

DEEPER THAN INSIDE

'builders of community'

Understanding why emo
exists and what it
stood for

59

MOSS ICON

WE CAN GET (kind of) EMOTIONAL

Punk is supposed to be strong, aggressive, and political right? Or, a punk is supposed to be tough, rigid, and mean? WRONG, WRONG, WRONG. Punk can be strong, aggressive, and political, such as London punk and anarcho-punk, but not necessarily.



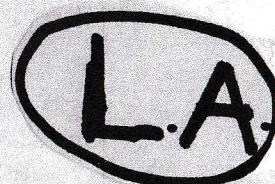
Hardcore began to take punk in further directions, sprouting from the suburbs of Los Angeles. From these hardcore bands, political lyrics were still incredibly common, however more themes incorporating personal lyrics were being seen. For example:

Black Flag - Nervous Breakdown (1979):

"I'm about to have a Nervous breakdown
My head really hurts
If I don't find a way out of here
I'm gonna go berserk
'Cause I'm crazy and I'm hurt"

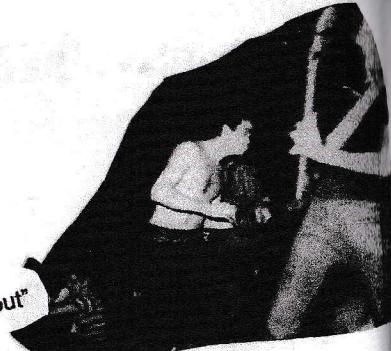
Descendents - Myage (1992):

Alone at night, Plans her game
Correctly thinking that I'm in Pain
Every night it's all the same
She be a-fuckin' with my brain
She don't need no one"



SOA - Blackout (1981):

"I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do
Everyday seems the same, I might as well die
I can't get what I want, what's the fucking point
Why the hell should I go on, when the bottom's fallen out"

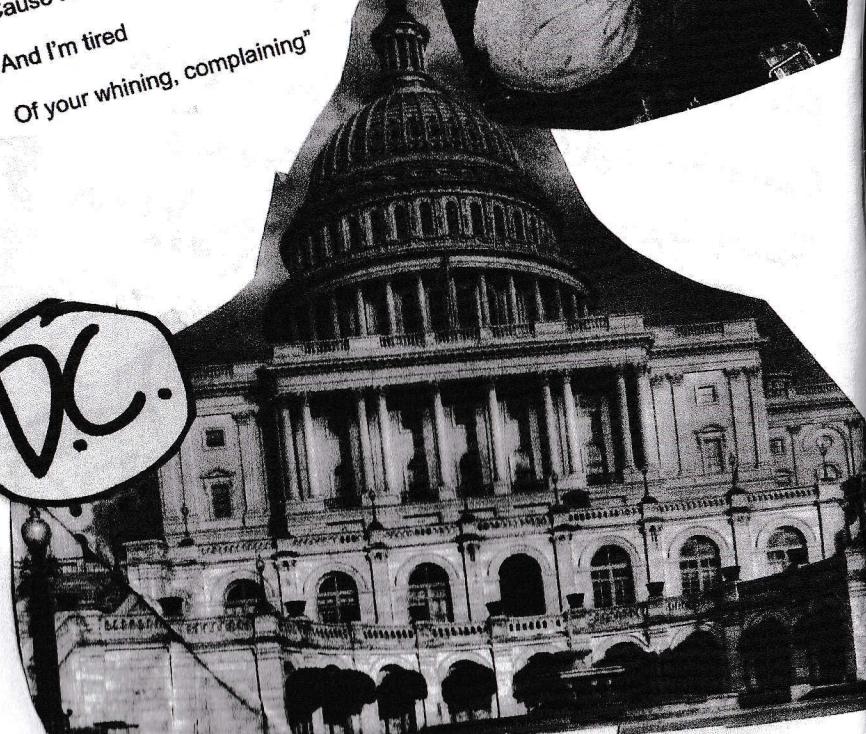


Minor Threat - Sob Story (1983):

"I wish there was a way
To make it all better
I pray for a way
To Make you happy
Cause I'm sick
And I'm tired
Of your whining, complaining"



DC.



