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Yippie Workshop Speech

Abbie Hoffman

1968

Cops are like Yippies-you can never find the leaders... You just let 'em know that you're stronger psychically than they are. And you are, because you came here for nothin' and they're holdin' on to their fuckin' pig jobs 'cause of that little fuckin' paycheck and workin' themselves up, you know. Up to what? To a fuckin' ulcer. Sergeant. We got them by the balls. The whole thing about guerrilla theatre is gettin' them to believe it. Right.

Theatre, guerrilla theatre, can be used as defense and as an offensive weapon. I mean, I think like people could survive naked, see. I think you could take all your fuckin' clothes off, a cop won't hit ya. You jump in Lake Michigan, he won't go after you, but people are too chickenshit to do that. It can be used as an offensive and defensive weapon, like blood. We had a demonstration in New York. We had seven gallons of blood in little plastic bags. You know, if you convince 'em you're crazy enough, they won't hurt ya. With the blood thing, cop goes to hit you, right, you have a bag of blood in your hand. He lifts his stick up, you take your bag of blood and go whack over your own head. All this blood pours out, see. Fuckin' cop standin'. Now that says a whole lot more than a picket sign that

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Retrieved on December 12, 2010 from <https://web.archive.org/web/20101212205216/http://www.hippy.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=100>

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says end the war in wherever the fuck it is you know. I mean in that demonstration, there was a fuckin' war there. People came down and looked and said holy shit I don't know what it is, blood all over the fuckin' place, smokebombs goin' off, flares, you know, tape recorders with the sounds of machine guns, cops on horses tramplin' Christmas shoppers. It was a fuckin' war. And they say, right, I know what the fuck you're talkin' about. You're talkin' about war. What the fuck has a picket line got to do with war? But people that are into a very literal bag, like that heavy word scene, you know, don't understand the use of communication in this country and the use of media. I mean, if they give a ten-page speech against imperialism, everybody listens and understands and says yeah. But you throw fuckin' money out on the Stock Exchange, and people get that right away. And they say, right, I understand what that's about. And if they don't know what you're doin', fuck 'em. Who cares? Take this, see, you use blank space as information. You carry a sign that says END THE. You don't need the next word, you just carry a sign that says END, you know. That's enough. I mean the Yippie symbol is Y. So you say, why, man, why, why? Join the Y, bring your sneakers, bring your helmet, right, bring your thing, whatever you got. Y, you say to the Democrats, baby, Y that's not a V it's a Y. You can do a whole lotta shit. Steal it, steal the V, it's a Y. It's up the revolution like that. Keeping your cool and having good wits is your strongest defense.

If you don't want it on TV, write the word "FUCK" on your head, see, and that won't get on TV, right? But that's where theatre is at, it's TV. I mean our thing's for TV. We don't want to get on Meet the Press. What's that shit? We want Ed Sullivan, Johnny Carson show, we want the shit where people are lookin' at it and diggin' it. They're talking about reachin' the troops in Viet Nam so they write in The Guardian! [An independent radical newsweekly published in New York.] That's groovy. I've met a lot of soldiers who read The Guardian, you

know. But we've had articles in Jaguar magazine, Cavalier, you know, National Enquirer interviews the Queen of the Yippies, someone nobody ever heard of and she runs a whole riff about the Yippies and Viet Nam or whatever her thing is and the soldiers get it and dig it and smoke a little grass and say yeah I can see where she's at. That's why the long hair. I mean shit, you know, long hair is just another prop. You go on TV and you can say anything you want but the people are lookin' at you and they're lookin' at the cat next to you like David Susskind or some guy like that and they're sayin' hey man there's a choice, I can see it loud and clear. But when they look at a guy from the Mobilization [against the War in Vietnam] and they look at David Susskind, they say well I don't know, they seem to be doing the same thing, can't understand what they're doin'. See, Madison Avenue people think like that. That's why a lot SDS's don't like what we're doin'. 'Cause they say we're like exploiting; we're usin' the tools of Madison Ave. But that's because Madison Ave. is effective in what it does. They know what the fuck they're doin'. Meet the Press, Face the Nation, Issues and Answers-all those bullshit shows, you know, where you get a Democrat and a Republican arguin' right back and forth, this and that, this and that, yeah yeah. But at the end of the show nobody changes their fuckin' mind, you see. But they're tryin' to push Brillo, you see, that's good, you ought to use Brillo, see, and 'bout every ten minutes on will come a three-minute thing of Brillo. Brillo is a revolution, man, Brillo is sex, Brillo is fun, Brillo is bl bl bl bl bl bl bl bl. At the end of the show people ain't fuckin' switchin' from Democrat to Republicans or Commies, you know, the right-wingers or any of that shit. They're buying Brillo! And the reason they have those boring shows is because they don't want to get out any information that'll interfere with Brillo. I mean, can you imagine if they had the Beatles goin' zing zing zing zing zing zing zing, all that jump and shout, you know, and all of a sudden they put on an ad where the guy comes on very straight: "You ought to buy Brillo because it's

