

# I Don't Want To Save The World:

A Conversation With America Hoffman by Keith E Lee, [April 20, 2016](#)



America Hoffman at home 2014.

Within the first five minutes of our talk America tells me he trusts me. I find that extraordinary and know it carries a certain amount of weight. After all, America Hoffman is the son of radical Yippie founders Abbie and Anita Hoffman. He was just a infant, when on August 28th, 1973 his father was arrested for selling cocaine to an undercover police officer. Facing a mandatory 25 years to life imprisonment Abbie went underground in 1974 to avoid prosecution for what was likely a set up to put the influential leader of the New Left out of commission for good. When Abbie was a fugitive Anita was a struggling single mother on welfare learning to organize a poor womens' movement, while being harassed and surveilled by the FBI, the IRS and local authorities. I wouldn't blame the man for being a bit paranoid. But talking to America was like meeting an old friend. In a rambling three hour conversation we discussed a wide range of topics: from tales of hanging out with El Duce of his beloved Mentors, to time serving on a grand jury and his faith in that system. Here are the highlights from the first interview he's given in a very long time.

**Keith E. Lee: So, I understand your name is a source of confusion for some people.**

**America Hoffman:** I was a crib mate with Tupac Shakur, and he had an interesting name. His mother and my mother were pregnant at the same time. My mother told me she was going to name me Tupac, but we didn't grow up together or anything. I was named america with a lowercase "a" and it's that way on my birth

certificate. Sometimes you'll see it spelled 'amerika' with a "k" like the Franz Kafka novel, but that is incorrect. It was a positive thing, it wasn't anti-American or anything. When I was born my dad got a Presidential blessing; a letter saying, 'Congratulations on the birth of your son.' from Richard Nixon, which he was very proud of. My early childhood is in the book *To America with Love: Letters From the Underground*. It's difficult for me to read. I have a hard time reading about Abbie. I did read *Revolution for the Hell of It*, but since he's been dead... I like the autobiography [*Soon to be a Major Motion Picture*], but I have a difficult time reading it because I miss him. It's very strange to read his books.

### **You were sill an infant when he went underground.**

I believe I was two or three when he went underground. We had a baby sitter who was going through our garbage and mail and everything once he left, and she turned out to be an FBI agent. That's when my mother decided to leave. See, they'd set it up so I could visit my dad. My parents had always planned that I'd get to see him. We arranged trips to visit. I visited him in Mexico a few times. In order to do that, and to keep the heat off us, we changed our names too. And my name was Alan. I remember being very young in the house that we were living in in the North Hamptons. I was very young and he asked me, 'How do you feel about changing your name? What name would you like?' and I said, 'junior' because he'd called me that before. But he said that they were going to call me Alan because my grandfather's name was

Alan. I was probably barely able to talk, but I remember the conversation. I remember being told that my name was changed, but I really didn't understand the impact. I was Alan until I was about 14-years-old.

And then I went to a new high school, and that was where I saw the first punk rockers I'd ever seen in my life. And there was a really cute punk rock girl in my class. They did this thing in English class where they said, 'come up to the front of the class and say a little bit about yourself'. I think I was in the ninth grade, probably 15, and I just impulsively said, 'My name is actually America Hoffman', and then I told the story of my name. And then the cute punk rock girl in the class smiled and seemed to kind of dig my name. So I decided to keep it. Sometimes I think my entire name and identity was to impress a girl. And I never did hook up with her. So it didn't even work out, and here I am; I've been America for 30 years since...just to get the girl.

**Maybe you'd still be called Alan if it wasn't for that little punk rock girl.**

Well, the name Alan, it was almost like it was a different person for me. I remember my mom calling out that name on the playground: 'Alan! Come on in!' She had a very strong Long Island Jewish accent and so she sorta trawled that name out. I love my mom. I think she's great. So the name had other connotations. Alan was kind of the nerdy scholastic side and then I became

America — a complete bad ass at 15. I spell my name with a capital “A” because I was used to signing Alan with the first letter capitalized.

