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Worcester Writers IQP 2009-2010

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

**Interdisciplinary Qualifying Project Summery:
Research for the Worcester Writers IQP “City
of Words” Website**

Abstract

The City of Words IPQ Project group is with the goal of creating a web site featuring writers associated with Worcester. It is based on the web site Worcester Area Writers, which was created by WPI faculty and students some years ago. We are placing heavy emphasis on bringing living writers to the new site, creating a multi-media platform that includes videos of writers reading their works, interviews, audio, and photographs of places in Worcester connected with their work. The group continually seeks creative and original ways to display the site's content. Students are required to produce these materials as well as write biographies and critical analyses of the writers for which they are responsible.

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IQP Research Methods

In my portion of the Worcester Writers IQP, I researched the life and writings of 1960's revolutionary and Worcester native Abbie Hoffman. His extreme actions and beliefs shine through his writings, and eventually caused him years in exile while his name resided on the FBI's Most Wanted list. Anybody can read his books or watch his protest videos from the 60's, but this project gave me a different view on the notorious Chicago 7 defendant.

Although Abbie left Worcester a few years after he graduated college, his brother Jack Hoffman stayed in the area and now lives in Framingham, MA. I was lucky enough to be able to interview Jack while researching Abbie, and although I was not able to get a video interview with him, the meeting was something I had never experienced in any of my previous research projects.

Jack was very happy at the opportunity to talk to an interested member of the new generation about Abbie and their family. Unlike his media savvy brother however, he did not like the idea of answering questions in front of a camera. We spent most of the time looking through boxes that probably hadn't been touched in years full of pictures, letters and documents that he had accumulated over the years. Some of the more interesting items included a signed letter from former President Carter expressing his grief at the time of Abbie's death and a postcard from fugitive Abbie in the Galapagos Islands with his wife Johanna.

Each new picture or letter sparked a memory of Abbie. These anecdotes were more describing of Abbie's personality than any book by or about Abbie. He explained how whenever Abbie made money for appearances or his books, he gave his money to Jack to control, mostly, he remembered, spent on bailing Abbie and friends out of jail.

I heard stories about how much Abbie loved sports (always a Boston fan), a trait not portrayed in any of his biographies or writings. I found it absolutely stunning and wildly fascinating that in the mid to late 1970's Abbie, returned to Massachusetts to visit his brother and decided they were going out to the Celtics game that night with Abbie's friend Jack Nicholson (yes, movie star Jack Nicholson). Jack recalled getting looks from some of the fans around them that actually recognized Abbie and gave them a wink or a thumbs up to show their approval.

Jack was nice enough to let me take a number of photographs of Abbie, their family, and locations in Worcester with his full permission to use them in our IQP. This project has given me a whole new outlook on different research methods how valuable those different types of research can be.

Abbie Hoffman Biographical Writing

Abbot Howard Hoffman was born November 30, 1936 in Worcester, Massachusetts to John and Florence Schamburg. He gained infamy during police riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention and the resulting Chicago Seven Conspiracy Trial that followed. Although this incident may be the one most remembered when people think about Abbie Hoffman, this was just the tip of the iceberg. He published 11 books and countless magazine and newspaper articles while mastering the art of manipulating the media and evading the FBI.

Abbie grew up the oldest of the three temple going Jewish children in a law-abiding Worcester home. His father John Hoffman owned the Worcester Medical Supply company, a wholesale distributor of prescription medicines while his mother Florence stayed at home taking care of Abbie, Jack and Phyllis. John Hoffman was a very proud man and cared deeply about his and his business's good reputation throughout the neighborhood, which would end up causing a lot of friction between him and Abbie in future years. Abbie grew up in a Worcester very different from today's, a thriving industrial city whose residents took pride in their Worcester heritage. There are still those people today who live in Worcester and are proud of their city, but even as a student with only 3 years in Worcester, it is obvious that pride in the city of Worcester is much less common than literature and history books describe existed 50 years ago.

