

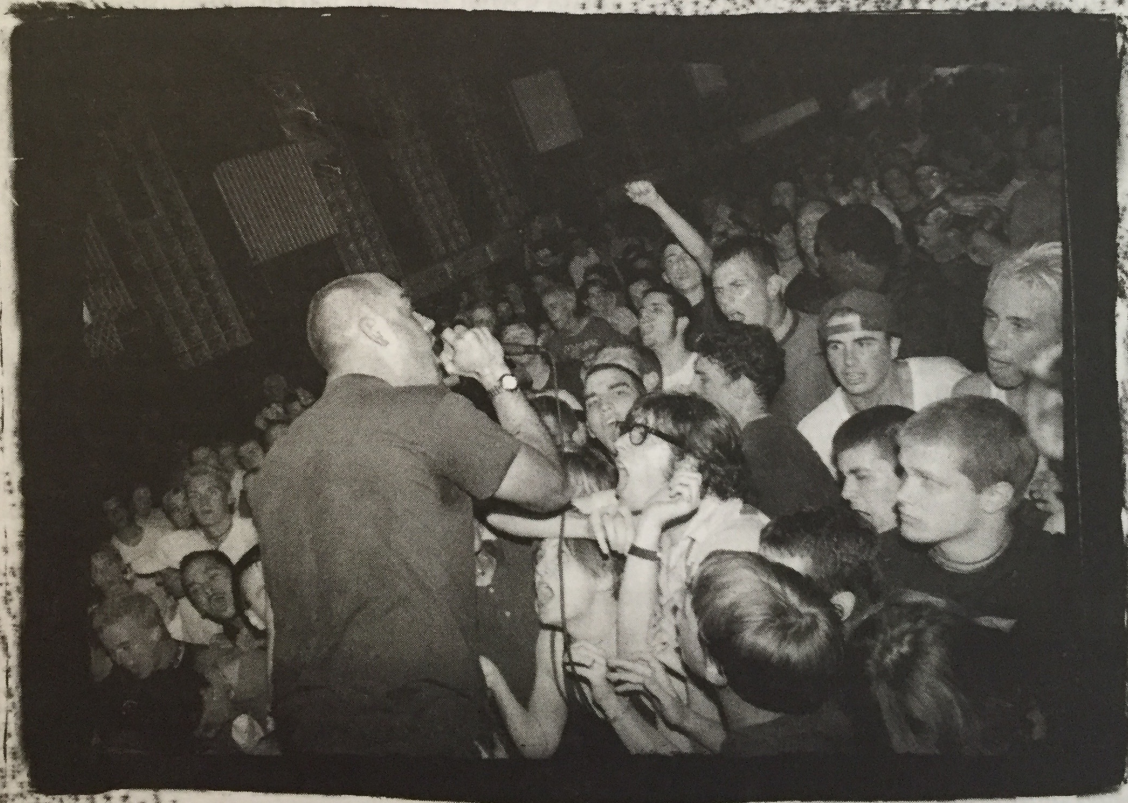
NOTES ON HARDCORE

Excerpts from Brian Peterson's book, *Burning Fight: The Nineties Hardcore Revolution in Ethics, Politics, Spirit, and Sound*

INTRODUCTION

Although there are different definitions of hardcore, most people agree that it's a loud, intense, and often abrasive form of music that usually contains personal or political lyrics and a rejection of the status quo. Its roots come from punk rock, an underground musical and cultural movement that started in the late seventies, but hardcore became its own sub-genre as the music was often faster and more extreme than much of the early punk was.

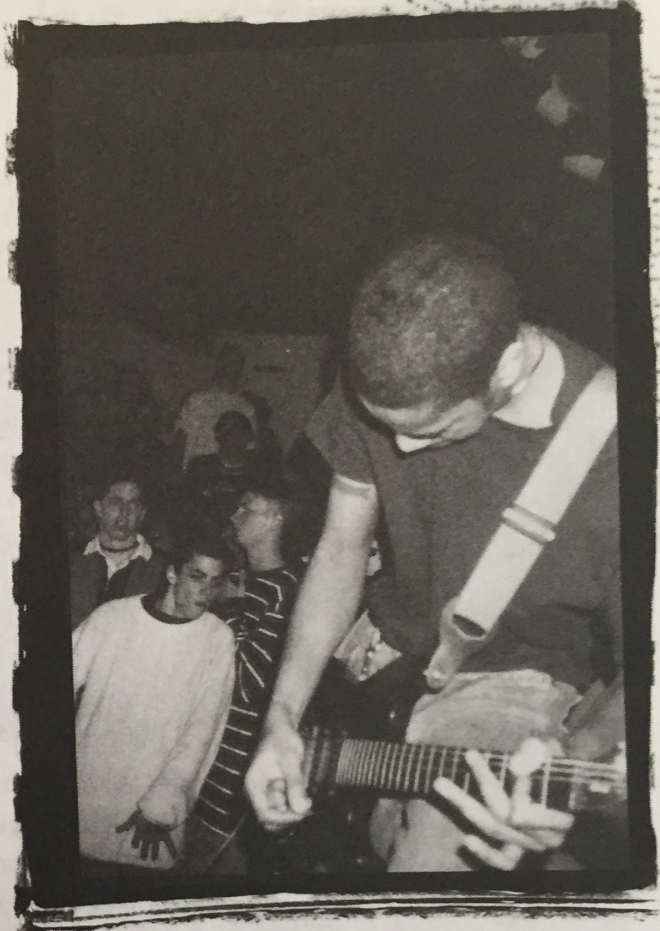
Like any music-based subculture, hardcore is also more than just a sound. It's a community, a feeling, a way of life. Here are a few perspectives on what hardcore means:



In the late seventies and early eighties, bands like Minor Threat, Bad Brains, Black Flag, Necros, Circle Jerks, 7 Seconds, S.S.D., D.O.A., M.D.C., Dead Kennedys, Negative Approach, Agnostic Front, and many other hardcore groups cranked up their amps and helped create an intense new form of music. For many hardcore bands, song structures were straightforward, almost always extremely fast, and devoid of solos. For a lot of people, these factors were seen as essential for punk and hardcore because they rejected the artistic pretensions of mainstream rock and the less complicated songs made playing in a band more accessible. This fast, raw simplicity repelled adults and more mainstream-minded kids who worshipped the carefully assembled structures of commercial rock.

