

Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Growing Up as a New Left Jew
from [The Ballad of Ken and Emily: or, Tales from the Counterculture](#)

Abstract: In the summer of 1972, hundreds of young people flocked twice to Miami Beach to demonstrate against the Democrats and the Republicans, who both held their presidential nominating conventions there that year. I was one of them. I arrived in Miami Beach as a Jewish-American Yippie radical. At the time, however, I was more in touch with my Yippie radical half, having rejected my Jewish-American half because I associated it with my bourgeois suburban middle class capitalist upbringing, which I had rejected two years previously. Imagine my surprise to learn that Jews in America had a proud radical history. In this piece, which I wrote in 1983, I trace the history of the radical Jewish left in America, analyze Yippie from a Jewish perspective, and tell some good stories from the summer of 1972.

In the summer of 1972, hundreds of young people flocked twice to Miami Beach to demonstrate against the Democrats and the Republicans, who both held their presidential nominating conventions there that year. I was one of them.

I was already a seasoned revolutionary at the time. Two years before, during the campus activity that followed the Kent State murders, the police had drafted me into the Movement by arresting me at a peaceful demonstration at Michigan State University. The incident led directly to my dropping out of college to organize full-time against the war.

In the next two years, I became a community organizer and a staff member of East Lansing's underground newspaper, *Joint Issue*. I also travelled extensively throughout the country, making contact with other countercultural communities and their newspapers.

I visited Madison, Wisconsin in May of 1972. The Madison community, I discovered, had a reputation for being the most radical in the Midwest. In addition, their Youth International Party (Yippie) chapter was the most active in the country outside of New York, where Yippie was born. I happened to arrive as the Madison Y.I.P.s were planning a Smoke-In to be held that weekend on the Capitol lawn, and I plunged into the organizing activity. I was still in Madison when Nixon announced his blockade of Haiphong Harbor. In the ensuing riots, I was busted for what was by then my third time. The Y.I.P.s bailed me out. In the first meeting I attended following my release, I learned that several of them were getting ready to leave for Miami Beach to begin setting the stage for the summer demonstrations. I drove down with them.

I arrived in Miami Beach as a Jewish-American Yippie radical. At the time, however, I was more in touch with my Yippie radical half than my Jewish-American half. Over the period of the past two years, my war with the government combined with my regular use of drugs caused me to reject all values that I thought of as being associated with my bourgeois suburban middle class capitalist upbringing.

By the 1950s and early 1960s, the period when I grew up, American Jews, relative to their immediate past, had successfully assimilated themselves into mainstream WASP culture. So that we children wouldn't forget our Jewish heritage, then, it had to be shoved down our throats—that was how I perceived my three-times-a-week Hebrew classes—until my distaste for Judaism blended into my distaste for middle class society in general. Values that were decidedly Jewish were indistinguishable to me from values that were middle class. When I rejected the middle class, I rejected Judaism as well. What that meant mainly was that I stopped going to Temple and celebrating the holidays. I never forgot or denied that I was Jewish, however. In fact, as my countercultural radical consciousness grew, I was surprised and proud to notice that a far disproportionate number of radical leaders were also Jewish.

Two of the most well-known radical leaders were Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, originators of the Yippies. Abbie spent very little time in Miami Beach that summer; Jerry was there more often, not doing many of the menial organizing tasks but appearing in the demonstrations when he knew the media would be there. Nevertheless, I had the occasion to meet them both individually. Like me, they were both Jewish; also like me, they were non-practicing Jews, though they didn't necessarily hide their Jewishness.

Both men were by now media myths as well as authors of five books between them (Jerry: *Do It and We Are Everywhere*; Abbie: *Revolution for the Hell of It*, *Woodstock Nation*, and *Steal This Book*) and were in the process of co-authoring a sixth, *Vote*, along with Ed Sanders. I read all of their books as they appeared on the bookstands. I accepted parts and rejected others, but, overall, I loved the spontaneous style in which they were all written. I was educated by their ideas and energized by their humor. I chuckled at occasional references they made to their Jewish backgrounds, as if I were on the inside of an inside joke, but I didn't recall there being that many of them.