As portrayed in Run Run Run: The Lives of Abbie Hoffman, a biography written by his brother Jack Hoffman and Daniel Simon, Abbie was a very ambitious as a child and showed a promise for great things to come. This meant that he was faced with high expectations from both his siblings and his parents. Abbie, Jack and Phyllis all attended catholic school their whole lives, as well as attending temple every Saturday and a temple study class after school. Although he had health problems as a child including bad asthma attacks, he was always active and striving for adventure. Jack recalls

Abbie's teenage years when he would steal cars for joyrides, even once driving his father's Buick off of Mill Street in Worcester into Coes Pond. Along with hustling pool halls and looking for girls, Abbie was a typical teenager, trying to be as smooth and cool as he possibly could.

In 1955 after graduating from the private Worcester Preparatory Academy, Abbie applied to Tufts, Columbia and Brandeis University. Columbia and Tufts rejected Abbie, and so he enrolled at Brandeis University in the fall of 1955. Brandeis, a small school, had only 14 professors and 107 freshmen when they began in 1948. Brandeis was created to serve all faiths equally in a time when many discriminated against Jewish applicants, and still today educates a large amount of Jewish students. It was at Brandeis where Abbie's mind was opened to the world and so many new anti-establishment ideas. During his sophomore year he broke up with his old girlfriend and began dating a very pretty psychology major named Sheila Karklin. When they met she was an artsy beatnik dressed in black wearing a beret, and he was on the wrestling team and still the same charming, arrogant young man he was in high school. They were quickly in love, and it was no time at all before Abbie started taking some of Sheila's psychology courses. One professor in particular, Abe Maslow, made a large impression upon Abbie. With speakings on self-actualization and sexual openness, Maslow changed Abbie's desired profession to psychologist. He graduated in 1959 and that September enrolled at Berkeley's graduate school for psychology. Berkeley allowed him to study unconventional methods like hypnosis or witchcraft, but more importantly showed him an example of the government's violation of freedoms and their response to a non-violent student protest at the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) hearings May of 1960 in San Francisco.

Just after the HUAC hearings Abbie found out that Sheila, who was living back home, was pregnant. Abbie dropped out of Berkeley, moved into his parents house and began planning the wedding. Even though the seeds of counter-culture anti-establishment were planted in Abbie during his 4 years at Brandeis and 2 at Berkeley, the standard was still to marry and find a job, and Abbie did

just that. He worked at the Worcester State Hospital as a psychologist and spent his time running the Park Arts Theater, a small theater that he opened himself to showcase films and music that he selected. Sheila stayed home and sold candles for extra money out of their home on Trowbridge Street. As he spent more and more time at his theater, his marriage to Sheila deteriorated and by 1962 they were separated.

The theater failed and was closed down, so unemployed and single, Abbie found a new place to focus his attention. Abbie joined the drive to put Stuart Hughes on the ballot for senator as a peace candidate. He drove all around central and western Massachusetts organizing groups of supporters to collect signatures door to door or otherwise. Abbie succeeded in gathering the 150,000 signatures needed to put him on the ballot, but Hughes ended up losing the election. Regardless of the election's outcome, the experience and knowledge of how to get things done on a large scale as well as the connections he made with other political activists during that time were priceless.

Abbie and Sheila tried to stay together but eventually the distance between them grew too large to be rectified. In the summer of 1965 Abbie's desire for action and his knack for organizing led him to Jackson, Mississippi where he organized marches and protests against the non-enforcement of the Voting Rights Act which had just been passed that spring. Abbie was learning the ins and outs of the movement and how to organize the people in it, preparing himself for the rest of his career as part of the counterculture. He would eventually divorce Sheila in 1966, move to New York City, and continue on his journey through the movement.

The atmosphere of New York was completely different than Worcester or Boston. There were many more people who shared ideas and goals with Abbie in New York including Anita Kushner, who would marry Abbie in June 1967, outside in Central Park, during the Summer of Love. In October that year Abbie and long time friend and cohort, Jerry Rubin, staged a protest at the Pentagon where Abbie

would proclaim they were performing an exorcism on the Pentagon to rid it of evil. Abbie was developing his fame and influence, and with that he was able to manipulate both the media and the counterculture into giving him his largest stage and most defining moment at the Chicago Democratic Convention of 1968.