rationally the correct decision and it's part of the American political process and it's the right way to do things." You know, fuck, they'll buy the Beatles, they won't buy the Brillo.

We taped a thing for the David Susskind Show. As he said the word hippie, a live duck came out with "HIPPIE" painted on it. The duck flew up in the air and shat on the floor and ran all around the room. The only hippie in the room, there he is. And David went crazy. 'Cause David, see, he's New York Times head, he's not Daily News freak. And he said the duck is out and blew it. We said, we'll see you David, goodnight. He say, oh no no. We'll leave the duck in. And we watched the show later when it came on, and the fuckin' duck was all gone. He done never existed. And I called up Susskind and went quack quack quack, you motherfucker, that was the best piece of information: that was a hippie. And everything we did, see, non-verbally, he cut out. Like he said, "How do you eat?" and we fed all the people, you know. But he cut that out. He wants to deal with the words. You know, let's play word games, let's analyze it. Soon as you analyze it, it's dead, it's over. You read a book and say well now I understand it, and go back to sleep.

The media distorts. But it always works to our advantage. They say there's low numbers, right? 4000, 5000 people here. That's groovy. Think of it, 4000 people causin' all this trouble. If you asked me, red say there are four Yippies. I'd say we're bringin' another four on Wednesday. That's good, that freaks 'em out. They're lookin' around. Only four. I mean I saw that trip with the right wing and the Communist conspiracy. You know, you'd have 5000 people out there at the HUAC demonstrations eight years ago in San Francisco and they'd say there are five Communists in the crowd, you know. And they did it all. You say, man that's pretty cool. So you just play on their paranoia like that. Yeah, there're four guys out around there doin' a thing. So distortion's gonna backfire on them, 'cause all of a sudden Wednesday by magic there are gonna be 200,000 fuckin' people marchin' on that amphitheater. That's

The Conspiracy, 28 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Illinois. Taped
by Charles Harbutt]

how many we're gonna have. And they'll say, "Wow. From 4000 up to 200,000. Those extra four Yippies did a hell of a good job." I dig that, see. I'm not interested in explainin' my way of life to straight people or people that aren't interested. They never gonna understand it anyway and I couldn't explain it anyway. All I know is, in terms of images and how words are used as images to shape your environment, the New York Times is death to us. That's the worst fuckin' paper as far as the Yippies are concerned. They say, "Members of the so-called Youth International Party held a demonstration today." That ain't nothin'. What fuckin' people read that? They fall asleep. 'Cause the New York Times has all the news that's fit to print, you know, so once they have all the news, what do the people have to do? They just read the New York Times and drink their coffee and go back to work, you know. But the Daily News, that's a TV set. Look at it, I mean look at the picture right up front and the way they blast those headlines. You know, "Yippies, sex-loving, dope-loving, commie, beatnik, hippie, freako, weirdos." That's groovy, man, that's a whole life style, that's a whole thing to be, man. I mean you want to get in on that.