Why was that? I can think of two reasons. First, I myself, as I have written, rejected everything from my past that smacked of middle class values, including the only brand of Judaism I knew. Consequently, I wasn't looking for references to it and, therefore, might have missed some when they appeared.

Secondly, having grown up in a culture-blend of WASPness and Jewishness, I often didn't know where one ended and the other began. You mean *schmuck* is Yiddish?—I didn't know that until I got to college.

Four years after the war ended, as I emerged from a nosedive into my internal psyche, I experienced a longing to get back to my roots. I had gone through such cataclysmic changes during first the Movement years and next the Me Decade that I felt a need to explore my past in order to get a perspective on my present. I found not only that my basic feelings for the values of the materialistic middle class were still of revulsion but that this revulsion had infected all aspects of my life, including those parts that were Jewish. I became newly interested in my Jewish heritage and began to look for Jewish signs and references everywhere.

Three years ago (1980), Abbie published his autobiography, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*. Scattered throughout it were tributes to and attacks upon his Jewish past, as well as a wide array of Yiddish words used so casually, and not even always as the zinger to make a point or to be a punchline, that I wondered how aware he was that not everyone would know what he meant or that he was calling upon his Jewish past for material.

Here are just a few examples:

[Recalling an interview somebody did with his father] “He was such a bright student,” my father said. “He could have been somebody, a doctor or a professor—now we have to read the papers to see which jail he’s in.”

[His Uncle Schmully] He was a Jew accepted and liked in the most redneck Polish-Irish town imaginable. They even made him head of the American Legion Post. He had a pink Cadillac and an old black Labrador retriever and everyone thought he’d die a bachelor. One day, however, he showed up with this snazzy dame with flaming red hair and a thick Irish brogue and announced they were getting married. Well the family didn’t exactly start throwing mazeltovs around. Marrying a goy was equal to getting pregnant before marriage or going bankrupt. It was worse, even, and Jinny was the shicksiest shicksah you could imagine.

It’s not to be found in the Guinness Book of Records, but I was the only Jew in the history of Classical High School to be expelled.

[At Worcester Academy, where he graduated] The Jewish barrier had been cracked and Yids were pouring into the place like the eleventh plague, much to the chagrin of the old Yankee traditionalists.

[His father] always blamed Brandeis [University] for my corruption. Be it divorce, dope, hippies, or schvartzes, he always ended up cursing Brandeis.

[Abraham] Maslow [his professor at Brandeis] is the legitimate father of the human-potential movement currently cashing in on his ideas. A worthy bearer of the name Abraham.

[Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl”] was inspired by the gods. Just as they had spoken to Isaiah and Jeremiah, they talked to Ginsberg and Ginsberg took his poetry into the streets. Jews don’t have saints, they just have Ginsbergs every once in a while.

I reject the notion of “modesty” as something invented by the WASPs to keep the Jews out of the banking industry.

[Woodstock was] a musical event not equaled since Joshua fought the battle of Jericho.

I became interested in the influence of Judaism and Jewishness on the writings of both Abbie and Jerry and also in the influence of their writings on Jewish youth. With those interests in mind, I reread their earlier books. In addition, I read all their later books, with two exceptions, both of which were unavailable to me: Jerry's *War Between the Sheets* (co-authored with Mimi Leonard) and Abbie's *To America with Love* (co-authored with wife Anita). This paper is a report of my findings. In addition, I have included observations from the various times I met them.

My experience in Miami Beach is a good place to begin, in part because that was the period in my life when I first met them both, but also because of symbolic reasons that didn't become evident to me until recently.

An issue in the early days of the summer revolved around the attempts of us young people to convince the city council to grant us park space so we could have a place to sleep at night after spending the day peacefully redressing the government for grievances and the counter-attempts of local right-wing elements to instill fear into the hearts of the local citizens, many of whom were Jewish and whose average age was 63.

Alarmist cries of "Remember Chicago" conjured up images of dirty hippies, trashing in the streets, and destruction of property. Old people began to avoid us. More than once, a senior citizen walking toward me on the sidewalk crossed the street so she could avoid passing me. We were shocked and angered, but, more than that, we were humbled. Our youthful arrogance had prevented us from seeing old people—especially Jews, whose stereotype had them all being rich, and especially in Miami Beach, where everyone was thought to be rich whether they were Jewish or not—as an oppressed minority.

