

Punk has done important things in its short history. (It's done some really stupid things, too, but that's for someone else to chronicle.) Out of the waste heap of middle class values and shopping mall esthetics, we've built a culture that has allowed us to survive the postindustrial world while at the same time salvaging some semblance of our independence, freedom, creativity, and human integrity. As important as this is, it is now time for punk to enter a new phase. Punk has allowed thousands of youths to survive in this rat heap of a world through its music, zines, and communities; now it's time to change the rat heap itself.

For the most part, punks, have historically been interested in shocking society. In North America, at least, punk's political practice has been to reject the middle class values shoved down our throat. Being a largely white, middle class youth movement (again, at least in North America), punk's relations with the outside world have been concentrated on shocking and rejecting that world, from the most political Crass punk to the drunkest Sore Throat punk to the sincerest Minor Threat punk to the most idiotic Exploited mall punk. About the only punk subgroup I would exclude from this generalization would be the wave of upper middle class straightedge and pop punk fans, although there

# **A NEW PUNK MANIFESTO**

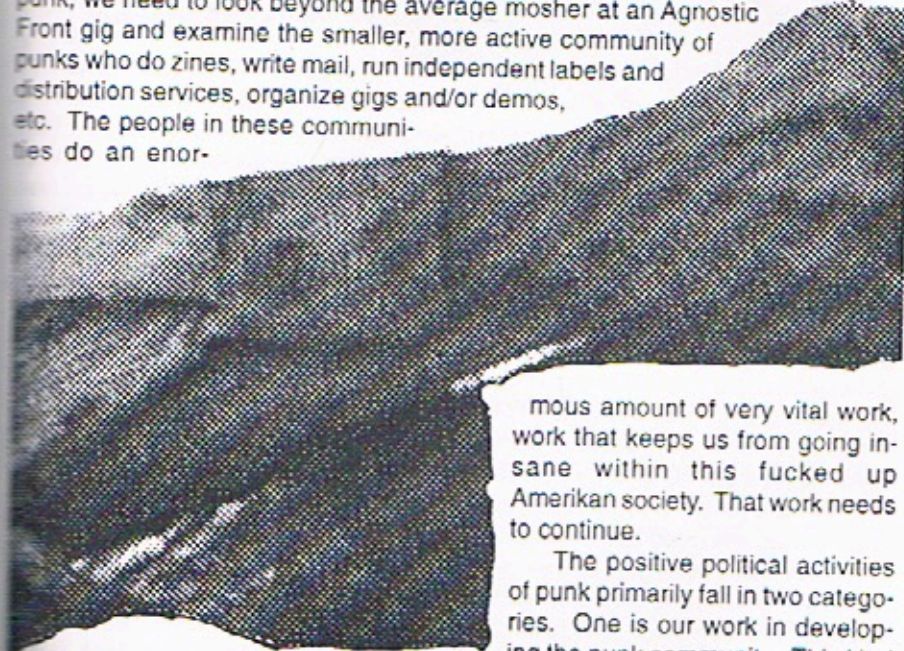
by joel

are significant numbers of people in these groups who also spend most of their political activity (where "political" is defined as one's relations with the social world) rejecting the morals and values of white bread America.

This rejection of our roots, our middle class backgrounds, is important, for (theoretically, at least) we are the inheritors of the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist world order. A prime position as defenders of the capital of the ruling class and the overseers of the underclass has been set aside for us by our parents, our upbringing, our culture, our history, and yet we have the moral gumption to reject it. As punks we reject our inherited race and class positions because we know they are bullshit. We want no part in oppressing others and we certainly want no part of Suburbia, our promised land.

However, as important as it is for us to reject our somewhat privileged backgrounds, it is also not enough. Our goal needs to be not to merely reject society, but to recreate it as well. Punk's effectiveness up to now has primarily been negative in the sense that its primary political activity has been to criticize and reject America and everything it stands for. Now it is time to take positive action. *We need to turn our anger and disgust with middle class America and creatively channel it into mass-based political action.*

To say that punk's effectiveness has been entirely negative and reaction-oriented would be dead wrong, and I don't mean to demean the accomplishments of punk by any means. To see the positive influences of punk, we need to look beyond the average mosher at an Agnostic Front gig and examine the smaller, more active community of punks who do zines, write mail, run independent labels and distribution services, organize gigs and/or demos, etc. The people in these communities do an enor-

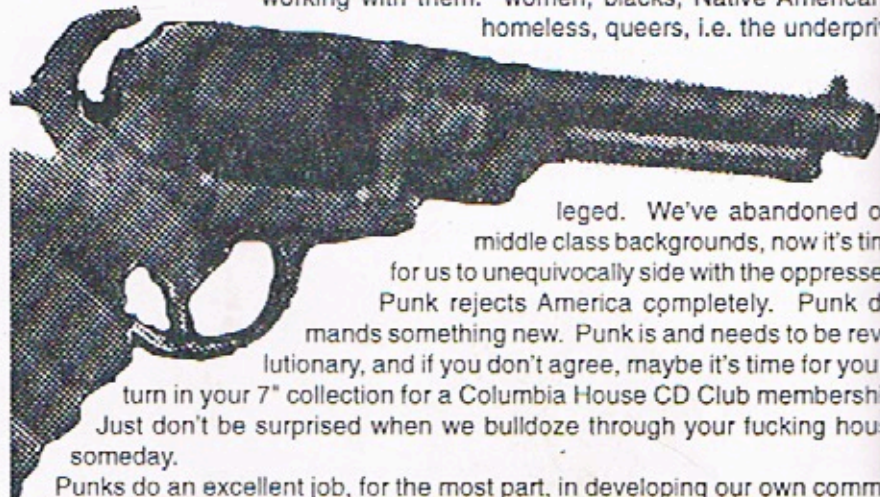


mous amount of very vital work, work that keeps us from going insane within this fucked up Amerikan society. That work needs to continue.