A related aspect of hardcore was a do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) ethos. This idea came about partly by necessity and partly from the desire for independence from outside influence. The idea was that people in the scene should do their own bands, write their own zines, and put out their own records without the involvement of “big business” (for more about this topic see Chapter One: “Politics and Social Awareness”).

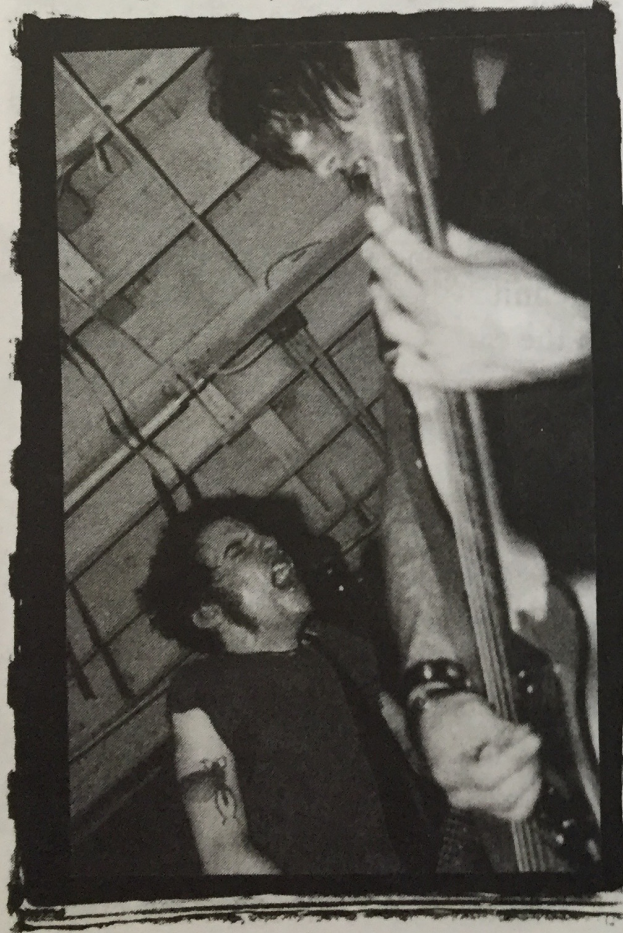
The content of the lyrics has always been equal in importance to the aggressive music style in hardcore. Hardcore kids (a term that has more to do with being a part of the scene than your actual age) were able to voice their opinions in a public forum whether it was on stage or in the pages of a fanzine. Consequently, if you felt out of sync with mainstream society you could likely find acceptance in the scene. That formed the basis of a feeling of community, which is a key component of hardcore.



WORLDS COLLIDE

Many hardcore bands in the early to mid-eighties spread a message about personal or social injustices. Groups like Dead Kennedys, Minor Threat, 7 Seconds, Youth Brigade, Articles of Faith and many others addressed issues like abuse of government power, consumerism, and a general rejection of mainstream society. Not every band sang about the same issues, but their anger and desire for change was shared and proved to be contagious. Fans connected with this and channeled it into their lives, many of them picking up instruments and starting bands of their own.

Hardcore's originators were dealing with the world of Reaganomics, fear of nuclear war, increasing class and racial divisions, in addition to personal problems like harassment from parents, jocks, or rednecks. Many in the scene addressed these and other issues



through music, zines, and discussion. Bands like Dead Kennedys, M.D.C., and Bad Religion created a dialogue about political resistance and social revolution that continues to the present. Sometimes sub-groupings within hardcore also developed as a reaction to problems they saw within society that also were present in the scene. Straight edge, a belief that advocated a rejection of alcohol and drugs, started as an idea that D.C. bands like Minor Threat wrote about and grew to become a mass-scale movement in the years that followed (for more about that see Chapter Two: "Straight Edge"). There were other movements as well including a fairly politically conscious crust punk/hardcore scene that was centered around anarchist principles. Many involved in this part of the scene lived in and supported squatted housing and were inspired by early British anarcho-punk bands like Crass and Conflict.

Eventually the first wave of hardcore gave way to a second one. Some people took hardcore in new directions musically whether it was through changing their bands' sound or by forming new bands altogether. Along with these new musical influences and directions, new ideas were also presented through lyrics and conversations at shows. Dozens of bands like Husker Du, the Meat Puppets, and the Butthole Surfers formed and migrated or broke away from conventional hardcore sounds despite being associated with the scene in some way. Other bands kept the idea of hardcore evolving by incrementally adding elements to the music including many that added a slightly more metallic edge to their sound. By the mid eighties another group of bands like Uniform Choice, Youth of Today, and Justice League formed and attempted to keep traditional hardcore sounds alive, but they also added other musical and lyrical elements either consciously or unconsciously. These, of course, were just a few of the diverse range of bands that existed in the scene at this time.