Indeed, as Abbie and Jerry wrote in *Vote*:

Behind the neon and the glitter lie the tears. Even Miami Beach has its slum and palm tree ghetto. Shielded from the myth of fantasyland lies the reality: thousands of middle-, retired-, and working-class Jews suffering in overcrowded and underserved conditions while living the last years of their lives on shrinking fixed incomes. There must be more at the end of life's rainbow than a cold platter of cottage cheese and a stack of unpaid medical bills.

We realized that most of these old people had probably never met a hippie other than through the media, let alone touched one, so we began consciously to relate to them. We visited the parks where they spent their afternoons and the free lunch programs where many of them ate their only meal of the day. We sang songs, spoke, and passed out leaflets telling who we were and why we were there, and we voluntarily changed the credibility slogan to "Don't trust anyone between the ages of 35 and 60."

We consciously began to project a new myth—youth and senior power. A Yippie-yenta pact.... We marched arm-in-arm with senior citizens to protest an anti-Semitic country club. [My note: We told the media we were going to “circumcise LaGorce Country Club.”]

Through it all, we petitioned them for signatures to demand that city council give us a campsite. We won and were given Flamingo Park, one of the senior citizen hangouts. During the days that followed, they offered their homes to us as refuge from the teargas that filled the streets and they fed us chicken soup to replenish our energy. They visited us every evening.

The culmination of our symbolic alliance between young and old took place at Lummus Park on the Sunday before the Democratic Convention began. There, Yippie sponsored a “Wedding of the Generations.” The first highlight of the affair came from Abbie, who delivered a Yiddish poem, “Nixon Genug,” that only he and the senior citizens understood. Then, Jewish poet Allen Ginsberg, acting as “rabbi,” married us. We young people only saw the wedding as a symbolic joining of old people in general and young people in general. The Jewish symbols were used not to alienate non-Jews but rather out of respect for our allies at the park that day, nearly all of whom happened to be Jewish. It wasn’t until years later, when I began studying about the history of the leftist Jewish movement in the United States, that I discovered another level of symbolism.

The classic study by Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, traces the roots of Jewish-American radicalism to czarist Russia in the middle of last century. There, Jews had lived together since the late 1700s in harsh conditions, isolated from mainstream Russian and Polish life, in the Pale of Settlement, a crowded though not entirely Jewish ghetto area of unproductive land consisting of fifteen Russian provinces and ten adjoining Polish provinces that the czar had taken over in three successive partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, and 1795).

Under Alexander II, who reigned from 1856 to 1881, a limited number of Jews were allowed for the first time to enter institutions of higher learning and to live outside the Pale. Those who took advantage of the opportunity were exposed to ideas in the secular world that were not prevalent in the Pale. One idea was socialism. Its universality appealed to Jews, who saw in it a philosophy that accepted people for who they were and not for what ethnic or religious label came attached to their names.

This period in Jewish history was known as the *haskalah*, or Enlightenment. It had begun in the German-Jewish community; now Russian Jews joined the movement. “A major aim of the Haskalah,” Liebman writes, “was to secularize and modernize Jewry [as] the solution of the Jewish problem.” Abandonment of certain customs that isolated Jews from Christians was advocated. Yiddish, the language of the Jewish ghetto inhabitants, was seen as a “jargon” and was shunned in favor of Russian, whose mass appeal made it more conducive to their new universalist beliefs.

The rabbinate, one of the chief agencies of social control along with the wealthy elite, responded to

it by becoming more traditionalist. They “drew the lines of religious conformity ever tighter,” according to Liebman. “The slightest deviations from custom were interpreted as acts of heresy.”

These actions by the rabbis served merely to further alienate the Jewish intellectuals from their fellow Jews. Radical and socialist writings by Bakunin and Plekhanov increased this distance. Another idea finding widespread acceptance in intellectual circles was populism, which idealized the Russian peasants and their communal institutions. Thousands of students, Jewish and non-Jewish, began a return to the land.