The Festival of Light, as Abbie and his fellow Yippies called it, began in Chicago on Sunday, August 25. Abbie had been in contact with the Chief of Police who had warned Abbie that if one city ordinance was broken, then all the protesters would be cleared out of the park. These ordinances included an 11:00 pm curfew, but it only took the police until 6:30 on that Sunday night to begin assaulting those gathered in the park. The beatings would continue with billy clubs and tear gas, almost all of it being caught by the news cameras and broadcast to the entire nation. This is what Abbie wanted, what he thought was needed to further the movement. On Wednesday Abbie was arrested for writing “FUCK” across his head with a magic marker and spent one of his many nights in jail while the police beatings raged on outside.

After the Convention, the country was split in two: those who trusted and believed in the government with all their hearts and those who rebel against the government with all theirs. After being subpoenaed by HUAC, Abbie appeared and was arrested wearing an American flag shirt with two buttons on it for “casting contempt” on the American flag. Abbie faced a \$1,000 and up to a year in prison, while country singer Dale Evans faced no such trouble after appearing on the Ed Sullivan Show wearing the same shirt. Abbie's brother Jack learned about the social divide the hard way. In an October 1968 *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* interview, Jack described Abbie's aim at a free society and his love for America, but he was ostracized by the community and business associates for his support of his brother.¹

On March 20, 1969 the Chicago 8, which became the Chicago 7 after Bobby Seale of the Black Panthers was separated from the others, were charged with crossing state lines to incite violence. Although eventually all charges would be dropped, the trial was long and exhausting for all the defendants. The defendants were members of all different factions of the counterculture including Abbie and his yippies, the SDS, the Black Panthers, and the Mobe (National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam). Abbie became the ringleader of the trial and thoroughly enjoyed the spotlight being on him as he put the FBI and the government's corruption and conspiracy on display.

After the trial was over the FBI did not leave Abbie alone. In fact from before the trial began all the way until he disappeared and went underground in 1974 the FBI systematically and continuously made efforts to diminish Abbie's influence and credibility by using undercover agents to penetrate the counterculture. Even though he used his earnings for legal fees, travel costs, and bailing friends out of jail, many accusations that Abbie was just in it for the money came forth after his books *Revolution for the Hell of It*, *Woodstock Nation* and *Steal This Book* sold a good amount of copies. Implications coming from people in his own movement that he lived the high life full of limousines and private jets made turned Abbie cold toward the movement and not interested in organizing anything close to the Democratic Convention again. The FBI had succeeded in denying Abbie of his most important weapon, his influence

Abbie published his 1971 book, *Steal This Book*, on his own because no publisher would take it due to the title's request. The book was a handbook for communal living in the society of the day describing all kinds of ways to score free food, clothes, lodging, protest gear, etc. In the introduction he explains his motives for creating this hippy farmer's almanac:

“One person's crime is another person's profit. Capitalism
is license to steal; the government simply regulates who

steals and how much. I always wanted to put together an outlaw handbook that would help raise consciousness on these points while doing something about evening the score. There was also the challenge of testing the limits of free speech.”²

In the years that followed the trial Abbie still made attempts to achieve change in the country, most of all getting Nixon out of office, but he did it in much less visible ways to the public, never again to see the spotlight like that of the Chicago Trial. Abbie continued using drugs and began to show signs of manic behavior which he would deal with the rest of his life. In 1973 Abbie was arrested in New York City with possession of cocaine and spent 18 days in jail until his bail was able to be met. His short time in jail made him sure that he would never be able to survive 10 years in a hard prison, and he made the hard decision to skip bail and live his life as a fugitive. He spoke with members of the Weather Underground for advice on living on the run and soon left his second wife with his third child, america, in Long Island and moved to Mexico to begin his life of exile.³

Even though the FBI never found Abbie, they had succeeded in both driving Abbie out of the country, out of relevance and at times out of his mind with paranoia. Abbie met Johanna, his third and final wife in Guadalajara, Mexico and with her moved from Mexico to Canada where they eventually settled down near the St. Lawrence River where he found his new cause, saving the St. Lawrence River from the Army Corp of Engineers. Abbie continued to use his name as best he could in furthering his causes, but he still suffered from manic depressions and often felt disillusioned about the progress that he had achieved.