When we stormed the Pentagon, my wife and I we leaped over this fence, see. We were really stoned, I mean I was on acid flying away, which of course is an antirevolutionary drug you know, you can't do a thing on it. I've been on acid ever since I came to Chicago. It's in the form of honey. We got a lab guy doin' his thing. I think he might have got assassinated, I ain't seen him today. Well, so we jumped this here fence, see, we were sneaking through the woods and people were out to get the Pentagon. We had this flag, it said NOW with a big wing on it, I don't know. The right-wingers said there was definitely evidence of Communist conspiracy 'cause of that flag, I don't know what the fuck it was. So we had Uncle Sam hats on, you know, and we jumped over the fence and we're surrounded by marshals, you know, just closin' us in, about 30 marshals around us. And I plant the fuckin' flag and I said, "I claim this

land in the name of free America. We are Mr. and Mrs. America. Mrs. America's pregnant." And we sit down and they're goin' fucking crazy. I mean we got arrested and unarrested like six or seven times. And when we finally got arrested, it was under other names. I'm really a digger, I never was a Yippie. Was always a digger. So I said, you know, A. Digger, Abbie Digger, Mr. and Mrs. A. Digger. They say are you a boy or a girl, I say girl. Right. This is where I wanna go. I don't have to prove manliness by beatin' up 14-year-old girls with nightsticks, you know. Fuck 'em. But ideas, you just get stoned, get the ideas in your head and then do 'em. And don't bullshit. I mean that's the thing about doin' that guerrilla theatre. You be prepared to die to prove your point. You gotta die.

You know, what's life? Life's all that fun shit. Life's doin' what you want to do. Life's an American magazine, and if we hook them right, they're gonna give us 10,000 flowers that are gonna be thrown out of a helicopter tomorrow afternoon. But we'll only allow them to do it if they bring a newsreel person up in the helicopter with 'em. You know, to take the pictures. So we're workin' out that negotiation with Life magazine. 'Cause we said, you know, it's called Festival of Life, man, we named it after your magazine. I know that's immoral and I know that's cheatin' and that's stealin'. I wish I was a revolutionist. I wouldn't have these problems. A lot of revolutionists come here, they worry about parking the car. Where we gonna park the car, should we park it in a meter? The meter'll run out, we'll get a ticket. It's a weird revolution. Fuck it. We don't need cars; we travel in wheelbarrows. You see, just worry about your ass. Forget about your clothes, your money, you know, just worry about your ass and all the rest of us's asses. Cars don't mean shit. They grab our walkie-talkies you say yeah, there you go, take it, thank you, it was too heavy to carry.

Well, I've shot my load. I'm for ending the Yippie thing Thursday, killin' it all, 'cause I don't think people are Yippies anymore than they're Mobe or Motherfuckers or whatever

they are. They're just people. And I think we oughta burn all our Yippie buttons and laugh at the fuckin' press and say nyah nyah, we took you for a fuckin' ride. That's what we figured when we started this thing back in December-just a couple of speedfreaks hangin' around the cellar sayin' now how are we gonna do this Chicago trip? We ain't got no fuckin' money, you know, we ain't got no organization, we ain't got no constituency. We went to a New Left meeting, they said where's your constituency, you can't talk here, you know, you ain't against imperialism. I said, man, I don't want any pay toilets in this fuckin' country, I don't want to pay a dime to take a shit. SDS doesn't consider that relevant. That's the trouble with the Left you know. Did a trip on a Socialist Scholars Conference, a couple of Hell's Angels guys and I, we went up and had a capgun fight in the Hotel Hilton where the Left has their conferences, it's very interesting. So the heads of the Hilton and the heads of the socialists were gettin' together to decide how to throw us speedfreaks out of the fuckin' place, see. But they didn't, I mean, we stayed to do our thing. The problem with the Left is that there are 10,000 socialist scholars in this country and not one fuckin' socialist. I mean I talk to guys on The Guardian and they say yeah, we're working on a serious analysis of the Yippies. I say, that's pretty fuckin' cool, man, that's great. By that time there won't be any Yippies. I mean, what the fuck are you analyzin' for, man, get in and do it.

[The complete workshop speech from which this is taken is part of the evidence being used to indict Abbie Hoffman along with Rennie Davis, Dave Dellinger, John Froines, Torn Hayden, Bobby Seale, Jerry Rubin, and Lee Weiner for conspiracy to incite riots during the Democratic Convention. Their trial begins in Chicago on September 24, 1969 and each faces ten years in prison and \$20,000 fine. We are told that funds and other assistance are badly needed. Persons interested in contributing should make checks payable to the Chicago Defense Fund, c/o