For the Jews, however, this return led them to the discovery that the peasants were anti-Semitic and didn't want them there. Then, on April 15, 1881, a series of pogroms began. A year later, the state issued the May Laws, which banned Jews from living in villages, even in the Pale, stole their land, and made it illegal for Jews to conduct business on Sundays and Christian holidays. The secular Jewish intellectuals were horrified by the lack of support from their non-Jewish peers, who had been espousing equality. The incidents awakened them to the realization that, in the eyes of the Russian non-Jews, socialist and non-socialist Jews were all one people, and their Jewishness was their major defining characteristic.

Armed with their socialist universalist world outlook but confined now to the Jewish ghetto, Jewish intellectuals made peace with Yiddish in order to better organize the working class Jews. “Their decision to learn and speak Yiddish had implications for communication far beyond that of learning the meaning of words,” Liebman writes. “The workers were provided with the example of highly educated young men and women coming amongst them and struggling to learn their language. This action was probably almost as important for them as the message that these radicals preached.... It was truly an historic moment for both.”

The result was a strong socialist subculture of Jewish radical intelligentsia and Jewish masses bonded together by the Yiddish language. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, during and after the pogroms, masses of Russian Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States and were greeted by conditions that were not quite as anti-Semitic as were the pogroms of Russia but that were just as oppressive capitalistically. Drawing on their experience in Russia, they organized again and spawned a Jewish-American radical experience that has continued throughout this century. The Yiddish language was a bond that kept them together for three generations but that has now all but disappeared.

Many of the young Jewish radicals of the early 1900s retired years later and moved to Miami Beach. Abbie would later pay tribute to the language (and, perhaps, to himself as well) when, in *Square Dancing in the Ice Age*, he wrote:

I've always been fascinated by Yiddish as the language of survival. Half insults, half complaints. Its subtleties, its built-in ironies (all Yiddish paragraphs end with a question mark), the historical road it has traveled, have often made me think the person who could tell my story better than anyone was Isaac Bashevis Singer.

But when he recited his poem in Yiddish, he was linking not just young and old—which was the external symbolism—but also the Jewish New Left, for whom Yiddish is the language of their ancestors, and the Jewish Old Left, their ancestors. In *Vote*, Abbie and Jerry dig into the internal symbolism:

Jewish Yippies discover Jewish grandparents in Miami Beach.

It was a beautiful story which turned the summer into a schmaltzy musical comedy instead of a violent tragedy.

We got stoned and went to see Fiddler on the Roof with the old people. Outside on the street we danced old folk dances.

Both Abbie and Jerry trace their own families back to Russia. In looking backward—and upward, from his position as an underground fugitive—Abbie was still able to write, in *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*, with the humor he mastered in the sixties. For example, in recalling his grandparents, he writes (first of his *zaddie*—his grandfather):

Dies in my arms mumbling ancient Hebraic chants leaving me his entire estate which totaled sixty-four dollars. My grandmother is a rock. She just celebrated her 98th birthday and comes from a town in Russia that hasn't even existed for sixty-five years. Once she called my brother to her bedside and asked him to tell me that her brother had been a leading Bolshevik in the Russian Revolution and had been killed by czarist troops. Apparently she had guarded this secret with ghetto silence for over a half century and now that I was underground wanted me to know. I took it as a great compliment because she dismissed all my *mishigas* with a scowl and a wave of her arm. At least I think that was her attitude. Jews survive on ambiguous gestures. Dismissal could have been acceptance. Or both.

That ethnic humor is evident also in his most recent book, *Square Dancing in the Stone Age*, a collection of essays, also written while he was underground. In one essay, “The Guy From Plains,” he tries to defuse the good-old-boy image of Plains, Georgia:

This is not without precedent. For centuries, there was such a town in Poland (where else?) It was called Chelm. In actuality Chelm had a pretty rough history, being sacked repeatedly by the cossacks and finally obliterated by Hitler's Nazis. In Jewish folklore, Chelm played an entirely different role: It was strictly Yiddish hicksville, the place where all the country numb-numbs sat around racking their brains, trying to shortcut their way to the big time. Hundreds of tales have been recorded and passed down from generation to generation concerning the schleps from Chelm. In fact, all you have to do to break the ice with some of the old-time Jews on the Lower East Side of New York is to ask them if they know a good story

about Chelm. If you do, prepare yourself for some hearty laughs.