Abbie was found dead in his Solebury Township, PA converted turkey coop home on April 12,1989. Officially declared a suicide by overdose of Phenobarbital, Abbie Hoffman was 52. In

October of 1989 Norman Mailer best describes Abbie in the foreword to a collection of Abbie's works,
The Best of Abbie Hoffman;

“He was serious. Abbie was serious. His thousand jokes were to conceal how serious he was. It makes us uneasy. Under his satire beat a somewhat hysterical heart. It could not be otherwise. Given his life, given his immersion in a profound lack of security, in a set of identity crises that would splat most of us like cantaloupes thrown off a truck, it is prodigious how long he resisted madness and death. He had to have a monumental will.”⁴

Abbie Hoffman Analytical Composition

“The key to the puzzle lies in theater. We are theater in the streets: total and committed.” –Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*⁵

Abbie Hoffman’s life and antics as a revolutionary member of the counter-culture have secured his infamy in the minds of many Americans as a master of media. His writings at times served as romanticized counter-culture guidebooks and at other times vilified the current institutions and called for revolution from his readers. Although his books, especially his most famous one, Steal This Book, succeeded in conveying his ideas to the public, Hoffman was most effective with and in fact revolutionized the use of the media. Hoffman changed the way 1960’s protesters were able to relay their messages to the nation and, for better or worse, the way protesters and counter-culture youths were perceived. In this essay, I will investigate Hoffman’s use of theater and media in his lifelong mission to incite change and revolution in the American people.

Hoffman got his beginnings in theater while living in Worcester in the early 1960’s. While he was working a full time job and with a wife and child at home, Hoffman’s drive for action would not allow him to sit back and live the quiet family life⁶. He opened and managed the Park Arts Theater where he was able to showcase foreign films and underground films that he thought were intellectually stimulating to the people of Worcester. Although this enterprise was shortlived (it was closed after less than a year), the experience gave Abbie an insight into how to reach people, and most importantly not to bore them.

Hoffman's political roots were as a community organizer in Massachusetts where he traveled across the state in an attempt to put a third party progressive candidate, H. Stuart Hughes, onto the ballot for U.S. Senate Representative from Massachusetts. His efforts were successful in securing Hughes a spot on the ballot, but Hughes ended up losing the election. When he eventually left Massachusetts, he used the skills he learned there and his innovation to bring new methods to the position of group organizer. In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, he suggests a few methods: "Run around tearing the leaflets, selling them, trading them. Rip one in half and give half to one person and half to another and tell them to make love. Do it all fast."⁷

Hoffman, along with Jerry Rubin, developed the Youth International Party in late 1967. The Yippie movement, as they called themselves, was perhaps the first activist group to use mass media, particularly television, as a forum to disperse their ideas to young people across the nation. Hoffman and the Yippies staged many outlandish, some even say clownish, events that were intended to create images of corporate greed and ruthless government repression.

The key to making these stunts effective is to be sure every moment is caught on videotape and replayed on the news that night. Using this method Hoffman became an easily recognizable public figure when he dropped hundreds of one-dollar bills onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange and videotaped stockbrokers and other businessmen picking up the money in an almost mob-like fashion.

In Daniel Boorstin's 1961 book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, Boorstin describes 'pseudo-events' as being created "for the purpose of being reported or reproduced"⁸. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. Hoffman had a great

understanding of this notion, as is self evident in his ability and determination to create and organize protests that would be fit for television.