A key difference between these hardcore lyrics and that of emotional hardcore that develops a few years later is that these lyrics have a more aggressive, angrier attitude. In a large majority of these hardcore songs, the lyrics describe being incredibly angry at someone else or oneself. However, these did bring the lyrical themes of punk into a more personal and situational realm, compared to that of past themes and lyrics. "Black Flag's lyrics babbled with resentment and self-doubt" (Greenwald, 9). As Henry Rollins said when he played with SOA, "I never had stage fright and was never nervous. I was too angry to be nervous. I'd get

on stage and just explode" (Crawford, 21). These are examples of first seeds of emotional release in hardcore being developed, with the DC scene being incredibly important in its development.



ALL AGES
WHERE: AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
WHEN: FRI. 13 9:00 PM.
HOW MUCH: I DON'T KNOW
WHY: THE STUDENTS
NEED A DEMONSTRATION IN
THE "SO WHAT" ATTITUDE
INFO: HENRY: 243-1132

w/ YOUTH BRIGADE
+ THE G1'S
+ THE HONKYS
+ SPECIAL GUE

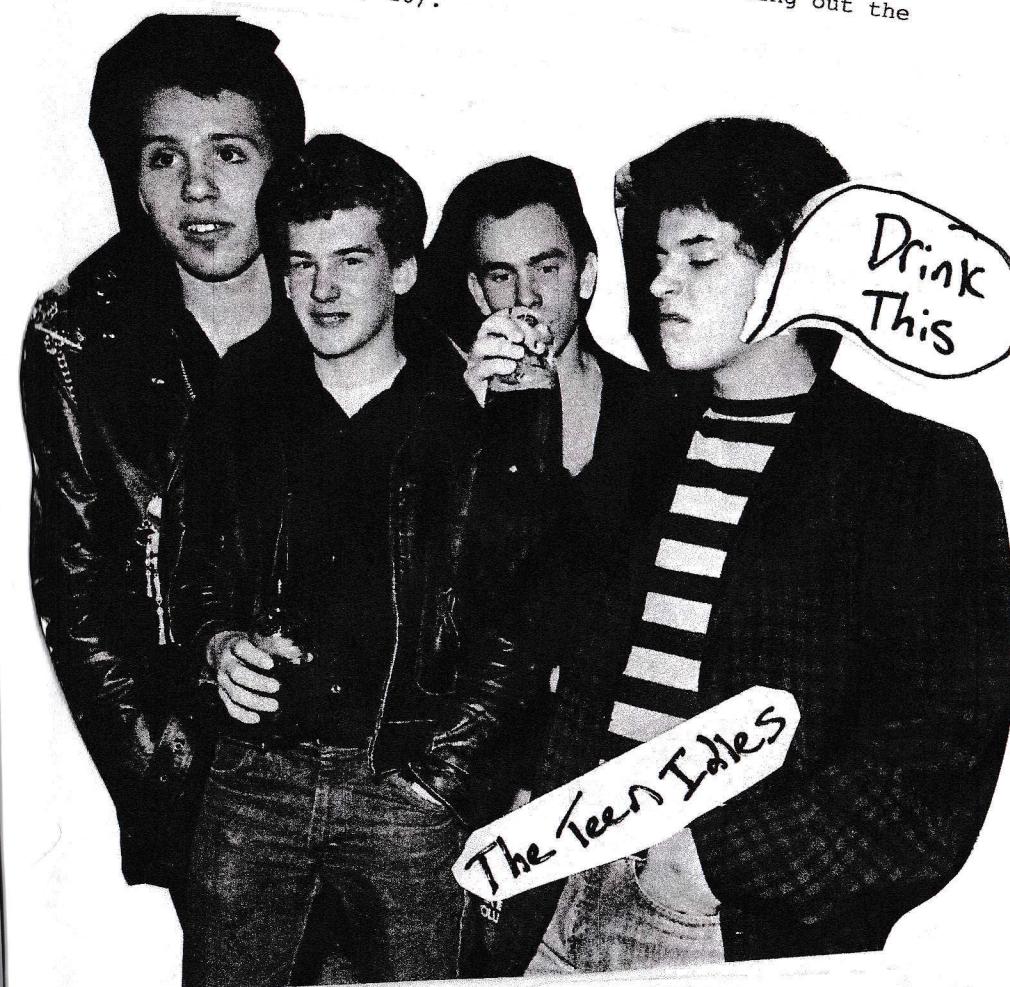


X Straight-Edge and a tight-knit community began to develop in the Washington DC hardcore scene, stemming heavily from the Teen Idles and Minor Threat. Bad Brains introduced the scene to the Positive Mental Attitude, which some will later expand upon in their own way. The Teen Idles brought a more inclusive