern civilized humans(men)as the owners and destroyers of the earth?

The first time that I started paying attention to ecological issues was when I started reading articles in the underground press by a Yippie named Keith Lampe. He called his articles, "Earth Read Out," and in some ways they helped start the ecology movement. The Yippies were around only in the early days of green politics. We were very active in creating People's Park in Berkeley in 1969. We took over some abandoned land and put down, grass, flowers and trees - it became a massive community event. But Governor Ronald Reagan called out the police and the National Guard and they shot up Berkeley. They killed and they maimed and they built a fence around the park. Many who were involved in creating the park never heard the word "ecology," But that's what the park was about.

The Yippies did not think industrial society was sustainable. We were into postindustrial thinking. We looked toward a computer-based decentralization of society, Perhaps we romanticized computers. We were sometimes called neoprimitives, because we wanted to combine high-tech with much more simple forms of living.

Leading up to and during the late 60s, could you explain the role and influence of “do-it-yourself” publications including flyers, newspapers, pamphlets, etc. and how the distribution of such propaganda affected and instigated radical action? What forms of propaganda did you find most effective? What production methods proved the most tenable considering limited funding?

I wonder about the practical relevance of this question, since we didn't have the benefit of web pages and the Internet - and in a way the game has changed or maybe it hasn't? When it comes to effective propaganda — nothing has changed. If you don't have lively layout that conveys energy and some joy you will cut down on your readership. And your language has to have life in it. No clichés and anything becomes a cliché if you repeat it enough. Humorous images, surrealistic juxtapositions are always great. And here's another thing to remember about propaganda. It should stimulate critical thought but not try to provide all the answers. It should leave room for the readers to fill in some answers of their own. And you should have a big ear, willing to listen and reflect what people say. If your propaganda is really good, even our enemies will reluctantly enjoy it, when that happens you know you're having an impact. You know your enemies children will soon be joining your ranks.

anarchist sunrise

terrible times
broken hearts
begging in the streets
and raging against
dark planets
of constraint
you will go mad
with a living death
called civility
and reason
it will burn your brains out
with poisonous boredom
and its bastardly Bush.
the beggars now
repair the pain
with onslaught
attacks of bloodbath and jest
against corpse capitalists
owners of hell
and
the free world franchise
of immaculately perfect greed
and break their vaulted chests
tear out their tickers.

give them
a plastic pump to blow
and a billion hearts
to repair
for repentance.

Stew Albert
5/20/01



Thoughts on Subversion: From Two Yippie Elders

<greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/2012/05/27/green-anarchy-6/>

stealthiswiki.com