In his 1968 book *Revolution for the Hell of It*, Hoffman muses on the Yippies role in the media:

The commercial is the information. The program is rhetoric. The commercial is the figure. The program is the ground. What happens at the end of the program? Do you think any one of the millions of people watching the show switched from being liberal to a conservative or vice versa? I doubt it. One thing is certain though...a lot of people are going to buy that fuckin' soap or whatever else they were pushing in the commercial.

What would happen if a whole hour were filled with a soap commercial? That's a very interesting question and I will speculate that it would not work as well, which means that not as much soap would be sold. It's only when you establish a figure-ground relationship that you can convey information. It is the only perceptual dynamic that involves the spectator.

Our actions in Chicago established a brilliant figure-ground relationship. The rhetoric of the convention was allotted the fifty minutes of the hour, we were given the ten or less usually reserved for commercials. *We were an advertisement for revolution.*⁹

This outlook that the Yippies in Chicago were actually an *advertisement* in themselves is as genius in its simplicity as it is contradictory to the Yippies vendetta against corporate America. Hoffman's action of flying money off the NYSE was a direct jab at the corporate greed that had been using essentially the same advertising tactics as Hoffman for upwards of 20 years. However, while both Hoffman and corporate America used the same methods to accomplish their goals, what differentiated them were the ends to which both groups worked. Big business used their advertising to sell products and make profit, while Hoffman advertised to spread the Yippie revolution and inspire social change.

Hoffman and Rubin alike knew that in order for their message to be impactful, the Yippie movement could not be defined by the media. Whatever actions, stunts or messages the Yippies sent out over the airwaves, whether they actually had reason behind them or not, would lose all importance as soon as the media executives were able to describe a motive or purpose. In *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion*, Aniko Bodroghkozy quotes Hoffman as he comments on this point:

The trick in this grassroots myth was to evade definition, confound understanding, resist categorization and analysis. "If the straight world understood all this Digger shit, it would render us impotent, because understanding is the first step to control, and control is the secret to our extinction." Distortion and incomprehension by the established powers within the media industry were precisely what the Yippies wanted... Both Rubin and Hoffman insisted that Yippie mass-mediated antics were meant to demand active participation from viewer, no matter what

that response would entail. By activating differently situated audiences to respond either in rage and disgust or in enthusiastic revolutionary revolt, the varied responses would heighten contradictions, sharpen dissent and polarization, and topple the power alliances just that much more quickly.¹⁰

By this theory, Hoffman and the Yippies didn't care what feelings their actions evoked, but rather that they made Americans *feel* something within them that might incite progress or change. This is a direct parallel to the theater, where the goal of the playwright is to bring the viewer into the world of the play, thereby making them emotionally invested into the play. The side that the viewer takes, for or against, is irrelevant; the important part is that the viewer is taken through a catharsis and brought to a heightened level of feeling. With this outcome in mind, Hoffman was given the largest audience of his life during the infamous Chicago 7 trial.

The trial itself is a form of real life theater. All of the defendants knew that they were embarking on a history making trial, but it was Hoffman who took it upon himself to turn the trial into as much of a show as he could. Hoffman seized the opportunity to create controversy by appearing in court dressed in judge's robes, a Chicago Police uniform, and most infamously an American flag shirt. By simply broadcasting the image of himself wearing an American flag on television sets across the nation, Hoffman brought forth 'rage, disgust, and enthusiastic revolt' from all types of people. He essentially turned himself into a one-man advertisement intended to display the system's extreme intolerance of the counter-culture.

Hoffman's strength was bringing all types of people together--blacks, whites, Puerto Ricans, Hippies, Yippies-- even if they all had different outcomes in mind, and using his

outlandish and captivating personality to create a buzz around the nation. Even today the basics behind his rabble rousing are being used like the example of the Washington Tea Party, where, as long as there are cameras to bring the images of protestors into Americans homes, the protestors were able to create a compelling show in our nation's capital.

Numerous video clips of Hoffman are available on the internet, as no book can do his personality justice. He will forever be remembered as part of the sixties because of his exceeding ability to bring theater to life and turn life into theater during his protests.

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