energy to DC, incorporating all-age venues, as well as the beginning of Straight-Edge values. All age venues would draw an 'X' on the hands of minors, indicating that they were not drinking. Soon, that became a symbol of solidarity. Ian MacKaye's follow-up band, Minor Threat, brought and even more political and community-based approach to the scene with an official label being made for the previous solidarity: Straight-Edge, which was X someone who rejected the "media-hyped sex-and-drugs lifestyle" (Rhine, 55) that became associated with rock and punk.

*"I'm a person, just like you
But I've got better things to do"*
- Minor Threat - "Straight Edge"

The DC scene as well began to take the Do-It-Yourself ethos of punk to heart, which contributed to the community-building. "Hardcore punks took a DIY approach to developing their music and bands, and to their relationships with their audiences...DC hardcore drew its strength and power from punk rockers' insistence on sticking with DC and singing their city" (Rhine, 55).

"Despite the rage, however, hardcore at its racing heart, was about community...the band [Minor Threat]--rode a wave of localized frustration and made entire rooms sing out the stress" (Crawford, 10).

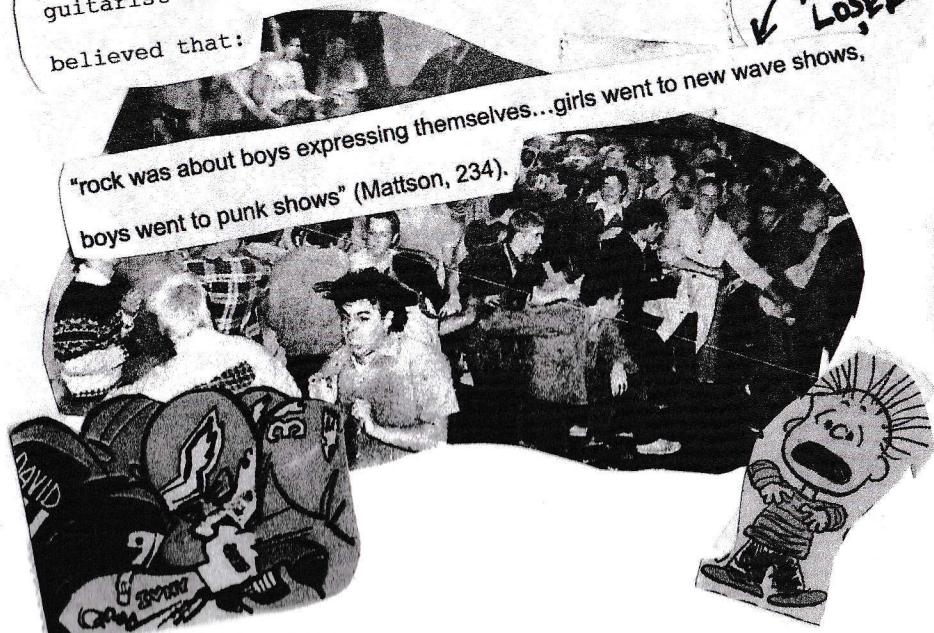


These aspects of community and solidarity continue to be incredibly important when discussing the further development of emotional themes in hardcore as the years progress.