**Your mother was a big part of the whole Yippie thing, wasn't she?**

Yes, she was. She also founded the Downtown Welfare Advocate Center in Manhattan.

**Did she espouse Yippie ideas or try to pass that on to you as a child?**

I definitely heard about the patriarchy. And, you know, just how bad men were. I was told that Judaism was this hard core patriarchy. I don't want to say she was anti-Jew or anything. She grew up in the nineteen fifties and sixties and times were a lot different. I do think a lot of the counterculture in the sixties was heroic. I think it had to happen and I don't think it's taken our country in the wrong direction or anything. I really love Marshall McLuhan and I feel like [what happened in] the sixties had a lot to do with television, and especially live television. Everybody sort of springing up all over the country and becoming hippies. These exoduses of people from all over the country to places like Berkeley and San Francisco. The whole movement. I think television played a major role in it.

**Absolutely. I think it was very media-driven. And I think your father's work was very much inspired by Marshall McLuhan.**

Yeah, and the Diggers, and some of the old left criticized him, saying, 'He's a master at television. He's a master of the sound bite.' These were new phenomena back then. He was very sharp, quick, witty. He knew how to say a very short sentence that would resonate with a lot of people. He used TV very well.

**People can criticize the sound bite or slogan as being simplistic, but it's an effective way to get a message across to a large amount of people. And that was one way your father and other luminaries from that period did it, and it still resonates to this day.**

I also don't think the media was very polished back then. They showed a lot of footage of the Vietnam war which I don't think would get shown now. I don't think the modern media would do that. They're a much more loyal machine now. I think the entire counterculture happened because of the media and live television.



Abbie, America and Anita Hoffman 1973.

**I understand your father was interested in MTV when it first came out.**

We saw the first video, which I think was “Video Killed the Radio Star”. I was at his apartment in New York and we turned on the television, and MTV was on and he said, “*This is going to be huge.*” And of course it was. My dad had these David Bowie videos that I just went apeshit for. The only way I could describe it was like *Yellow Submarine* or something. They weren’t really common

back then. My favorite was “Ashes to Ashes” because it was so psychedelic — it just made sense to me. I liked things that were goofy and weird and strange. And this was before I was doing psychedelic drugs. (laughs) That’s the stuff I grew up with.

I learned how to read from R. Crumb comics. *Big Ass Comics* were like my *See Spot Run* books. And I don’t know if that warped me or if I was already jaded to all the extreme sexual content. By the time I was six I’d already seen everything.

**That’s pretty advanced. I’m a big fan of Crumb’s work, but I don’t think most parents would want their 6-year-old reading that stuff.**

I don’t know if they even knew I was reading them. I remember those vulture women with the really big booties. Those were in my dreams as a kid.”

**Wow! That’s scary.**

I wanted to live in that world. Those were my dreamscapes.

**Have you ever met Robert Crumb?**

No, I’ve never met him. I like his art now. I looked at his *The Book of Genesis* and I like it because I look like those guys. I’m that Hebrew looking, so I feel like there’s definitely some history.

**It seems like he's got a natural attraction to Jewish women.**

He's been around it more than me. I'm not very well versed in Judaism or knowing them. My mother was Buddhist and I was probably more in touch with Thích Nhất Hạnh than knowing anything about the Bible or Judaism. I'm very much an outsider to it, but I have all these traits that are exactly like other Jews. So, I want to say I like them, but I've never felt like I'm part of the people...whatever the hell that means. You don't see a lot in construction. I'm sure there are some, but usually I'm the very Semitic-looking person at my jobs and I have to constantly say that I don't have a nationality, that I'm American. I think that might be called a micro-aggression or something (laughter) even though I don't believe in micro-aggressions. It's only slightly annoying because anybody that demands you answer any question is annoying. But I don't feel offended or anything.