Now I propose we join together to make Plains, USA our Chelm.

Jerry tells his story in his autobiography, *Growing (Up) at Thirty-Seven*. In this book, his style is vastly different from Abbie's, and from his own early books, in that it is much more serious and introspective than when he wrote as a Yippie. For instance, in the first chapter, using as his take-off point the summer of 1972, he says, "No one seemed to see my pain, my anxieties, my terror—all they saw was an 'image.'" He exaggerates somewhat. At least one person noticed.

We were still fighting with city council at the time over the issue of a campsite. The federal government's response to the debate was to deny us money for camping space and porta-johns, claiming none was available. Not unnoticed, however, was the fact that they were pouring megabucks into the police department in the form of guns, helicopters, and extra people power.

So, to kick off our summer campaign, we planned a march "to protest the militarization of Saigon and Miami Beach." As Yippie media coordinator, I repeated that phrase about forty times the day before the march, until I had called all the names from my phone list of media people who were streaming into the city. That night, Attorney General John Mitchell's wife Martha eluded her FBI captors long enough to call UPI reporter Helen Thomas and complain that she was being held a political prisoner. When the news broke, we immediately changed the theme and staged, instead, a "Free Martha Mitchell" march.

At the organizing meeting that evening at the Albion Hotel, where the Yippie media stars and their best friends were staying, I talked briefly with Jerry. I was a kid then, relative to any level of radical sophistication, and I was slightly overawed in the presence of a living myth, but even from that perspective I noticed that he looked somewhat forlorn. He was 32 years old at the time and obviously, in a culture that didn't trust anyone over 30, feeling old. When he said to me, in a way that made me feel somewhat like he was talking out loud to himself, "It's kind of scary to feel your life has peaked at 28" (his age during the Chicago '68 demonstrations), I felt sad. The next I heard of him after that summer, he was going in and out of every therapy of the Me Decade that he could get his head into.

Growing (Up) at Thirty-Seven is the literary result of his odyssey. The book is positive-sounding and refreshing for its candor—even if sometimes it is smothering and confessional for the same reason. He recalls vividly his Jewish upbringing but he does so with the pain and sadness one would expect from someone who has just spent a concentrated period of time dredging up blocked memories. A few examples:

[About his move to San Francisco to find himself] What I missed most in San Francisco was Jewish soul. San Francisco is a WASP town. Even its Jews don't act like Jews. I longed for an intellectual New York Jewish friend almost as much as chicken soup.

[Describing therapy session where he is attacking his mother] I took your bullshit about being a victim, oppressed by two thousand years of suffering, and built myself a political trap full of self-righteousness. I became an orthodox Jewish yippie rabbi with heavy morality trips JUST LIKE YOU MUMMY except that I did it rebelliously, spitting in your face.

My family goes to the synagogue. Grandma goes upstairs to join the women, who are segregated from the men. The women sit quietly upstairs, observing the men downstairs who are solemnly listening to the prayers as the sacred Torah is revealed. Even though I am only seven, I am allowed to join my grandfather and father downstairs. During the break I go upstairs to visit with Grandma. She is not permitted to come to the men's section because she is a woman—passive, second-class, only a spectator by the rules of the religion which she deeply believes in. She believes in her own inferiority.

But my grandfather, in the guise of love, was really programming me to be just like him: to believe that my race and religion were superior to all others; to fear and distrust a paranoid world that murdered Jews.

[Yippie politics] The moment we got described as violent traitors, we reappeared as good Jewish boys. The moment we were accepted as good Jewish boys, we turned again into obnoxious radicals.

[During his trip to Israel in the early 1960s] I saw Jews from the Arab world mistreated and dominated. Israelis openly described Arabs the way whites talked about blacks in America.

I respected the Israelis as people, but I felt frustrated whenever politics came up. The very things I was running away from in America I found in Israel. My heart was Jewish but my head leaned toward internationalism.

Like Abbie, he writes of his Russian roots, but, again, in a much more serious vein:

I learned devotion and intensity from my grandfather. He gave me my first political education, explaining the difference between those who work for a living and those who own. When I was a kid, I hated my grandfather spending hours in the synagogue doing nothing but saying the same prayer all day, over and over again, shaking his body back and forth.

