

Hoffman shifts political gears

By Suzie Rollins Singer
Staff writer

Abbie Hoffman resents being called an ex-Vlpple. He says he hates the tag "former member" of the famed Chicago-7.

Instead, he wants people to know him as he is today — a leader of Save the River, a group devoted to stopping winter navigation on the St. Lawrence River.

He insists college students flock to his lectures in record-number crowds to hear him talk about "insuring that fresh water exists for future generations," not about the '60s.

But when he spoke to more than 600 students at Oakland University recently, he spent more than an hour discussing his life in the '60s before making a pitch for his environmental concern.

Prior to Hoffman's talk, the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young song "Four Dead in Ohio," played repeatedly, exemplifying the desire of students to hear stories of the legendary "radical decade."

But even as Hoffman criticized the students for their apathy, they laughed.

"There are 4,000 colleges across the nation competing for the title of 'Most Apathetic' and you're right there with them," he said.

While making barbs at their age and lack of worldly knowledge, he told stories of his life in the '60s, particularly the latter part of the decade.

"When you fight the power structure you learn how to organize. Democracy demands dissent. If you question authority long enough you'll go out and do

what we did. Eventually you'll find out authority is immoral and stupid," he said.

HOFFMAN EXPLAINED the meaning of fallout shelters and told stories of his many arrests.

"If you're going to take on conflict, get it into the streets," he said, to a crowd that listened to him in awe and applauded his every word.

The audience was mesmerized by the 46-year-old man in his worn-out jeans and a T-shirt that said "Stop Double-Strength Reagan!" But most of them were preschoolers when Hoffman was making a name for himself.

He acknowledged that fact prior to the talk during a press conference.

"Kids today don't know about the '60s. It's been completely wiped out of the history books. They aren't taught how to challenge the power structure today like we were," Hoffman said.

Hoffman came back into public notice in 1980 after spending seven years as a fugitive from charges of selling \$36,000 worth of cocaine. He is presently on probation for the felony charge.

Hoffman assumed the name Barry Freed while a fugitive. He said he was able to use the alias to his advantage.

"I use any name to win any issue. People on the St. Lawrence wouldn't consider me if they knew I was Abbie Hoffman. As Barry Freed they would," he said.

While living his life as Freed, he had plastic surgery to reshape his nose and organized the Save the River committee, which stopped the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from destroying several nearby islands to improve navigation.



DAVID FRANKEL/Staff Photographer

Abbie Hoffman blames the current environmental problems on the Reagan administration, saying they aren't sympathetic to his cause. He displays his T-shirt which urges stopping Double-Strength Reaganol.

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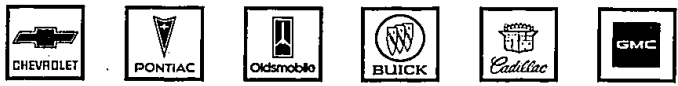
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