**I would be more annoyed at being tasked with having to answer the question than the answer, itself. What is this 20 questions crap?**

Yeah. It goes on and on and on. By the third or fourth question I'm kind of annoyed. And no one wants to answer a bunch of questions.

**Well, no. It's rude.**

And sometimes I've gotten annoyed and just said I'm Israeli or Arab or Muslim. I do have strong Semitic features and when I worked in the South I was asked, 'Are you an Arab?' I've got the name thing and the look thing, so either I throw it on them or I'm just under a barrage of questions constantly. My dad said always to answer a question with a question. That usually works.

### **You worked in North Carolina for a while, right?**

I was living in Boston and it got really difficult to live there with the cold. And I couldn't find an apartment. There are some times during the semester that there are so many college students that you can't get an apartment or a room or anything. It's very expensive and cold and dreary. And I, basically with nothing, rode a motorcycle to Raleigh and it exploded half way there. And all of my possessions were in a back pack and I ended up in Raleigh and it was very cheap there. I could rent a basement for two hundred bucks. So I went there until I figured out what I wanted to do with my life. And I become an electrician.

I love the South. I'm the South's biggest fan and I really enjoyed the people, the culture, the food... everything.

I had to learn [being on a construction site] is kind of like being with people in a schoolyard or in prison. People give each other shit all the time. And I had a foreman who would think of the biggest insult he could hurl at you, like, 'You from Florida? Nothin'

but queers in Florida.’ (laughter) ‘Where you from? You from Miami? You a queer?’ I guess it’s obvious I’m not from the South, so I’d say, ‘California’. And he’d go, ‘California? That’s worse!’ (laughter) He was a very interesting person, actually. I was once digging a ditch and he was above me, and he came up to me. and said, ‘You know that movie *Deliverance*?’ (laughter) I said ‘Uh, yeah. I’ve seen it’. And he goes, ‘Well, that ain’t true. We ain’t like that.’ (laughter) It was just out of the blue that he was personally offended and defensive about the movie *Deliverance*.

Look, I love American culture. I love hillbillies. I love rednecks. I love it all. I will defend a redneck. And unlike the townies that look down on them, rednecks have been an integral part of this nation. They build things. These are self-made people, ya know?

**Yeah, there are people in my family that grew up without indoor plumbing in the 1950s. Distant relatives who picked cotton just a few generations ago.**

My ex wife and I went to Asheville. Went to these waterfalls with all this nature and hiking. Went way out there, and we got a feel of what the local people are like. They’re very friendly with you if you’re there with tourist money, but they don’t want you moving in. They don’t like other people moving into their area.