As the eighties progressed, hardcore continued to diversify in sound as many veterans of the scene gave birth to new projects similar in intensity yet strikingly different in atmosphere and approach. The D.C. scene in the mid to late-eighties is the most prominent example of this trend. It ushered a more philosophically divergent brand of hardcore and post-hardcore by way of the melodic yet often dissonant sounds of Rites of Spring, Embrace, Dag Nasty, and Nation of Ulysses, among others. These bands and other scene members directed scathing social critiques at the hardcore scene itself, as well as society at large. Unsurprisingly, these attitudes and ideas prompted a strong reaction from hardcore traditionalists, but they also became popular and had a wide and lasting impact on what direction the scene was headed as the nineties approached. This intentional restructuring of the underground in D.C. was itself a reaction to the levels of violence, turmoil, and predictability that had, as they saw it, plagued hardcore.

Ideas that become widely accepted in hardcore usually provoke re-evaluation at some point. Straight edge was one example. It had become one of the largest movements within hardcore toward the end of the eighties, but as that decade came to a close, the number of those who championed straight edge messages began to falter. Many distanced themselves from the term whether or not they continued to believe in the idea, as they felt it was too limiting a label to live their lives by or felt that the idea had become associated with a movement they weren't comfortable with. Similarly, a lot of bands — the majority of their members were still in their late teens or early-twenties — felt confined by others' definition of hardcore, and wanted to construct bridges to alternate musical and social landscapes.



DESPAIR

Social, spiritual, and political upheaval played a primary role in development of the nineties hardcore scene. A variety of philosophies had been sung, written, and talked about since hardcore's inception, yet the nineties would put such an emphasis on lyrical content, activism, and D.I.Y. ethics, as well as sonic dynamics, that hardcore would be irrevocably altered.

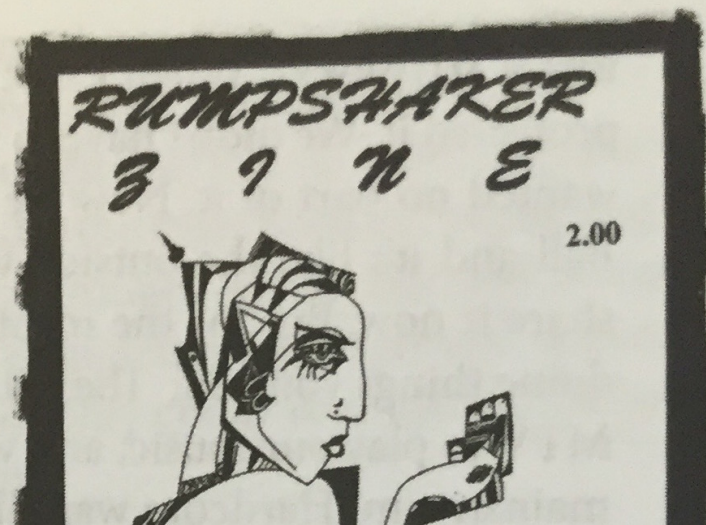
Whether it was the animal rights movement, the re-emergence of straight edge, the fresh sonic excursions pioneered by a wide variety of bands, social-political debates, emotional catharsis, or spiritually rooted lyrics, these various ideas and artistic concerns, as well as the dialogue elicited by them, were the life's blood of the nineties scene.

A lot of people in the nineties scene came to have extremely radical views on topics like animal rights, gender, D.I.Y., race, spirituality, and many other subjects. These ideas were around in the eighties, but many people became even more focused on them in the nineties.

In fact, some people began to feel that others were too extreme in their views on these issues. Militancy played a role in all of these debates, which led to arguments that the scene had become overly judgmental.

For those who took to these issues, the political and ethical focus in the nineties hardcore scene was vital. A lot of people, in fact, pursued these ideas outside the scene and made them their life's work. However, as the late nineties came around the number and intensity of debates that were once wholly integrated into the scene had diminished. One major factor for this occurrence was that many who promulgated much of the dialogue took their ideas into

Although the prominence of politics and ethics in hardcore appeared to wane, they of course did not totally disappear. As with every era in hardcore, new generations react to the old. In the process, new issues that arise from the current times are explored. But no matter what new directions the scene heads, it will also likely be influenced by what transpired in the past.



POLITICS AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

Revolutionary politics and anti-government ideas have played a fundamental role in hardcore and punk since their inception. In the late seventies, punk rock started as an iconoclastic cultural movement that rejected most mainstream beliefs and ideologies in a way that was often intentionally offensive. Punk's imagery was often meant to shock. Many punks dyed their hair, had body piercings, used lots of drugs, and generally spurned the norm. Punk rock music was also loud and aggressive, which was the opposite of much of the popular music of the time.

Hardcore was an offshoot of punk, though early hardcore scene members saw themselves as punks who rejected the more fashion-oriented "new wave" direction some people in the early punk scene gravitated toward. In response, hardcore became faster, more aggressive, and took even more uncompromising political stances. Regardless of the level of political or social awareness a band conveyed, nearly all made some sort of comment on politics or society at one time or another — otherwise it might be hard to define them as punk or hardcore in the first place. Early hardcore bands were often characterized by boldly speaking out against the Reagan/Thatcher era conservatism that was prevalent in the political and social climate of the time. Bands like Dead Kennedys, M.D.C., Articles of Faith, and many others wrote overtly political lyrics and encouraged scene members to take action against the culturally conservative atmosphere.

From the mid eighties into the nineties the political bent of bands varied widely. Instead of just a general rejection of mainstream culture, bands started to take on more alternative ideas. Eventually, various sub-scenes were formed that sometimes exclusively aligned themselves to political or ethical principles like straight edge, D.I.Y., anti-racism, animal rights and anarchism, though there was plenty of overlap among most of these. This differentiation of issues continued into the nineties as grassroots factions deepened their focus on these topics and continued to introduce new ones. Inspired by the revolutionary ideas present in previous eras, nineties bands like Born Against, Los Crudos, Spitboy, Go!, Downcast, Econochrist, Endpoint, Trial, Struggle, His Hero is Gone, Code 13, Drop Dead and zines like *HeartattaCk*, *Slug and Lettuce*, *Inside Front*, and *Profane Existence* were just a few of many that addressed such issues. The exposure to these different points of view and an overall broader cultural and political awareness that was present even in more mainstream circles in the nineties helped create a larger political consciousness in this era.