Now I see my grandfather as a high Zen monk emptying his mind by repeating the same mantra.... While praying to "God," he was really getting high, losing his ego, dancing in cosmic consciousness. I extended my rebellion against my grandfather to

a distaste for all rituals and religious activity, even meditation.... Now that I see my grandfather as a man living in a totalitarian world of one consciousness, I can appreciate his getting high through religion and not allow that path to be blocked for me. I carried my grandfather's faith and intensity with me into political activity of the 1960's.

And:

Not only did I discover that I am my grandmother and grandfather but I began to see that in my blood are the values and beliefs of nineteenth-century Russia! Here I am—a modern, hip, radical yippie. But if you look close, what I really am is a nineteenth-century Russian orthodox religious Jew. That is my programming.

Jerry represents that element of the New Left that burned out and submerged itself in the Me Decade. Abbie, forced underground to avoid being jailed on a cocaine bust, spent the Me Decade as a fugitive. As he writes in *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*:

Forced to be an outlaw, I never had to face the life crisis confronting my comrades. Either that or I had to face it in such totality that the anxieties of the seventies passed overhead. It's as if being underground helped me escape the radioactive clouds of neurosis polluting the atmosphere. The government solved my identity problem by insisting that I become someone else if I was to survive. They should know I'm surviving and then some.

A tendency now is to see Jerry, who came back to work as a Wall Street analyst and now brings hip businesspeople together as head of Jerry Rubin's Business Networking Salon, as somewhat of a sellout; Abbie, on the other hand, is still working for popular causes, especially environmental (At a recent talk at Michigan State University, he declared that he was "probably the first Jew since Noah to be interested in water conservation"—stretching a point, of course, since Noah came before Abraham, who the Bible records as being the first Jew).

In response to this charge, it seems we must first discount some of Jerry's apologies and admissions of sin and simplistic generalities. After all, how often is it that people who undergo an intense conversion experience, such as Jerry did in his therapies, exaggerate newfound ideas or insights almost to the total exclusion of all those previously held? Jews have long noticed that Jews By Choice—the modern-day term for non-Jews who convert to Judaism—often observe customs and laws more devoutly than those Jews who were born into the religion. Statements such as "Money for me is freedom," then, sound like they are coming from one whose psyche is on the extreme conservative end of the pendulum after having arrived from the extreme radical end.

At present, as seen in their latest writings and current jobs, Jerry appears to be more inner-directed while Abbie is more outer-directed. Jerry is struggling with himself, Abbie is struggling with the world, while both are at least aware of the existence of the other side and are probably seeking a

balance between the two extremes. For instance, whereas Jerry told young people to kill their parents in *Do It*, his first book, his autobiography is dedicated to his own parents. In Abbie's autobiography, he reveals an inner side of himself that is sensitive and personal in addition to being humorous. However, when he emerges as Abbie Hoffman/Barry Freed, he rejoins the college circuit but refuses to answer questions about himself. Is he merely organizing in the best way he knows how or is he trying to recapture the excitement of being a myth in the sixties that Jerry is trying to grow beyond? Or, on the other hand, is Jerry trying to escape the memory of it, as so many sixties burnouts have done?

Another question worth asking, because in the sixties the two of them were seen by the media almost as one individual and now they can be seen as symbolic representatives of the two behavioral extremes of an individual: Is there tension between the two? In their writings, they admit to constant tensions throughout their relationship, even during their Yippie days, while still referring to each other in friendly terms. However, in person, at least Abbie exhibits some antagonism. At a private reception after a May 1982 talk at Michigan State (during which he said, on the subject of abortion, that "Jews don't believe a fetus has life until it gets its graduate degree"), he was heard to say to the hostess, who owns a catering business, "Jerry Rubin is a caterer, too. He caters to schmucks." Hard to analyze perhaps—witnesses were confounded. Nevertheless, out of deference to them both, it might be seen that the ideal revolutionary individual is a composite of the personal and the political, as represented by Jerry and Abbie. Like the head and tail of a dog, they are both part of the complete animal, but only one can face forward at a time.