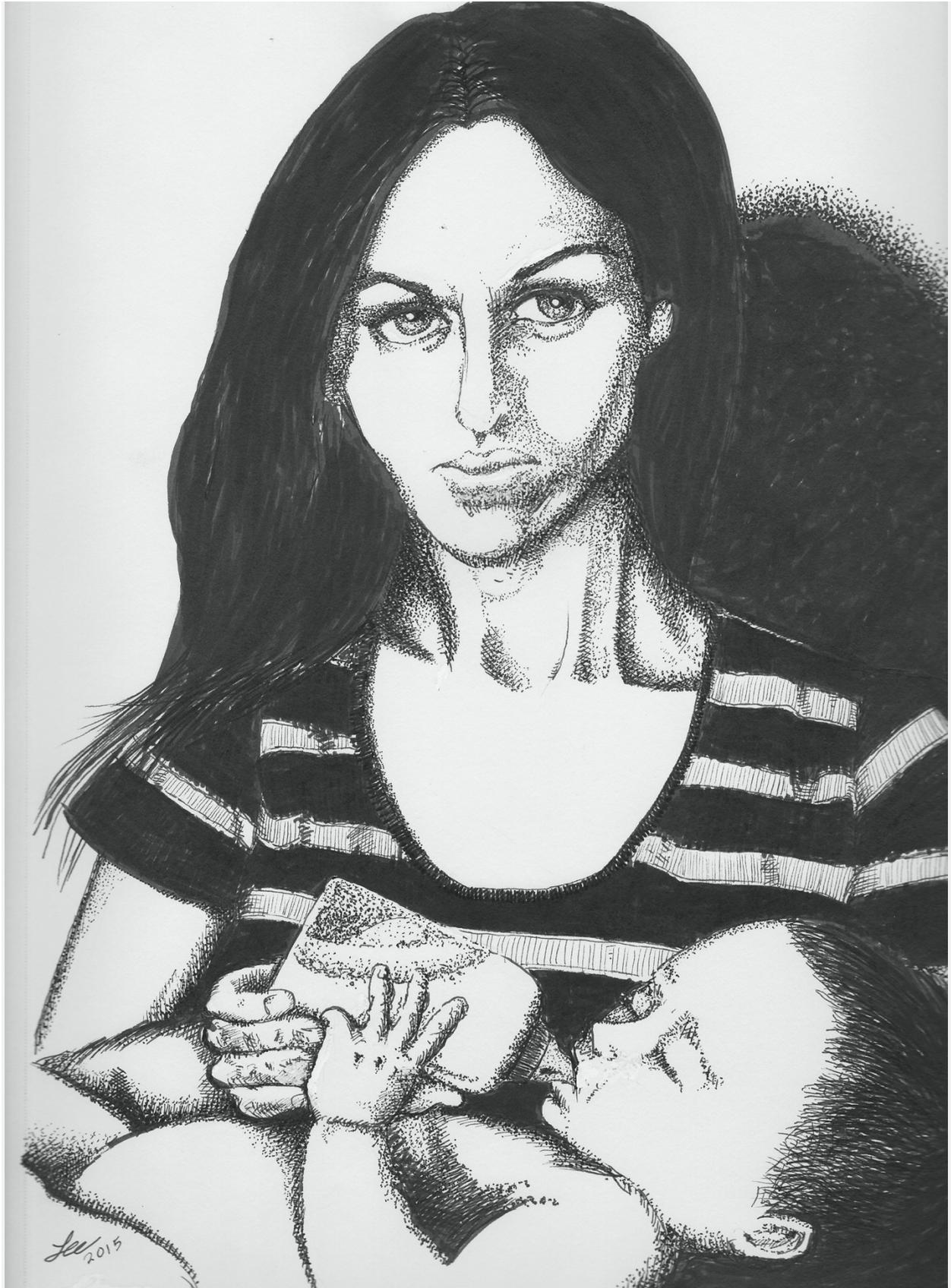
**I’ve visited there too and I got the same impression. It’s kind of like...to them it’s paradise and they don’t want it**

**to be overrun with a bunch of people that aren't from around there.**

Well, I kind of get a little bit of that. I live in Damascus, Oregon which is a really small little pocket. It's just over the hill from suburbanization. And it's beautiful and rural. Lots of trees. And I don't want a lot of people moving in or any development. It's nothing personal. I feel like I'm living in paradise out in the country. I like the freedom of being secluded. I love it. And so I really respect the redneck way of life. They go into the forest with their trailers and trucks and bring back wood to heat their homes with. They know how to fix a car, hunt, fish and grow food.

**And a lot of times they just want to be left alone to do their own thing.**





Anita and America Hoffman — drawing by Keith E. Lee.

I forgot when it happened, but I think it was early this century, where the amount of people that lived in urban areas outnumbered those in rural areas worldwide. It might have been around the time we hit seven billion. It happened, I believe, in the last decade. Pretty soon there will be just little pockets here and there. That makes me sad, but there's *nothing* you can really do about it.