For many, the nineties cemented the notion that hardcore should be equated with substantive ideas.

Since the beginning, the number of social and political issues in hardcore has been so large that there would be almost no way to touch on them all in a reasonable amount of space. This chapter of *Burning Fight* is just an overview of several issues that have been discussed in the scene since the early days but became focal points for many in the nineties. In addition to the subjects of the other chapters in this book, anti-corporate self reliance, race, gender equality, sexual orientation, and the so-called "P.C. backlash" are subjects that came up in most of the interviews conducted for this book. Each of these could probably warrant a book of its own as could the many others that are not covered here.

D.I.Y.

The do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) ethic has always been a vital issue in hardcore and punk. Independence from the corporate world is seen as important to maintain the ethical integrity of the music. Although some early punk bands' albums were released by major record companies, hardcore's early bands, labels, and fanzines were created without the backing of large organizations. They defined their own music, issues, and positions and were free from the influence of commercial record companies and publishers. This simple concept went beyond the boundaries of the scene and became a general philosophy of taking your personal ideas, beliefs, and ultimately your life, into your own hands.

As hardcore moved from the eighties into the nineties, the issue of D.I.Y. became even more important in maintaining what many felt was the underground, anti-corporate, ethos so ingrained in hardcore. Bands with a punk rock or hardcore lineage such as Sonic Youth, Nirvana, and Green Day signed to major labels and became mainstream successes in the early-nineties. The success of these larger bands brought even more major label attention to the underground music scene of which hardcore was a part.

Most viewed this as corporate colonialism. At the time, several prominent hardcore bands either flirted with or actually signed to major labels, which caused a lot of controversy. These trends prompted many in the scene to become more defensive about maintaining its independence from big business. Some saw these major label deals as an act of treason while others were sympathetic toward bands that aspired to get their music to a broader audience. Unsurprisingly, the debate against major label involvement and the position taken those who defended a band's decision to sign with such labels divided the scene to a certain degree.



RACE

The issue of race was also heavily discussed in hardcore. From the eighties into the nineties, many in the scene spoke of racial unity and the promotion of cultural awareness, often as a way to push back against white power skinheads that were sometimes on the fringes

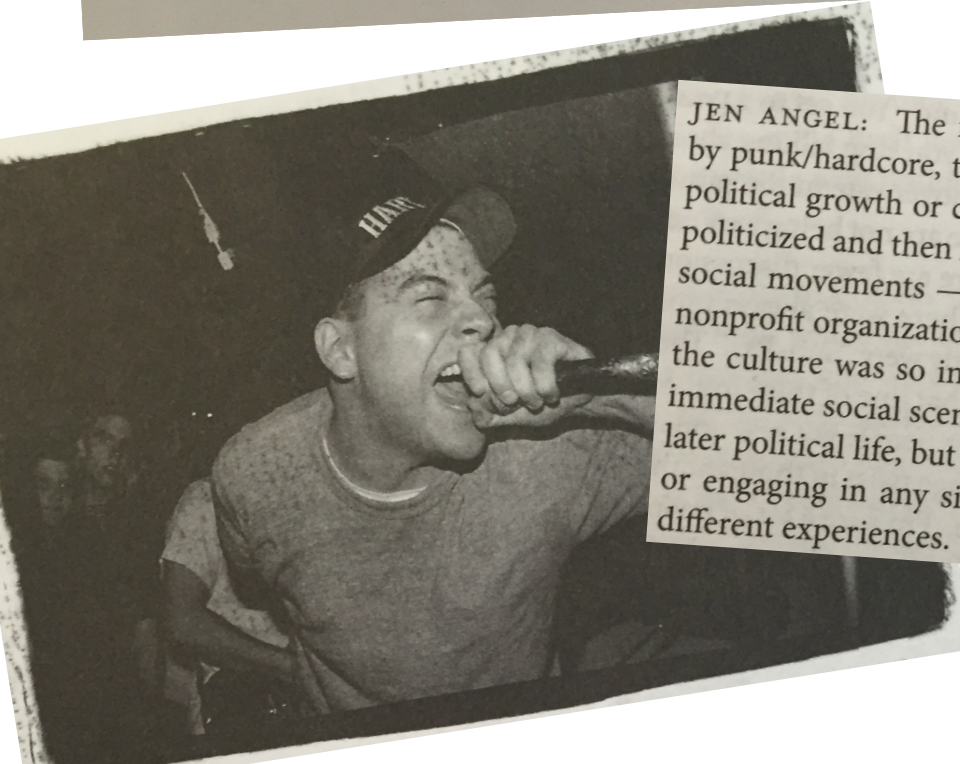
of the scene. Despite this anti-racism focus, a number of people felt that some in hardcore and punk had, even if subconsciously, racist sentiments at times or at least expressed some racial insensitivity. Some also felt that because the scene was predominantly Caucasian, there was somewhat of a built-in lack of cultural awareness.

On the other hand, people from all backgrounds were often drawn to hardcore because of the political and ethical concerns voiced in the scene. Bands like Downcast, Los Crudos, and Racetrailor examined issues of white privilege, gentrification, and a perceived Eurocentric attitude some countries had in matters of economic policy and international diplomacy. Such bands occasionally drew criticism if their members did not come from disaffected minority groups because some thought that these discussions should be led by those most directly affected by those issues. Others, however, felt that as long as the issues were being discussed in a sincere manner, the ethnicity of the person doing the talking was not important.

