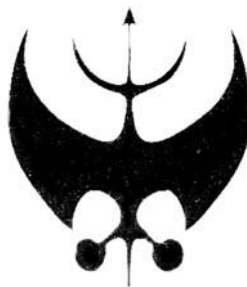
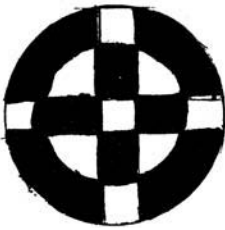
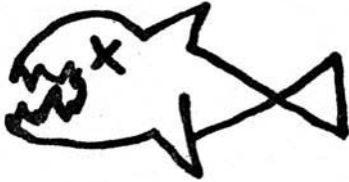
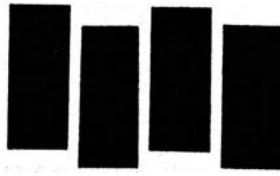
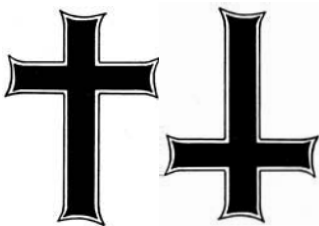
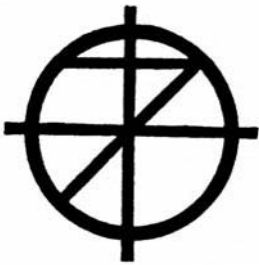
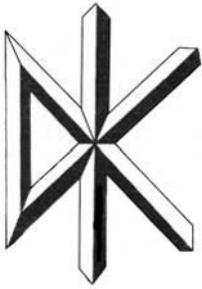
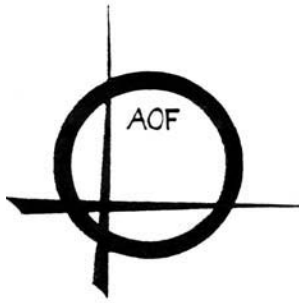


**AMERICAN
HARDCORE
SECOND EDITION**





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American Hair Metal
.45 Dangerous Minds

AMERICAN HARDCORE

A TRIBAL HISTORY

by Steven Blush

SECOND EDITION

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HANX!

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**Editorial Assistance & Research: Deanna Lehman,
Jerry Lee Williams, Sal Canzonieri**

Front cover by Edward Colver: Danny Spira, Wasted Youth, LA, 1981
Photo colorized by Eric Hammer
Back cover by Karen O’Sullivan: Bags, CBGB, New York, 1983

MY WAR 2001

I'M DOCUMENTING THE AMERICAN HARDCORE PUNK MUSIC SCENE BECAUSE IT'S BEING FORGOTTEN. Its history is evaporating as the participants die off or find religion or repress their memories of those dynamic days.

This book addresses the peak years of American Hardcore, 1980 through 1986. Much happened in that short time.

Hardcore was more than music — it became a political and social movement as well. The participants constituted a tribe unto themselves. Some of them were alienated or abused, and found escape in the hard-edged music. Some sought a better world or a tearing down of the status quo, and were angry. Most of them simply wanted to raise hell. Stark and uncompromising, Hardcore generated a lifestyle stripped down to the bare bones. Its intensity exposed raw nerves. Everyone was edgy and aggressive.

Like most revolutionary art and original thought, Hardcore clashed with mainstream society and generated resistance. As a minor subculture it received little attention and commanded even less respect. Hipsters took one look at its adolescent violence and dismissed the whole scene.

Lots of fucked-up kids “found themselves” through Hardcore. Many now say things like, “I grew up thinking I was a weirdo, but I met like-minded people and figured out I wasn't such a freak after all.” If that's what “HC” did for them, then the scene succeeded. For some, it served as a valuable social network; for others, it opened a rich musical mine; but for all involved, Hardcore was a way of life, something that they had to do.

The aesthetic was intangible. Most bands couldn't really play that well, and their songs usually lacked craft. They expended little effort achieving prevailing production standards. However, they had IT — an infectious blend of ultra-fast music, thought-provoking lyrics, and fuck-you attitude.