**Not really. Well, you work in construction industry and I've been doing that for years, too. And a large amount of people in the Atlanta area work in the construction industry in some capacity. And here in the metropolitan area in about the past 50 years the development has gone unchecked. It used to be you could drive 20 miles outside of Atlanta and you were in the sticks — farm land. This was when I was a teenager. Nowadays, you'd have to drive at least an hour out to get anywhere near the woods.**

I kind of feel like Southern California is the template for the rest of the world, or at least the rest of the United States. Everything that people complain about; the traffic, crime and the crowding — they act like it's something specific to Southern California. What it really is is the future. The whole world will be like that. A vast sprawling parking lot.

**Yeah, I think so. Southern California's unique because it was one of the later areas of the country to be developed. But that's the type of development that has been prevalent since then.**

The sprawl.

**Exactly.**

I hate the suburbs. I like living where it's crime free.

**Crime has moved to the suburbs here now, where 10 or 15 years ago that wasn't the case. And it's expensive to live in the city, so the poor people moved to the suburbs.**

Right. It goes back and forth. It ebbs to the urban centers and then people fan out to the suburbs and come back again. It's been back and forth and now things are being re-gentrified, so people are moving back into the city again, I think.

**What's happened here is that many young upwardly-mobile people have moved to the downtown, midtown area (which has driven up prices), and they have expendable income and can afford it, while everyone else has been priced out. Me and my wife were priced out. We used to live in the city, but it's really expensive to live in the city now. If you move just outside of the city — or**

**what's called the Perimeter — you'll be able to eek out a living.**

I just want to say that I didn't grow up wealthy. I never got an inheritance or anything like that. My mother was a fairly poor single mother just trying to eek out an existence. And actual survival was just kind of drilled into my head as a kid. I've seen good neighborhoods and I've seen bad neighborhoods. I think my mother did her best. We were apartment poor. You know the expression 'house poor' in the South? Where people own a house but they're broke. All they have is that house, but there's nothing in it. Not that I'm trying to do a disservice to my mother; I'm actually crediting her. She tried to live in nicer areas, but we were poor as hell. Rent was a *major* part of our income. And I'm grateful that she allowed me to go to public school in, possibly, nicer areas. I don't mean rich areas, but regular suburbs instead of poor areas. We didn't have money, so it was sort of drilled into my head that if you work really hard you might have a job that you don't hate. That would be the highest thing I could aspire to — to be able to stand on my own two feet. And have a job that I don't completely hate and be able to support myself. And I arrived at that a long time ago.

That was my life's goal. It was not saving the world. Or anything lofty like being this incredible artist or musician or rocket scientist or anything. It was enough to just make ends meet. And I think I've surpassed both my parents because I've owned my own house

before. I'm on my third house now. I've worked very hard for these things. I *never* thought of saving the world. It's entirely out of my realm to even think in those terms. Every couple of years, and maybe it's narcissism, but I will check my facebook account to see if I have any messages from random people, and a Millennial will contact me that's protesting or trying to set up something Abbie Hoffman-related, and I have no interest in any of that. (laughs)

It puts me in a weird place, because they're young, and I appreciate their blind optimism about change. But I almost feel like there's three stages: there's where you're larval, and you accept the system and you think the heroes are the President and the police. And then you start to question that, to question authority, right? That's the second stage. And then there's the third stage, where you're cynical about everything. (laughs) And you question everything. And I've been in that last phase since I was 15, maybe 16. When I was 16 my mother gave me this book *101 Marxism* and I read that. And I read the Communist Manifesto. But I kind of got over that and became cynical at 16. I don't want to criticize people. I see a lot of articles through my facebook feed and elsewhere and a lot of it gets me pretty angry. For one thing, I hate groups. I want to be contrary to what everyone's doing, always. For a while I thought I was a Libertarian, but then a lot of the Libertarians were kind of obnoxious 'cause they were so certain in their beliefs.