"P.C. BACKLASH"

Throughout the nineties, the focus on political and ethical dialogue inspired people to think and act. However, others insisted that this atmosphere also brought about a large amount of peer pressure that compelled people to take positions on these matters regardless of whether or not they actually cared about them. In addition, sometimes the ideas were presented in such a confrontational way that it was difficult to engage in an open discussion without it turning into a yelling match. These factors led toward cynicism from some, which sparked a backlash against the presence of that dialogue.

Because of this division it seemed that many who were deeply involved with issues like animal rights or social work became less concerned with hardcore and channeled their



JEN ANGEL: The real issue is that though countless people were/still are politicized by punk/hardcore, the scene I experienced didn't offer a good mechanism for allowing political growth or challenges. Many people, and I include myself to some extent, were politicized and then moved on/out of punk/hardcore to do real organizing work in other social movements — many [got involved] in unions, the environmental movement, or nonprofit organizations, for example. It was a limitation of punk/hardcore that much of the culture was so inwardly focused and didn't really encourage organizing outside of immediate social scenes. Punk/hardcore did give me some tools which helped me in my later political life, but I experienced the scene as being somewhat resistant to mobilizing or engaging in any significant way around political issues. I'm sure other people had different experiences.

PERSONAL IMPACT

Frustrated with their lives, environment, social setting, and government, many came to hardcore as an escape. But instead of simply offering an alternative social setting to the mainstream, hardcore created a dialogue that impacted not only the scene but drove people to try to change the world they originally wanted to get away from. Many people's entire political or personal consciousness was shaped by the debates that occurred. For them, hardcore wasn't just a rebellion for rebellion's sake — it was about learning something and making a change in response.

Although heavily influenced by eighties straight edge bands, nineties straight edge expanded its focus to topics outside the rejection of intoxicants and animal exploitation. While many of the late-eighties straight edge kids moved in other directions with their lives, a slew of new bands came along with both overt and subtle perspectives on straight edge. Some bands focused on positivity and individual progression and many who followed them used the movement as a starting point to dig into broader social and political issues. The variety of perspectives on what defined straight edge continued to exist in the nineties with some viewing it as a political stance against what they perceived as a negative aspect of the culture, and others viewing it as a way to improve their lives along with other varied viewpoints.

The nineties straight edge scene often acted as an entry point for broader issues, but as many straight edge kids became more interested in issues pertaining to animal rights, gender, race, spirituality, politics, and the environment, the occasional overzealous and

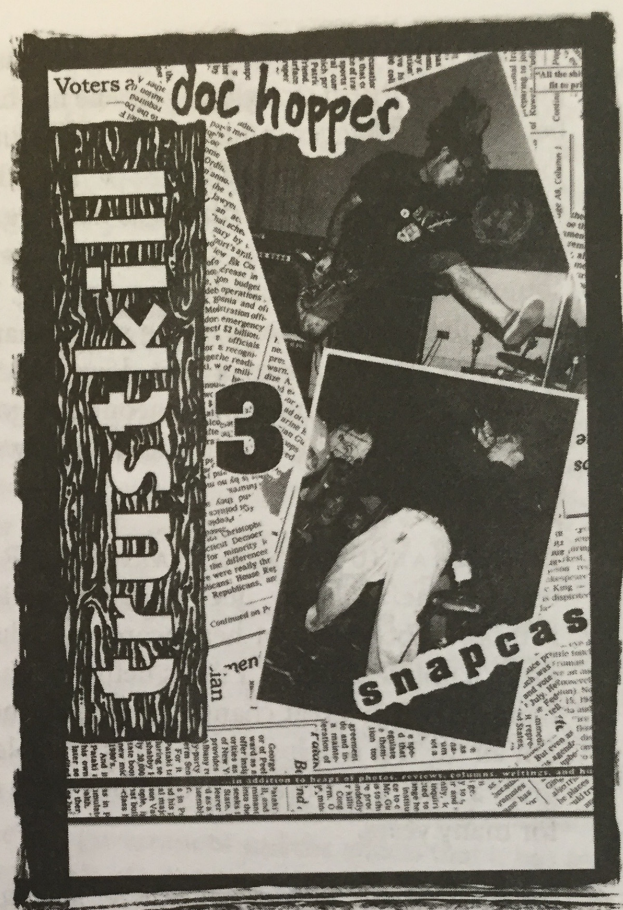
As the differences between die-hard straight edge kids and those skeptical of the movement widened, the level of straight edge militancy increased. As might be expected, the more people that support an issue, the larger the push to legitimize it.

Although many looked back to the eighties for their initial inspiration for becoming straight edge, the number of people who considered themselves straight edge in the nineties was probably larger. During this time, hardcore drew larger audiences due to a variety of punk/hardcore rooted bands—everyone from Nirvana and Green Day to Quicksand and Sick of it All—signing to major labels and getting more mainstream exposure. Some of those who were exposed to punk and hardcore through these bands sought out the roots of their music, which many found in the hardcore scene. Hardcore bands, and in particular certain straight edge bands such as Earth Crisis, Snapcase, and Strife, sold more records and reached more people.

Other straight edge bands like Mouthpiece, Ten Yard Fight, Bane and others also played an important role in maintaining a straight edge presence in the hardcore scene.

However, while many bands in the nineties spoke out about straight edge, there were others that were straight edge, but took a more overtly political and/or philosophical approach to the movement and often did not even address the topic of straight edge specifically in their songs. For example, bands like Policy of Three, None Left Standing, Disembodied, Endeavor, Groundwork, Threadbare, Portraits of Past, Endpoint, and Frail all had straight edge members, though they rarely spoke about straight edge on stage.