Nobody thought things out too far in advance. We participants were for the most part just kids. Irrational kids. Which in part made the whole thing so intense. The rage often remained unfocused — you'd see kids morph from drugged-out, suburban Metal misfits to shit-kicking skinheads to vegan pacifists over the span of a few years. But let's not over-intellectualize. Accept Hardcore for what it was — something alienated kids created. It taught us to mistrust authority and mass media. It sparked a rebellion that is only now beginning to be appreciated.

I dealt with most of the classic Hardcore bands. I knew “movers and shakers” in most every town in America. I watched the great and the small come and go. I saw them turn into the smug commercial Rock Stars against whom they'd supposedly rebelled. I knew those now dead. I experienced it all first-hand. During the scene's formative years I lived in Washington, DC, a place not unlike the rest of America. Nor was my life too unlike those of most people in these pages.

As a Hardcore show promoter, college-radio DJ, indie label owner, band manager, and tour coordinator, I hooked up many people I will be introducing herein. Did I get enough thank-yous and accolades? In the end, I'm comfortable with my props.

With this book, I give the scene's participants not only their day in the sun but also their day in court. I've spoken with virtually all the important characters of the era — over 150 interviews in all. Participants not represented herein were unreachable or did not respond to my inquiries. There are a few I regret not speaking with, but I did my best. Everyone else cooperated, to varying degrees. They confirmed theories or pointed out my errors. Through this process, I've had to distinguish fact from opinion, forcing myself to rethink preconceptions. I've tried to purge myself of all the punditry, stereotyping, sloganeering, gut

feelings, and knee-jerk reaction developed over the years, and I've quit trying to defend my personal tastes. Plenty of petty, shitty attitude persists among Hardcore participants to this day, but I strived to avoid adopting the bad vibe.

As for veracity, both the interviewees and I recount events as best we remember. Those were crazy times long ago; the interviewees, most around 40 at the time of this writing, are recounting the events of often-tumultuous youths. And sometimes the truth gets distorted or misrepresented through nostalgia, bitterness, gossip, poor memory, or brain damage. Having said that, I've done exhaustive fact-checking wherever possible. American Hardcore ain't no revisionist history based on what I personally think happened.

My entire life's experiences, conversations, readings and listening has become one massive reference library in my head. I can't always recall the origin of the facts and figures, but I've credited all sources wherever possible. I spent five years making phone calls and driving around America tracking down band members, fans, promoters, and whoever else.

It takes a Hardcore mind to write a Hardcore book. I'm talking about a spontaneous, rebellious, undisciplined, undocumented movement. I wrote *American Hardcore* in pure HC fashion — with everything I fucking had.

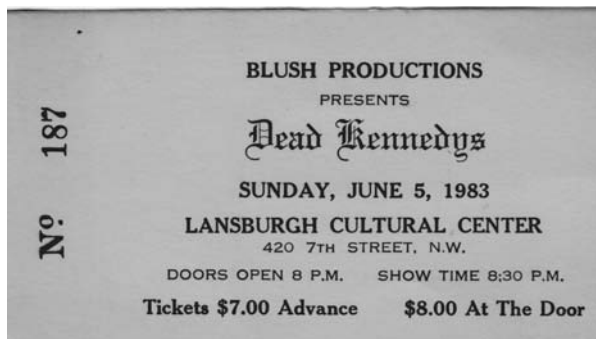
As for the current Hardcore renaissance, I don't wanna deny the legitimacy of today's teen angst. I just feel like, "Yo, make your own fucking music! Why just ape the music of my salad days?" I can relate to those old Jazz or Blues cats who played back when it was all about innovation rather than formula, and who now see a bunch of complacent umpteenth-generation beneficiaries claiming the forms as their own. Face it, Hardcore ain't the same anymore. It can still make for powerful music, but it's an over-with art form. It's relatively easy to be into now, but back then it was an entirely different story.

American Hardcore, generally unheralded at the time, gave birth to much of the music and culture that followed. The original fans should feel vindicated. No one today gives a shit about which huge arena act sold ten zillion records in 1983 — Hardcore heroes like Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, Bad Brains, The Misfits and Minor Threat are modern immortals. At the time of this writing, few successful Rock artists are not tinged with Hardcore.