**Anybody that's pushy or dogmatic is going to be a turn off.**

And even though that's the most anti-government of all, governments are going to exist no matter what you do. If all the hippies decided to go off into the woods to escape the system, they would end up forming their own government. So government is inescapable. I've even thought lately that I don't like Democracy, because one stupid vote cancels out my smart vote. (laughs) And I don't think that's fair.

**I understand what you mean. I feel like it's almost futile because, like you say, an informed vote can get canceled out. I try to educate myself and vote the best way I know how. But then I'll turn on the news and see churches busing their entire congregation to the polls, and they're basically just being told how to vote.**

At the same time I will often vote according to how the little fliers that my union sends me says I should vote, so I'm guilty of that too. With me it's a very selfish way of looking at things. I will not vote for things that are against my own self interest. And I feel like everyone should vote in their own self interest. So if something is going to create more jobs, say to rebuild schools and I'm going to be working on those schools; hell yeah, I'm going to vote for that. It's going to put money in my own pocket. I don't know if that's

going to sound self serving, but I'm not going to vote against myself."

**I'm very involved with my local community. I'm on the board of the neighborhood association and the Secretary of the Homeowners' Association. And we have decided that focusing on the local races is most effective in serving our own interests as a community and as individuals. For instance, in the last election we paid close attention to who was running for the county school board. Because, ultimately, the quality of schools in our area is a determining factor in our property values. And that's self serving too. Even though I don't have children I pay attention to that in the interest of keeping my home value up.**

Right. I don't have children, and when I first saw how my property tax bill was divided up I thought, 'I don't have kids and I still have to pay for all this?' But then I thought, 'What's the one thing that home buyers care about when they buy in the suburbs?' And that's what school district it's in. So, even without kids it actually helps to be in a good school district when you want to sell your home.

Now here's where I might get on a kick about the environment. I think that, basically, human beings are destructive to species diversity. And I think it's horrible. I would like there to be more diverse species. It's a shame that so many are becoming extinct.

There's a lot of species like that, and it sucks. So I feel like every human being on Earth is a net harm on balance compared to all other species and their futures. It comes out as a deficit to every human being. I'm probably creating more harm than good with packages and things I buy. Everything I do is probably slightly more harmful than good just by being and living in the West.

**I can relate to that. I've felt that way for years.**

I can say honestly I'm a very self centered person. I don't want to save the world. I like to be good to my friends and those around me, and to be a generally polite, nice person, and righteous in my own life. And I think that's enough. It's almost like I was handed this huge mantle to save the world. I was around activism my entire childhood, you know? I've even been put in front of crowds. I don't feel like I have to do it.

**Did you feel a lot of pressure to do that?**

I only get the pressure from people who just assume that because I'm my father's son that I'm carrying on the Abbie Hoffman tradition. And that's kind of an insult to me because I have my own life.

**Of course.**

There are probably reasons behind the things I believe based on my personal experiences. But this idea that I'm here to save the world — I've been put in that position. I've had it pushed on me and I don't particularly like it. And it isn't something I feel. I'm not arrogant enough to know what everybody else should do. And I don't really care what they do as long as they leave me alone.



Abbie and America Hoffman 1986.

**When I see what's going on with the current crop of activists and the protest movements of today, I can see that your father was an influence. At least in the theatricality displayed with, say, the "die ins" for example. Your father's work in that arena resonates still.**

**With the exception that today's protesters seem to lack any sense of humor whatsoever. Your father had a really keen sense of humor.**

He had a sense of humor, but he had very specific strategies when he did the demonstrations that they did. They were very specific. He was ready to call the media to tell them what was going on. He'd already sort of figured it all out like a chess game. He was an organizer. Right now it boils down to people just holding a sign and speaking their mind. And I don't see anything wrong with that at all. I'm not against it, but I don't really see what good it does. The real stuff that's happening now has to do with banks. And I feel like you need an economics degree just to understand it. Things are passed through Congress that nobody really pays attention to unless you're seeking out that information. And it has to do with our monetary system and trade and all this other stuff. These huge financial waves that are repercussions from little uninteresting things that get attached to other bills that nobody notices. It's so exceedingly complicated how the real dynamics of power work that even if you are well informed it's probably too boring to get anybody else on your side.