Setbacks and Lost Values

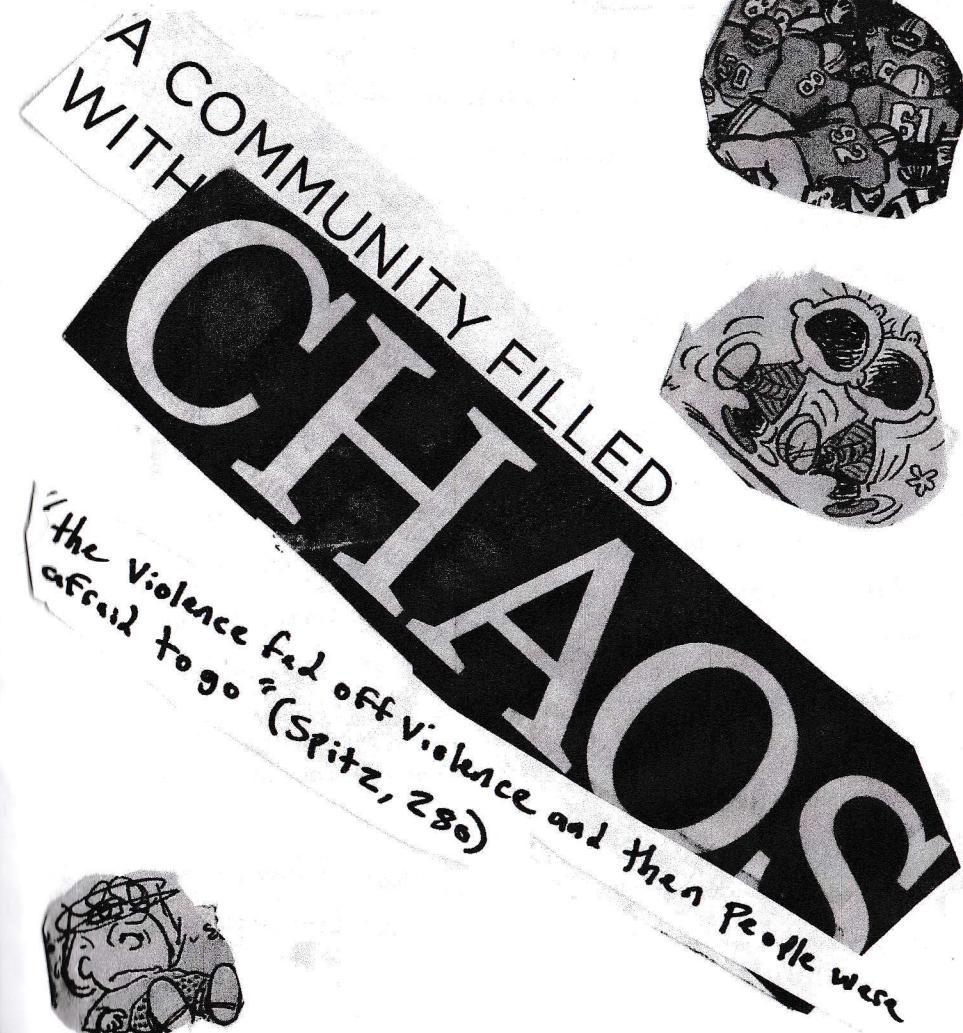
As hardcore developed and evolved, incredibly negative parts of the movement began to pop up within scenes across the country. Some of these issues included violence and toxic masculinity, declining quality within the music, a bastardization of straight edge in the eyes of their creators, and a sense of decline being felt in the authenticity and overall movement of punk.