Befitting of all great artists, Hardcore bands "made no money" and "never received their just due" — only subsequent generations of enthusiasts would propel them into "legendary" status.

The world has changed dramatically over the past decades. What occurred in the early 80s can never happen again.

— Steven Blush, New York City, July 2001



MY WAR 2010

Here's the Second Edition of *American Hardcore*, the book that set the record straight on American Hardcore Punk music. It opened the doors to a decade of discussion and debate. I'm proud to have been the one who stepped up and documented it all (and took the heat for it), and I'm humbled by the attention and appreciation.

The success of Feral House's 2001 First Edition (now in five languages) and the 2006 Sundance-selected, Sony Pictures Classics-released documentary film (that I made with director Paul Rachman) was a testament to the impact and importance of Hardcore.

My five-year pre-internet research for the original book was like an archaeological dig. I prodded the participants' battered psyches and opened their dusty old boxes of hazy memories. The histories of Hardcore bands lay buried in minefields of conflicting recollections, occasionally verifiable via fanzines, liner notes or flyers. Of course I wish I'd had the benefits of today's easily-accessible information and networking possibilities. Now, thanks to technological developments, we all reap the rewards my research.

Over the past ten years, I've learned much more Hardcore minutiae. That's why I've got so much more to say. I've also come to realize that my brash "tough love" approach made me at once the scene's primary historian and its biggest critic. Today, now that the record's been set straight and the innovators received their just due, I no longer feel the need to lay it on the line so harshly. Call it mellowing with age or taking my foot off your throat, but this edition is less absolutist and more "live and let live." With that said, I stand by my original assertions and still call bullshit wherever I see it.

So much effort went into this Second Edition. I wanted to give fans a reason to buy the book a second time. I also wanted to give the critics a shot at reappraisal. This edition includes many new photos, flyers, record covers and set lists, as well as dozens of new interview subjects (such as Flea, Moby, and artist Matthew Barney). My personal faves are the "lost" chapter, "Destroy Babylon," about the mutant strains of spirituality that grew from Hardcore's anti-organized religion ethos, and a gallery of cool flyer art. I even surprise myself herein with a few startling new perspectives and conclusions.

A heartfelt thank-you goes out to Adam Parfrey and Jodi Wille of Feral House for all their belief in and support of this project. Their publishing house exemplifies a HC-style DIY aesthetic, with a prolific catalogue of edgy, thought-provoking tomes. Without their tireless efforts, we wouldn't be here right now.

An extra special thanks goes out to my friend George Petros for all his hard work and dedication to this project. If not for his poking and prodding, there'd never be an *American Hardcore*. His relentless efforts as the editor and art director of both this edition and the first are every bit as important as my gift of gab. George is more than a secret weapon, he's my partner-in-crime in this nefarious endeavor, so please give it up for Petros.

Harley Flanagan jokingly dubbed this the "What About Me? Edition" in reference to those second-tier participants who griped that they got cut out of history in the first version. Now, some of them get a modicum of props. To those who bitched and

moaned about the book or the film — let me respond with a line from Minor Threat’s Ian MacKaye: “At least I’m fucking trying. What the fuck have you done?”

The most valuable thing I’ve learned from this whole wild ride is that no matter what you do or how the hell you do it, it all comes down to integrity. Despite all their flaws and misgivings, Hardcore bands — when compared to virtually every other entity in popular music — ooze with a relentless real-ness that reads as refreshing and respect-worthy to today’s addled teens.

In so many ways, our world has drastically improved since the chaotic Reagan daze of American Hardcore. In other ways — thirty years removed from the original HC explosion — we’re sadly right back to where we started in 1980. Consider this *American Hardcore* Second Edition a 400-page blueprint for new-century cultural revolution: what you do with the seditious data herein is totally up to you.

— Steven Blush, New York City, August 2010



The author-as-promoter (left) wheat-pasting posters in Georgetown for the PiL/Minor Threat show, Halloween 1982

PART ONE



America, 1979. Photo by Edward Colver