**That's a good point. Banking regulations are not sexy.**

It's not sexy, but everything important that happens is the result of that. The Great Depression.

This is my basic philosophy about life, social systems and everything else. Every time you think you're doing something liberating, something else hitchhikes along with that that is being manipulated by whatever powers that be. And it gets twisted and subverted. Even going back to the Civil War. Slavery was flat out wrong. The worst thing ever. It's absolutely wrong. But we definitely had a more centralized powerful government after that. The real power players take advantage of every situation that happens no matter how liberating it is for the common people for a little while. Every technological advance has liberated people and allowed us to communicate, but then actually isolates people. The more technology for communication, the more isolated everybody is at the same time.

**People are obsessed with their devices, but there is a loss of intimacy, I think.**

I'm addicted to my iPhone. It's technology that drives everything. I think it always has been. If there's something that produces the most change it's how we communicate. It's the technology of communication. It's what's driving everything in the realm of human experience. The social issues will always be around, but they are driven by technology in ways we can't even see. I miss the days before the Internet. The days when you could tell a good story and there was no way anyone could fucking fact check you. I miss telling tall tales and regaling people with bullshit. There was an artistry to it. You just can't do that anymore.

**Yeah, I remember when I was young, before the Internet, hanging out with my friends and bullshitting. And everyone would just roll with it and enjoy the back and forth. Now everyone would be on their iPhone trying to find whatever they can that correlates to what you're saying, 'Oh, there's a video about that!' I don't want to watch a video, I want to talk to you and have a conversation.**

For thousands of years we had a rich tradition of story telling, and that's vanished. And everybody's freely giving up information about themselves. There are vast data banks that record everything. There is now the computing power to actually know what everybody is doing, and what everybody's thoughts are on everything.

I feel almost a nostalgic sadness for what used to be two parent homes; I guess what I envision the fifties were like. I see a lot of people having children and feeling liberated, even though it's going to be one parent raising those children. I'm kind of alarmed at the way relationships are being reinvented now. Like the 50 different kinds of genders. We couldn't figure out the old system of the nuclear family and now we're trying all these experiments with new ways. And new ways of raising children.

And I feel like the most stand up people on Earth are the people a generation older than me who grew up in the fifties. I have

tremendous respect for the people older than me. They were disciplined, they did chores. They weren't told that every little thing they did was the most amazing thing. They weren't fed all this stuff that the Millennials were about how they can do *anything*. People that were raised in the old school ways are more upstanding people: well rounded, better educated — everything. And now we're just experimenting with whatever fad is popular in child raising.

I guess [politically] my biggest beef is with liberals because I encounter so many. And they all seem to subscribe to the same camp.”

**The thing about liberals I've noticed is that, generally, when it comes down to talking about or debating ideas they're the first — and I hate to generalize — but it seems they're the first to go for the personal attack, the insult. The 'I wish you would suffer' mentality. Whereas my supposedly mean conservative friends generally want to talk about ideas and don't hate those they disagree with.**

One thing I've noticed is how vicariously bloodthirsty the left is.

**And just how casual it is.**

I don't know how people get so mad. What makes me mad is...I hate being misunderstood. I hate it when I say something and

somebody assumes it's something else. That can get me really mad, but I don't want to harm them.

