

LYNN **Yaeger**

A fresh look at Fenton's family album



David Fenton/Oliver Kasher Gallery

Left Out No More
 Snapshots of the long, long trip
 from Chicago '68 to Chicago '08

I SPENT LAST WEEKEND PALLING AROUND WITH BILL AYERS. OK, IT WAS ACTUALLY A PHOTOGRAPH OF AYERS LEADING A 1969 DAYS OF RAGE MARCH IN CHICAGO, AND IT WAS HANGING ON THE WALL AT THE STEVEN KASHER GALLERY, BUT THE SIGHT OF IT MADE ME FEEL POSITIVELY INSURRECTIONARY.

I love this gallery because: 1) It specializes in photographs of renegades, radicals, and rebels with the occasional foray into vintage protest posters; 2) It's around the corner from Comme des Garçons and Balenciaga; and 3) It's next to the Half King, a bistro that always makes me feel like I am a great undiscovered artist even though I am defined by a Paint-by-Numbers kit.

The present exhibit at Kasher is called *David Fenton: Eye of the Revolution* and features the works of the photographer, who began recording street protests while he was still a teenager in the '60s. I vote, I am so hysterically nervous that I don't feel like going shopping, a rare condition for me.

The photos on display depict uprisings at Yale and Columbia, Black Panther headquarters, Central Park, Be-Ins, and even the occasional foray into the frivolous—one work is entitled "A Naked Protester in the Reflecting Pool at the Honor America Day Smoke-In, Washington, D.C., July 4, 1970." As I'm looking around, Kasher pops out of

his office and reminds me that on Saturday, there'll be a panel discussion at the gallery to discuss the legacy of the '60s, featuring none other than Mrs. Bill Ayers, former Weather woman Bernadine Dohrn (no, she didn't read the forecast on TV—she was a member of a radical underground group); SDS founder and Chicago Seven defendant Tom Hayden; former Black Panther Jamal Joseph, who earned two college degrees during his nine years in prison; and Fenton himself. I hate panel discussions, but the prospect of hearing this crew of iconic '60s personalities weigh in on the election sounds like it might be a little bit of fun, especially if we win.

We win. When Saturday rolls around, I meet my friend D at the Half King for a pre-panel Caesar salad with dressing on the side (let's all lose five pounds between now and the inauguration). Then it's off to the gallery, where the principals look surprisingly cute—Dohrn has a perky red bow in her hair, Joseph has a lovely face and a passel of delicate braids; and Hayden

is so distinguished you can almost see what Jane Fonda saw in him. Kasher introduces the panel and gets a laugh when he says that if the other team won he thought he might have to cancel the event, since the panelists would have left the country.

Want to know what happens to unreconstructed radicals of a certain age? They become college professors. Joseph is now chair of Columbia University's Graduate Film Division. Dohrn is a law professor at Northwestern, and Hayden teaches at Occidental College, which means they tend to talk in complete sentences and full paragraphs, which makes me want to squirm in my seat, stare at the clock, doodle, and giggle. Still, it's hard not to share in their palpable excitement that everything they worked so hard for, and went to prison for, and dreamed of decades ago finally seems to be coming true.

Hayden begins by saying that everybody knows this moment is something special: "Let's just say it's historic. The question of what the left will be like will be determined by the Barack Obama movement, the Barack Obama generation. I would much rather be with something that is new, new, new than ever be a part of the old left." Dohrn talks about being in Grant Park on election night—she and Ayers, as the whole world knows, live in Chicago—and describes the irony of seeing the police discreetly tucked into the far

corners of the crowd, so different from the situation 40 years ago, when out-of-control officers caused such mayhem during the infamous Chicago '68 police riots at the Democratic National Convention.

Then, former Black Panther Joseph talks about being on 125th Street on Tuesday night and overhearing a group of kids partying and one shouting, "We voted, and it worked, yo!" and how touched he was by that. He tells of how the doorman of his building in Harlem stopped him and said, "This is a great day! Don't let anybody take your joy away!"

After these initial statements, which are not exactly short—these people are college professors; they live to talk—I must admit that my joy, although by no means vanished, is waning somewhat. I distract myself by looking again at the Fenton photos and am particularly taken with a 1969 shot of members of the High School Student Union protesting the Vietnam War. The students are wearing lumberjack plaid, army jackets, floppy hats, Indian shirts, and lots of scarves. None of them would look out of place walking down the street today, and, alas, their "Bring Our Men Home" signs are not antiquated either.

The next day, still basking in the exquisite unreality of President-elect Barack Hussein Obama, I decide to continue my exploration of the '60s and how that decade fucks with your emotions, even if you were born years after Mayor Richard J. Daley unleashed his Chicago cops in 1968. (Another exquisite irony—you can't make this stuff up—it is that current Chicago mayor and fervent Obama supporter, Richard M. Daley, is the son of Richard J.) I am certainly not alone in this enthusiasm—the windows at Henri Bendel presently salute the 50th anniversary of the peace symbol—their slogan is "Peace is the new black"—and Barneys plans to unveil '60s-themed holiday windows in a few weeks.

I skip these big stores in favor of a place called Free People, whose very name

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could have been coined in a squat in Haight-Ashbury during the Summer of Love. I go there because I'm a free person, even though I know this place is meant for shoppers far younger than I (at least its monkey, unlike the dastardly Forever 21, doesn't throw sand in my face) and because there is a wonderful velvet flap dress on the racks, a perfect replica of the vintage clothes that people

first started wearing in the '60s. Of course, back then, a '20s dress was only 40 years old. (Now, an ugly dress with shoulder pads from the '80s qualifies as a vintage garment, but that's another story.)

I gear up my courage and try the velvet thing on, in a fitting room that has walls splattered with psychedelic flowers and a thick shag carpet on the floor. My plan is to treat this garment as a top, since, of course, it's way too small, but who cares? I'm in no mood to let one tiny freckle take my joy away.