Violence at hardcore shows became an incredibly large issue. The pits became unnecessarily violent, with people slam dancing and breaking into fights often. Hardcore became incredibly male-dominated as well; Al Barile, guitarist of SSD out of Boston and massive macho jock believed that:



It created a space that was incredibly toxic and dangerous towards women, where risk of injury and sexual assault were high. This resulted in less women attending shows and being associated with punk, a scene which from the beginning gave women a space to perform and be heard in rock music.

Skinheads were responsible for a lot of these violent issues as well, so many people opted out of going to shows in order to avoid interacting with them. Overall attendance at shows diminished due to the violence and fear. From this, the community aspects of punk were being hurt.



Declining quality and creativity within the music was another issue. Hardcore had become sterile in the eyes of many. Going further into the mid-80s, hardcore had become the defining sound of punk. Being easy for teens to imitate and great for boys to blow off their "adolescent steam" (Marcus, 49). Jack Rabid, Alternative Section Editor of Rockpool magazine, talked of how "what really bugged him about the stale category of 'hardcore' was how it got dumped onto who played more interesting fare than formulaic thrash music" (Mattson, 277).

Straight-edge became associated with the male aggression of hardcore that was mentioned earlier, with many criticizing the movement for "being puritanical and self-serious, and for serving as a platform for a male aggression, violence, and intolerance (Aron 2016). The movement became increasingly popular with suburban, white, and adolescent males, which therefore further gave into the aggression of hardcore and cliquey energy. Ultimately, further hurting the community of punk.

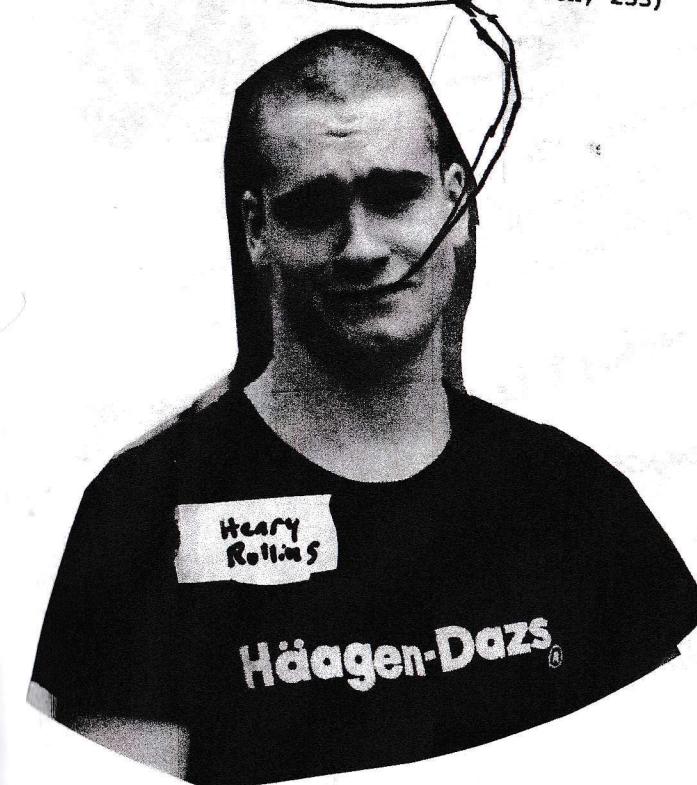
"Straight-Edge took itself way too seriously and kind of cornered itself into something of a ghetto, almost like a religion. (Lopes, 2018). This almost bastardizing of the ideals of original straight edge to one of the original pioneers of the movement, Ian MacKaye, to the point of himself feeling displeased at being the figurehead of straight edge (Wray 2015).