**I'm sure you remember growing up during the cold war, and how during the Reagan era, radicals, artists and musicians felt like there was a clamp down on freedom of expression. Then it was the right that was censoring expression, like the Moral Majority and the PMRC. And now it seems completely the other way around, and it's the left that is attempting to silence speech considered offensive.**

People want to censor themselves. I feel like the status quo won. If you look at it institutionally they all probably look at us as such peons beneath them. They really don't care if we're fighting racism or whatever social issue, they're just looking at the instrument of control. If whatever is presenting itself as the counterculture now is a series of witch trials where everybody is putting everybody else under a microscope, then how much more divided and ineffectual can it be?

**Exactly! That's how power is dissipated on the one hand and control is consolidated on the other.**

Right. You make the youth culture the most conformist, self-censoring group of people ever — and that's the next generation running things. If we're going to have witch trials and persecute

anything that's even slightly subversive, even if that subversive thing is labeled racist by everybody else, or something that's very repellent, it's more about the dynamic of control. And once we've accepted totalitarianism, once we've accepted groupthink, it really doesn't matter what the topic is about. It doesn't matter who the enemy is that we're all united in fighting against.



America and Anita Hoffman 1989.

**I think that those who seek power, who seek control, will try to obtain it using whatever means they have at their disposal. Any issue that will help them gain control will**

**be exploited. Whatever the current outrage du jour is, they'll use it to their advantage.**

If you wanted to get really scary... I'd like to think I'll never be targeted for anything. And I'm sure a lot of people feel like this sometimes — a sense of paranoia. When I research MKUltra or COINTELPRO, which actually happened to my parents... And then some people have theories that my dad was assassinated. Every couple of years I web search all of that stuff, and I get *so frightened!* Because you start to see patterns. The rabbit hole goes deep. So then I stop. I do it a little bit, and then I'll stop. And for me it's even more frightening, because my own father died in such a way. [At the time] there were a rash of suicides that had to do with Prozac. Prozac is an antidepressant, but antidepressants can give some the energy to carry it out. Most people that are suicidal are completely unmotivated to do anything about it, because if you're a depressive person you're [usually] not going to be proactive enough to carry that out. But back then it gave a lot of people just enough chutzpah to carry out their suicidal intentions. So most of me thinks that because he was one of the loosely-monitored early Prozac users...that his death is because of that specific thing.

But it could have also been a staged assassination. I have no idea. He did have this article he wrote that had to do with the Iran-Contra affair. He was sort of making waves with all that. So, maybe there were enough interested parties to take him out. Who knows?

For all I know there could have been a conspiracy to kill him. I think it was a suicide, but there is always the nagging suspicion that it wasn't. I wasn't there. I don't know what happened. There were no signs of a struggle. I believe he was found with a benign expression on face.

**There were reports in the media at the time of his death stating that he was depressed because not as many young people were engaged politically as they were in the 1960s. The materialism of the 1980s.**

No. That's one thing I'd like to dispel. My dad didn't even think that way. He certainly thought the fight was harder. Times were tougher in the eighties. People were putting more on the line to be activists. But, no, he absolutely did not, in my opinion, kill himself because he was sad about the way the country was going, or anything having to do with that. He was manic depressive.

Right after he died I remember being at the memorial for him, and people in tears coming up to me and telling me what an inspiration he was. And there were thousands of people there all distraught. I was 19-years-old and I felt almost angry because I hadn't had time to cry yet or time to process this. And he was my father, not theirs, and they had no right to cry in front of me about him. I had my own grief and I didn't want to share it with them.

**That's a lot for someone so young to process. And those people that came up to you crying were much older and probably should have known better.**

That's happened many times. People want to engage me and tell me how important he was to them. I've heard it a thousand times. It's strange because I am really proud of who he was, but it's also deeply personal. But then again I feel like I need to own it.

---

*Originally published in Stomp and Stammer magazine February 2014.*

*This article appears at medium.com and may be found here:*

[https://medium.com/@keithelee\\_38983/i-don-t-want-to-save-the-world-fe57cc5bc27e](https://medium.com/@keithelee_38983/i-don-t-want-to-save-the-world-fe57cc5bc27e)