Another new factor was the internet straight edge community, which was gaining popularity even as it was still in its early days with straight edge email lists, chat rooms, and message boards. This broader exposure gave all viewpoints on straight edge a forum to discuss the subject.



As straight edge in the nineties became more divided, many people on both sides of the issue became turned off by the posturing. Some chastised the kids who smoked or drank for “buying into” the ultimate corporate scam, while non-straight edge kids cynically mocked those who were straight edge for their reliance on staying sober. Many straight edge and non-straight edge kids grew bored of the debate and instead started to focus their ambition on other issues. For instance, many hardcore kids dove headfirst into animal rights, while others became involved in political issues and dedicated themselves by going on to college and taking their activism in other directions.

In the long run, straight edge, and hardcore for that matter, became less important for some. Instead, they viewed straight edge and the hardcore scene as a gateway to a broader focus of improving one's life or making the world a better place. Even though they may or may not have shed the straight edge label, their immersion in straight edge and hardcore at least at one time in their lives forever changed their outlook.

Although many have stopped being straight edge or simply made it a lower priority, straight edge didn't become any less important to the people who found value in it. People became straight edge for different reasons, but many found a common consciousness or self-awareness that they had not experienced before their interest in the movement. It's likely that nearly everyone involved in nineties hardcore took the ideals they formed from their experience, internalized them, and incorporated them naturally into their lives. Many straight edge kids have gone on to become activists, business owners, full-time artists,

lawyers, teachers, professors, chefs, writers, and parents, and if it wasn't for their exposure to straight edge and the hardcore scene, however brief their run might have been, it is possible they wouldn't be the productive people they are today.

Of course, straight edge continues to be an integral part of hardcore as bands like Champion, The Promise, Have Heart, Betrayed, Count Me Out, The First Step, Throwdown, Triple Threat, and others have continued to spread the message from the nineties into the 21st Century. All of these bands were influenced by eighties and nineties straight edge groups, but they have also developed their own unique perspectives on it. While straight edge to some is nothing more than an empty cliché, to many, including people who no longer consider themselves “true till death,” straight edge is influential in numerous ways.

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Probably the most fervent ideological battles waged within the nineties hardcore scene were issues pertaining to animal rights. These included vegetarianism, veganism, and other related environmental issues. Although many in the hardcore scene incorporated animal rights into their belief systems, these issues divided the scene in some ways. Those who incorporated animal rights into their lives, particularly with respect to their diet, often felt that the choice became an important part of their identity. For those who made these choices, it changed their entire outlook and they even found it to be a catalyst for change in other areas of their lives.

Issues relating to animal rights and vegetarianism in hardcore and punk were introduced in the early eighties. Early U.K. punk bands like Crass, Conflict, and Flux of Pink Indians, among others, spoke out against meat eating and animal experimentation and played an influential role in spreading these ideas around the scene. American political punk and hardcore bands like M.D.C. (though some feel they teetered back and forth on these issues), Crucifix, and, later on, Nausea also advocated for vegetarianism. Many of these bands were highly concerned with the political climate of the time. The Cold War was still playing a role in international politics and threats of nuclear disaster, class polarization, and environmental concerns were topics of major importance in the hardcore and punk scene. Many of these bands saw taking a stance for animal rights issues as one direct way of fighting back against corporate control. Emotional interests in the welfare of animals also played a role. When people learned about animal testing, the often cruel treatment animals receive at slaughterhouses, and the sometimes unsanitary conditions of such places, it made them think twice about their choices. At the least, they felt that not eating meat was a step in the right direction.

Some other notable eighties musical figures also helped spread these messages. Influenced by the ideas of bands like Beefeater, Ian MacKaye and others from the D.C. hardcore scene were rumored or known to be vegetarian and to support animal rights. British post-punk bands like The Smiths also prominently spread a vegetarian message. Their 1985 album *Meat Is Murder* gained international prominence as much for its subject matter as its music. At the time, there was also some congruence between the political concerns voiced in hip-hop and hardcore. Bronx, New York, emcee KRS-One of Boogie Down Productions often spoke about his vegetarianism in interviews and on stage. His political and ethical views were widely shared in both hip-hop and punk/hardcore circles. Although not all of these artists or groups affected the entire scene's outlook on these topics, their impact was noticed and discussed by many and at least had an effect on the members' immediate social circles.

Although many disliked any sort of spiritual affiliation with hardcore, influenced bands like New York's Cro-Mags and Cause for Alarm spoke about vegetarianism and made it a topic of discussion in the New York hardcore scene. A lot of people in the scene considered Krishna consciousness, a spiritual movement rooted in a branch of Hinduism, to be a cult, but several respected people in hardcore investigated and practiced the faith. One of the primary tenets of the group is that every practitioner must be strictly vegetarian. Despite the general disdain for religion that was present in the scene, philosophical discussions about the various reasons for becoming a vegetarian were common. Krishna consciousness had been on the periphery of the New York scene since it started, but its role in hardcore generally grew larger in the late eighties and early nineties (this is covered more thoroughly in Chapter Four: "Spirituality").

By the late eighties, youth crew bands like Youth of Today, Gorilla Biscuits, and others began to link these issues to straight edge. Some were skeptical of this combination because they didn't agree that any sort of moral belief system belonged in hardcore. On the other hand, vegetarianism was one area where both political and non-political hardcore and punk bands had some overlapping views. Youth of Today wrote a song called "No More" on their 1988 album, *We're Not in This Alone*, which was a rallying cry for vegetarianism. Many in the hardcore scene initially scoffed at the notion of vegetarianism being linked to straight edge, but others started to take to the idea. Bands like Gorilla Biscuits and Insted also wrote songs about being vegetarian and they became fairly common in hardcore by the end of the eighties. Youth of Today's vocalist, Ray Cappo, drawn in by its emphasis on the vegetarian diet, soon became more interested in the philosophy of Krishna consciousness. After becoming a Krishna devotee, Cappo quit Youth of Today and started a Krishna conscious band called Shelter that continued to address animal rights issues in the nineties.

