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The left's betrayal of youth culture began with music

"It's always the young that make change."

- Late '60s activist Abbie Hoffman, at age 50

Many books on politics try to convince the reader that a particular ideology reigns supreme and that all others deserve nothing but scorn.

Music industry executive and activist Danny Goldberg's "Dispatches From the Culture Wars: How the Left Lost Teen Spirit" refreshingly does not.

Goldberg, chairman and CEO of Artemis Records, is a proud liberal or "progressive," a term he and others in his camp seem to prefer these days.

He generally targets political figures on the left, mostly Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., and Al and Tipper Gore, for what he perceives as their self-righteous (in Lieberman's case) and "snobbish" contempt for younger generations' music, film and overall culture.

Goldberg himself is a product of the 1960s.

He was living in the San Francisco Bay Area when Haight-Ashbury was ground zero for hippie culture, and he covered the first, and genuine, Woodstock music and arts festival in 1969 for Billboard magazine.

Goldberg talks about early rifts between pop culture and the political left, such as when activist Abbie Hoffman jumped onstage at Woodstock during the Who's set to make a political statement, only to get kicked off, literally, by Pete Townshend.

Goldberg also talks about a more telling omen at the famous San Francisco counterculture "Human Be-In" in 1967, during which Yippie co-founder Jerry Rubin gave a fiery speech that annoyed Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, one of the featured bands, which decided to make its music apolitical afterward.

The core of Goldberg's case for Democrats' betrayal of youth culture begins with Tipper Gore's mid-'80s crusade against popular music and ends essentially with Lieberman's attacks on youth culture leading up to the 2000 election. Goldberg details where he thinks the Democratic Party went wrong with young voters and why youths of today are just as likely to vote Republican as they are Democrat, based on election 2000 voter demographics data.

As someone who finds the parties of the donkey and elephant to be equally repellent tools of special-interest weasels, I don't have a horse in this race.

But for us pop culture and history junkies, the book provides an enlightening insider's view of the middle and late '60s and early 1970s, when things got rather trippy and often violent in America.

(Goldberg wisely defines the radical-counterculture '60s as the time between JFK's assassination in 1963 and President Nixon's resignation in 1974.)

Goldberg appears to have crafted a wake-up call for the Democrats to embrace younger voters and stop thumbing their noses at youth culture.

But if the Democrats' recent flailing in the 2002 midterm elections and the lack of momentum in

the nine 2004 contenders' bid to unseat President Bush are any indication, Goldberg may have unwittingly written the early verses of a eulogy.

Review

Dispatches From the Culture Wars: How the Left Lost Teen Spirit

By Danny Goldberg

Miramax Books, \$23.95