"the fundamentalist-minded among the straight edge youth branched off into various forms of militancy and insanity...some started mini-gangs and brawled with non-straight edge" (Aron 2016)

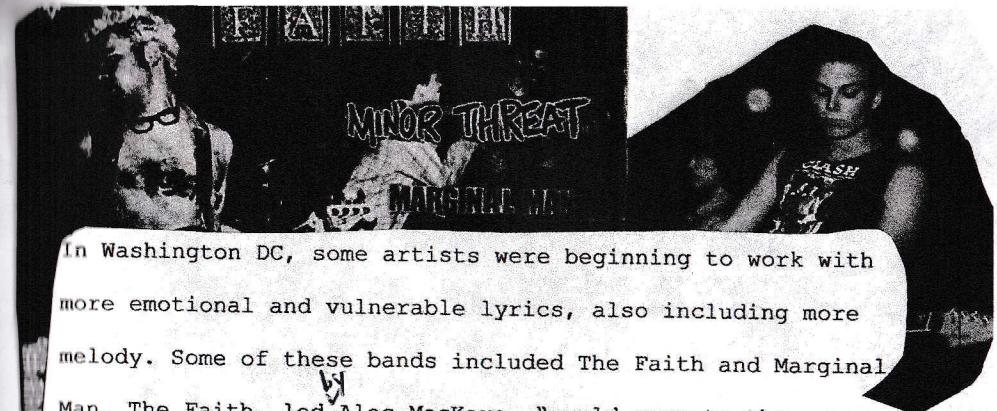
Through these aspects of testosterone-filled hardcore dominating the movement, violence, loss of creativity, and straight-edge going off the deep end, there was an overall sense of decline being felt in the authenticity and overall movement of punk. Punk rock began to fall between the cracks (Spitz, 280). Many punk and hardcore bands had peaked already and were winding down, with poppy new wave becoming the defining image of punk in the mainstream.

Leading into the mid-80s, "there were very few punk bands still knocking around that meant anything" (Spitz, 280).

"Henry Rollins knew by this time [1984] that the band [Black Flag] had run its course, that it had turned into something it never intended to be... I think that Black Flag has reached its high point" (Mattson, 233)