In many ways, Yippie was a Jewish phenomenon. Or, as Jerry wrote in *We Are Everywhere*, in explaining about the time they ran a pig for President, "Nobody objected on the basis of pigs not being kosher, even though yippies are Jewish hippies."

No doubt he was sacrificing political purity there for the sake of a humorous ethnic one-liner. I believe as an overall philosophy they were speaking not as Jews per se but, like our college-educated forebears who lived under Alexander II, as universalist secular socialists. For instance, as Jerry says in the same book:

The religions of the past, Catholic, Christian, and Jewish, are hypocritical creeds used to justify white men's murder and to confuse the poor. We are all refugees from Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism. We come to each other to create a new religion in the streets.

Nevertheless, this universality was presented from a Jewish point of view. In rereading the early Yippie books, I realized the subtle appeal their message had to me. Non-Jewish youth of the counterculture could read of Jewish experiences and translate them into their own. Young Jews didn't have to translate because in many cases their experiences were our own.

A few examples:

—from *Woodstock Nation* (Abbie)

[At Woodstock] Were we establishing a liberated zone or entering a detention camp? Like dig it baby. When the Jews entered the ovens at Dachau, the Nazis played hip Wagner music, passed out flowers and handed out free bars of soap.

[Arm wrestling with MIT Professor Jerome Lettvin] That was some trip. He weighed about twice as much as me and smoked a cigar while he grunted and I swore out phrases at him in Yiddish like *alta kaka* as I strained.

—from *Do It* (Jerry)

[About the pre-1950s generation] They were alive when Germany created concentration camps for Jews and other troublemakers.
Will they send us, their own children, to concentration camps?

[About his bodyguard, Bob, who was later discovered to be an undercover cop] Bob kept telling me to eat and sleep well.

He told me to take care of my health.

He was like a Jewish mother.

—from *Revolution for the Hell of It* (Abbie)

[Describing an experience at the Ninth Precinct in New York] Captain Fink is Jewish sometimes, just like me. Once I said to him what my relatives always said to me: “What’s a nice Jewish guy like you doing in a place like this.” I like to talk Yiddish in front of him, especially if there are goy cops in hearing distance. He doesn’t understand Yiddish. I speak only a few lines but he thinks I’m a Talmudic scholar.

[Describing the hearings before House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)] Wednesday we broke for Yom Kippur or the World Series, and the committee carried on in closed session.

—from *We Are Everywhere* (Jerry)

Making pot illegal is like telling Jews matzoh is now illegal.

[About getting a prison haircut] Three black sergeants came up to our tier to tell us that we had visitors downstairs. I got a funny feeling in my stomach, like a Jew being told, “It’s just a shower.”

It is the Jew who should always be on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the underdog, the wretched of the earth, because of the Jewish experience. And thousands of young ex-American ex-Jews are. Three of the kids killed at Kent State were Jews. An unusually high proportion of hippies and revolutionaries are Jews. American Jews are losing their kids at a faster rate than any other religious or social group 'cause young Jews are becoming hippies and yippies.

If Moses were alive today, he'd be an Arab guerrilla.

In addition to the Jewish perspective of Yippie's key spokespeople, particular elements of its philosophy were decidedly Jewish in origin. A case could even be made that "One God" is the original universalist idea in the Western world (In the Eastern world, the zen idea of "It all comes together" is comparable). Unfortunately, long ago that One God became synonymous with "The God of the Jews," thereby sacrificing its universal appeal.

However, certainly the leaderlessness and anarchism of Yippie must have appealed to young Jews. After all, aren't Jews the original anarchists? Having a leader as amorphous and all-Being as the Jewish concept of God is like having no leader. Again, it's the old zen thing of opposites coming together. In this case, God is everywhere. Therefore, God is in all of us. Therefore, we are all leaders. Therefore, there are no leaders. This concept is the essence of Yippie. As Jerry wrote in *Do It*, "There is no such thing as a YIPPIE FOLLOWER. There are 646 1/2 million different kinds of yippies and the definition of a yippie is that he is a LEADER. Yippies are Leaders without followers."

When Abraham rebelled against his father he became the first yippie.