The positive political activities of punk primarily fall in two categories. One is our work in developing the punk community. This kind of activity includes writing fanzines, putting out records, setting up gigs, having picnics, distributing punk materials, writing mail, traveling, and simply hanging out with our good punk friends. The second kind of positive punk political activity

is the focus on changing our individual selves. This includes vegetarianism/veganism, emphasizing recycling, exploring racism, sexism, and homophobia in our punk communities and within ourselves, etc. As I've said, these activities need to continue. They are absolutely necessary in creating change, and in making change fun. After all, without punk, what would the disaffected middle class youth of Amerika have to listen to, the goddamn Grateful Dead? The Chili Peppers? Yeesh.

However, we need to add a third element in our goal to make positive change: organizing with other revolutionary elements in our society. In case you didn't know, punk is and needs to be revolutionary. The fact that it doesn't seem so indicates not that punk is liberal or reactionary but that we as punks have been selling ourselves short in realizing the potential of punk and our potential to thoroughly fuck up this society. Punk is one of the very few middle class youth cultures in North America that actually rejects middle class values. This puts us punks in a unique position, and we need to use this position as rejectors of the inheritance to our advantage and to the advantage of oppressed peoples by working with them: women, blacks, Native Americans, homeless, queers, i.e. the underprivi-



leged. We've abandoned our middle class backgrounds, now it's time for us to unequivocally side with the oppressed. Punk rejects America completely. Punk demands something new. Punk is and needs to be revolutionary, and if you don't agree, maybe it's time for you to turn in your 7" collection for a Columbia House CD Club membership. Just don't be surprised when we bulldoze through your fucking house someday.

Punks do an excellent job, for the most part, in developing our own community. It's time to take that experience into the larger community and infuse our spirit and creativity with mass-based revolutionary potential. We need to help organize and work towards a mass movement, one that's set on destroying America as it stands and empowering the dispossessed. We need a revolution and it's time for punk to be a part of it!

Further, we need to be more than superficial. We need more than another zine. We need to organize and get established in our local communities. We need to offer our collective strengths to the struggles of oppressed people, which, after all, are our own. I'm talking about expanding our present facilities, I'm talking about developing new ones. We need to continue to put out zines, but we need to get them out beyond the punk community, even if that means giving them away. We need to make better use of our present facilities and open them up to the rest of the community. Epicenter, the punk-run nonprofit record store

and community center in San Francisco is an example of this, like when they opened their doors to the community as a meeting space for the General Strike meetings during the Gulf War and when they open their space for various community groups to hold their meetings. Not every city has an Epicenter, to be sure. It's time to work with the rest of the underprivileged people in our communities and build them.

We need other new resources. We need outreach: punk soup kitchens, community groups, free stores, etc. We need to let people know that we are on the side of people, not privilege. The fascists are organizing in our communities; we need to beat them at their own game. Why do you think the KKK and the racist populist movement enjoys such success in poor farming and lower middle class communities? Because they actually go into those communities and work with the people there and help them in their struggles with the rich and powerful who are trying to destroy their lives (e.g. by helping farmers keep their land from the banks, etc.). We need to do the same thing, but we need to offer anti-fascist alternatives to the people who need help in empowering themselves. This will take a mass, broad-based movement, and punks need to take an active part in that.

The fascists are organizing in our communities; we're not. Time to change. Make no mistake, war *is* coming to Amerika. It's overdue. Look at the economy, look at the deteriorating condition of our cities, look at whatever you want. The New World Order of Bush and his lackeys is heralding in a new age, and it's not going to be pretty. The New Right want a piece of you, the racist Right wants a piece of you, the upper class want to keep their piece of you. Are you going to let them? War is coming to Amerika, and it's time to prepare, punx. We need to fight if we are to survive, and being punx, we undoubtedly can figure out a way to have a good time doing it.

Getting involved in the community does *not* mean we have to sacrifice our identities. We don't have to "grow up," look nice, act polite, or refrain from drunken binges to be revolutionary or to work with non-punks. We're punks and we will change the world as punks. We need to help out those who need help in our community as punx and let folks know that we're on their side and that we're ready for a revolution, even though we're white and largely middle class and male.

So what are we doing here in Minneapolis? Profane Existence is taking an active part in a new local anarchist group, Twin Cities Anarchist Federation. TCAF has just started, and our focus will be on community activities and creating solidarity with other groups in the Twin Cities struggling for self-determination as well as working toward, well, total social revolution. Further, *Profane Existence* will emphasize and document punk activities and punks who are getting involved in their communities. In this issue, check out the Anti-Racist Action piece.

It's time to fess up. We're punks, we hate society, and we want a new world. We're revolutionaries. As revolutionaries, it's time to work with the underprivileged and angry elements in our communities and to get organized. It's in our hands, and we should expect nothing less from punk and from ourselves. We will make punk a threat again, together. Let's do it! ★