Although one could argue that they played a bigger role in the nineties, California's Vegan Reich started in the mid eighties and spread an extreme animal rights message and political philosophy. They were inspired by anarcho-punk and best known for creating hardline, a militant movement in the hardcore scene that combined revolutionary politics, Old Testament style spirituality, and veganism. They were among the first in hardcore to push vegetarians toward accepting the concept of veganism and they also linked with animal rights activists and encouraged people to take direct action against corporations that tested on animals. They were also closely associated with other animal rights activist bands like Statement and Raid. The hardline movement played an important, albeit controversial, role in nineties hardcore due to their stance on animal rights, sexuality, abortion, and other issues.

Although these various influences show that animal rights and vegetarianism had long been a part of hardcore, the cause was taken up in an even more prominent way in the nineties. The debates these aforementioned influences encouraged impacted a lot of participants in nineties hardcore at the beginning of the decade, which is when the issue really came to a head.

Animal rights groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (P.E.T.A.), which played a role in the animal rights movement in nineties hardcore, also helped spread these messages. Many of these organizations started in the seventies or eighties and gained prominence in underground artistic communities like the hardcore scene, where ideas alternative to the mainstream were typically explored. In the nineties they would often set up tables at hardcore shows, pass out free literature, and pay for ads in zines with the goal of promoting the discussion of these topics and recruiting new members for their causes.

Many activists in the more political spectrum of hardcore felt that human rights needed to be addressed before animal rights. They believed issues such as vegetarianism were personal choices that should be left to one's own conscience. Others, such as Boston's Slapshot, were antagonistic to vegetarianism and felt it didn't belong in hardcore at all. There were also other factions in the scene that echoed mainstream objections: i.e. meat eating is a part of human nature; vegetarians are "wimps," etc. There were also other people who agreed with animal rights on an environmental level, but they did not actually become vegetarians.

By the early nineties the link between straight edge and vegetarianism that was popularized by many of the youth crew bands had arguably become its own sub-scene in hardcore. The two issues became intertwined and it wasn't uncommon to go to a show, meet someone, and have that person immediately ask if you were straight edge and vegetarian or vegan. For some, these were just conversation starters and, because they were so common in the scene by this point, seemed fairly innocent questions. Others, however, felt answering "no" to either of the topics was the first step toward exclusion.

Aside from musical influences, many people from the nineties scene learned about vegetarianism and veganism through animal rights related literature. John Robbins' *Diet for a New America* and Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* were just a couple of many notable books that circulated in the hardcore scene in the late eighties and early nineties. After reading such sources, bands, fanzine writers, and others spread the information to those around them. Although there were fanzines in the eighties that addressed these topics, a larger number of zines cropped up in the nineties that addressed animal rights, many of which made it their primary focus.

At the same time, the nineties also brought about a broader focus on health issues in mainstream culture. People were more concerned than ever about staying healthy, so natural food stores, organic co-ops, and a new wave of diet fads also became popular. In the process, vegetarian products became more widely available. In the eighties, it was often difficult to find items that vegetarians and vegans now expect any grocery store to carry.

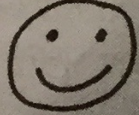
With all of these influences as a backdrop, Syracuse's Earth Crisis arguably made the largest and most widespread impact on the animal rights debate as their mix of metal-influenced hardcore and militant lyrics launched the vegan straight edge movement and their music became one of the most popular sounds in the nineties scene. Through albums on Victory Records and tours with other hardcore bands (and later larger metal bands), they built up a sizable audience. They also received mainstream media exposure from CNN, MTV, and other outlets for their views on straight edge, animal rights, and environmentalism. Earth Crisis were succeeded by other vegan straight edge hardcore bands like Abnegation, Framework, Green Rage, Warcry, Morning Again, Culture, Birthright, and Day of Suffering to name just a few.

While these bands became more prominent in the scene, the level of militancy increased. Many dedicated to these causes felt that just being a vegetarian or vegan wasn't enough. Radical animal rights and environmentalist groups like the Animal Liberation Front (A.L.F.), the Animal Defense League (A.D.L.), Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, and Earth First! became popular, and a number of hardcore kids became members. Some were involved in direct action and even played a role in organizing local, national, and international protests. This deeper focus led to a level of scrutiny that was often extreme. For instance, some vegans began to examine the manufacturing processes of foods and other products and even the sub-components of those items' ingredients to determine whether or not they were truly free of animal products.

Although lots of people dedicated to animal rights saw these developments as a sign that their argument was taking hold, others grew tired of the militancy and often responded in reactionary ways. Earth Crisis reportedly had meat or dairy products thrown at them during their sets in some cities. Some of the more militant hardline adherents were also verbally confronted by those who didn't share their views. While these responses were somewhat rare, the fact that they were occurring showed that some rejected the tone that had been set.

By the end of the nineties, several of the more militant vegan straight edge bands had folded. Like many of the political issues that were so heavily debated in the nineties, animal rights took a back seat to other topics. A new generation took the reigns and hardcore, as it always does, moved in a different direction. Even so, many of the nineties vegan and vegetarian bands left a strong legacy as bands like Maroon, Purification, Gather,

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Obviously, animal rights issues impacted a lot of people who played a role in the nineties scene. Whether it was for personal or political reasons, the treatment of animals was of great concern for many. However, because such a focus came about there was bound to be a debate about the steps one should take to help the cause. Direct action against those involved in animal exploitation became a relatively common topic of conversation.