The Old Testament, unlike the New Testament, is the story of a people with no permanent leaders, only great men and women who rose to the occasion during their time. Even Moses only led the Jews to the Promised Land. It was Joshua who led them into it.

"Today's leader is tomorrow's scapegoat," Jerry writes in *We Are (God Is) Everywhere*. "The movement must be protected against yesterday's leaders. Every new struggle pushes new leaders forward."

Abbie and Jerry are yesterday's leaders. Clearly, the highpoint of that period when their names dominated the national media was the Chicago Conspiracy Trial that, because it resulted from the police riots that took place there outside the Democratic National Convention in 1968, became the symbol of New Left oppression in the sixties.

In *We Are Everywhere*, the least funny but also the angriest and most powerful of the early yippie books, Jerry gives an in-depth analysis of the trial, which he called "a Jewish morality play" because of its strong Jewish cast of leading actors—Judge Julius Hoffman ("B'nai B'rith Man of

the Year”); assistant prosecutor Richard Schultz (“who made our indictment and conviction his passion”); yippie defendants Abbie, Jerry, and Lee Weiner; and their lawyers Leonard Weinglass and Bill Kunstler:

We knew that Jews are an oppressed minority—murdered, jailed, and ostracized across the world for 2,000 years.

But Schultz went after us with all the fanaticism of a Nazi prosecutor upholding law and order.

We kept reminding Julius that everything done to the Jews in Nazi Germany was legal. Judges in black robes committed crimes in the name of the State.

Do Jews become free when they put on those black robes and become those judges? Or become prosecutors for the State?

Here was Jewish Schultz doing all the work for [prosecutor Thomas] Foran, a Catholic and his political ambitions, and helping clear the political grudges of Mayor Daley, an anti-Semite.

Somewhere, somehow, we tried to reach Julius and Schultz on the only thing we had in common with them: our historical Jewishness, the role of the oppressed in history.

.... I personally feel very torn about being born Jewish.

I know it made me feel like a minority or outsider in Amerika from my birth and helped me become a revolutionary. I am shocked at Julius Hoffman and Richard Schultz ‘cause they try to be so Amerikan. Don’t they know they’re still Jewish no matter how much “power” or “security” in Amerika they have?

The Yippies never got through to Judge Hoffman and Assistant Prosecutor Schultz, of course, but they did turn the trial into the most outrageous one in recorded history. Its more memorable moments are recorded in *The Tales of Hoffman*, an abridged transcript of the proceedings. In it, Abbie and Jerry hammer away at the Jewish consciousness of Hoffman and Schultz. Included is the most often remembered remark of the entire trial, Abbie’s outburst to the judge: “Your idea of justice is the only obscenity in the room. You *schtunk*. *Vo den? Shanda fur de goyem*.” [Which means, roughly, “Hatchet man for the WASP power structure.”]

When in 1972 Yippie became a formal organization, with membership lists and a monthly newspaper, it was clear that its heyday was past. Since then, the words and writings of Abbie and Jerry have not had the impact they had in the sixties. Jerry, for one, is somewhat of a pariah in the radical community because of his apparent embracing of capitalism. Abbie, on the other hand, is

still organizing but he is attracting smaller crowds on the campus circuit and blaming it on apathy rather than on his diminishing drawing power.

During their heyday, they spoke as universalists to young people of all religions. They didn't emphasize their Jewishness but they acknowledged it when necessary to make a political point. Their casual use of Jewish ethnic humor is indicative of the Jews' relatively comfortable position in mainstream American society.

But they also spoke specifically to young Jews. Where Philip Roth de-intellectualized the Jewish fictional character by giving him a sex life, Abbie and Jerry, through both their writings and their actions, de-intellectualized the image of real Jews by giving them spontaneity and allowing them to demand instant gratification, reactions to the middle class syndrome of preparing for the future.

Like their Jewish literary forebears, Abraham Cahan (*The Rise of David Levinsky*) and Michael Gold (*Jews Without Money*), they were political organizers and radicals first and authors second, and the narrative style they used as their form of political commentary provides us with valuable records of the time.

Finally, they both have gone through changes over the years, but their Jewish roots continue to manifest themselves in their writings and speeches of the present.