Many disagreed with these forms of protest because they sometimes involved violence and the destruction of property. The aforementioned “hardline” bands were among the most extreme advocates of this type of action.

Sean Muttaqi founded the Hardline Records label and was instrumental in the hardline movement. He was involved in the anarchist punk scene but tired of what he saw as contradictions in that movement. Muttaqi got together with some like-minded friends from the anarchist scene, and promoted radical environmental change, animal rights activism, a strong belief in the rejection of intoxicants (though there is a debate over whether or not hardline really was a part of straight edge), and a belief in the “natural order,” a concept that opposed homosexuality and abortion. These topics were extremely controversial and marginalized the hardline movement to a large degree. Bands, hardline offshoots, and zines also sprung up with similar perspectives. Some followed a more militant vein, such as Memphis, Tennessee’s Raid, and others chose a slightly less extreme approach.

Many in the scene who weren’t a part of hardline also took an interest in direct action. As vegan straight edge bands like Earth Crisis became more popular, the more these messages became palatable to people who may not have taken to them so quickly before this time. Direct action, of course, was a controversial topic, as in many cases it involved breaking a law of some sort. Whether it was vandalism, breaking and entering, or verbally antagonizing people wearing clothing from animals, these measures were viewed even by many vegetarians and vegans as extreme. However, this didn’t stop many from becoming involved in these and other forms of protest.

While the more controversial aspects of the animal rights movement often received the most attention, there were just as many who became dedicated to these issues on a more personal level. They applied principles of non-violence to their diets, one of the main ideas that attracted many people to animal rights in the first place, and tried to influence others by example or through one on one conversation. There were also people who supported animal rights issues, but did not actually become vegetarian or vegan.

The more militant segments of the scene often debated with those who took a less radical approach to animal rights. This tension impacted the overall climate of the scene.

To this day, the impact of animal rights on hardcore is felt not only in the scene but also in the broader public consciousness. Militancy, though resisted by many, only served to increase awareness about these topics. Because these issues related to a person's diet, they also had an impact on peoples' lives outside of the scene. Others were turned off by the extreme nature of these debates, saw no value in changing their lifestyle in that way or thought it was more of a sacrifice than they were willing to make. Some rejected vegetarianism because they didn't want to give in to what they saw as social pressure.

However, many who delved into animal rights and vegetarianism made the issue their life's work and subsequently created or joined activist groups that have exposed the mainstream public to the controversies surrounding factory farming, diet choice and related issues. Groups like P.E.T.A. have practically become household names. Animal rights activists like Peter Young and several members of the S.H.A.C. 7 (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty), both of whom have received international media attention, also had roots in hardcore. Young released minks from fur farms in the Midwest in the late nineties, eventually did prison time, and now lectures about animal rights issues. The S.H.A.C. 7 were charged with stalking and "terrorism" against Huntingdon Life Sciences, a company that tests on animals. They were declared guilty in 2006 and were sent to prison.

Although hardcore has addressed a wide spectrum of topics, animal rights is one that has maintained a strong and lasting presence. Attention paid to most topics is cyclical, but like straight edge, animal rights and vegetarianism/veganism particularly have become almost inextricably linked with the scene. Not every person involved with hardcore is drawn to animal rights issues, but it's difficult to find another topic that permeates all of the sometimes territorial and varying sub-scenes within hardcore as thoroughly.

Animal rights impacted people on several levels. The issues made people think and make decisions about how to act. Consequently, animal rights could act as a catalyst and impact other areas of peoples' lives by introducing them to a more complex world and prompting them to consider what actions to take in these new areas.

SPIRITUALITY

An essential component of hardcore is the spirit invested in the music. Every form of music comes from within, but the passion displayed at a hardcore show can be similar to what is seen at a religious ritual. At nearly every hardcore show, bands play their songs with the utmost intensity, singers testify to an issue that is close to their hearts, and fans struggle to reach the stage in an effort to be a part of the experience. To many, hardcore is a religion—it can have its own values and belief systems (e.g. straight edge, vegetarianism/veganism, D.I.Y.), classic texts (e.g. records, zines) and leaders (e.g. band members, zine writers, show promoters) who speak their minds and sometimes find themselves wrapped in controversy.

During the nineties, something controversial happened in hardcore: a variety of religious ideas, most prominently from the Hare Krishna movement and Christianity, began to have a very visible presence in the scene. The Krishna conscious band Shelter was probably the first primarily religious hardcore band, but others like 108, Focused, Strongarm, Prema, and Zao followed suit and also openly discussed their spiritual beliefs. Although there were bands in the eighties that wrote about such topics, the nineties bands took these messages further. For example, several Hare Krishna influenced bands made their spiritual beliefs the central focus of their music and their lives in general. Members of the bands moved into Krishna temples, had special Krishna haircuts, wore robes and other trappings of the group and followed a strict diet and other ritual behaviors. As with other notable debates in the nineties scene, religious adherents openly advocated for their causes. Most people involved in the scene, however, saw this as intrusive.

Many in hardcore have had fairly strong agnostic/atheistic stances due to disaffection with organized religion, so the presence of anything spiritual in the scene was hotly contested and is still discussed now. Most people feel that hardcore is about rejecting the norms and values of mainstream society. Pioneers like Minor Threat derided organized religion as being “full of shit” (in the song “Filler”), and found the corruption stemming from religion had such a negative impact on the world that they saw no place for it in hardcore. Others felt the need for religion or spirituality in their lives at some level, and first Krishna and then later other religious ideas were brought into the hardcore scene in an attempt to fulfill that need.