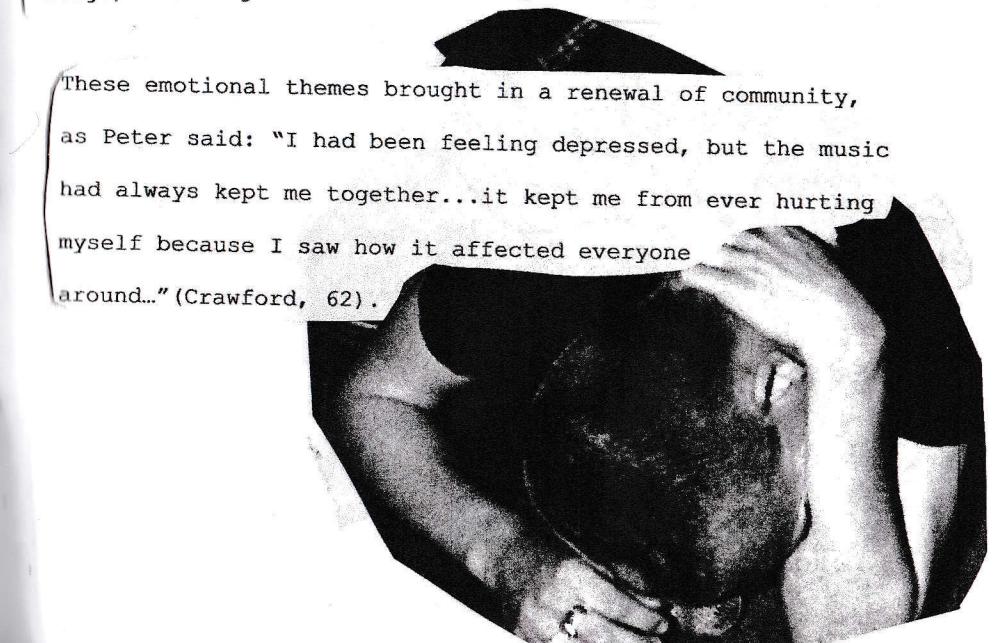


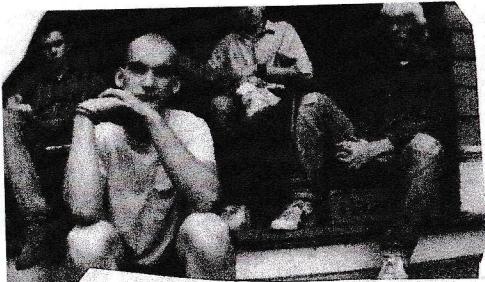
As much as punk seemed doomed during the mid-80s, some still saw potential and a chance for the scene to come back strong. Out of the Twin Cities, The Replacements and Hüsker Dü began experimenting with the genre of punk in new ways. With both groups pioneering what would later be labeled "alternative rock". Along with that, Hüsker Dü were incredibly influential in the development of post-hardcore.



According to Mark Andersen, co-founder of Positive Force: "Marginal Man were the first proto-emo band in DC." Once again, they were slowing down and adding melody. Their song "Forever Gone" is a prime example of this. Peter Murray of Marginal Man wrote the song in dedication to his late friend, who took his own life. It would be a struggle playing it live, and often Peter would begin to bawl on stage, the song was too emotionally taxing on the band.

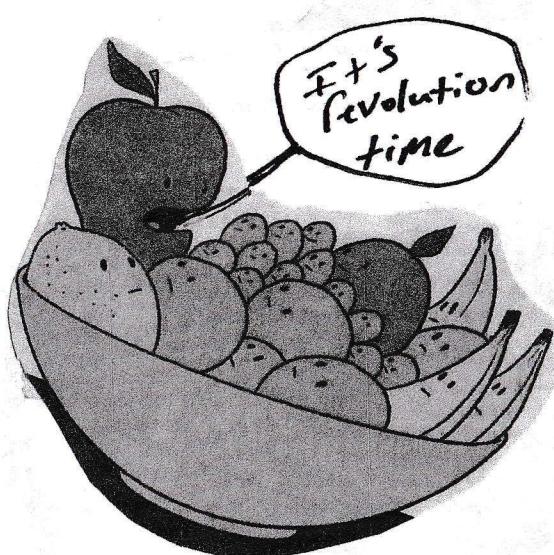
These emotional themes brought in a renewal of community, as Peter said: "I had been feeling depressed, but the music had always kept me together...it kept me from ever hurting myself because I saw how it affected everyone around..." (Crawford, 62).





Minor Threat had broken up in 1983, however in 1985 they released a track that they had previously recorded while together called "Salad Days". Salad Days epitomized one thing: Nostalgia. From its opening line, **"Wishing for the days when I first wore this suit. Baby has grown older. It's no longer cute. (Minor Threat, 1985)"**.

The moment this track released, it "symbolized going to the vault, retrieving something from the past" (Mattson, 259). Due to the state of the punk scene at that moment in 1985, this track's release started to make those of the DC scene feel nostalgic and wishing that the scene was as thriving, or even more so, than it used to be. So, they decided to do something about that...



Revolution Summer and Emotional Hardcore



The release of "Salad Days" in 1985 suggested that the punk scene was not progressing how it should have been; it was only getting worse. This was due to the nostalgic feelings that were associated with the lyrical content and the fact that the track was from a band that defined the DC scene years before.

"A revolt within a revolt" ensued (Mattson, 259). That revolt being Revolution Summer. The movement was a direct response to the violence, lack of creativity, political apathy, and overall sense of decline within the punk scene. Revolution Summer was incredibly important in the evolution of punk into the late-80s, and ultimately all the way until the present day. This was due to the rejuvenated inclusivity, political activism, creativity, and how it was a general renaissance for the scene.

This movement is where emotional themes in lyrics majorly came into the foreground, as they were something of importance to those involved in the community of Revolution Summer. Many of these emotional bands would go on to be labeled as 'emotional hardcore', later shortened to 'emo'. Shortened



Musician and Dischord Records employee Amy Pickering coined the term 'Revolution Summer' in 1985. Often called the 'mother of the revolution', she would pass along anonymous notes with critiques on the community. She did not think of the movement as the start of something new, but instead as "the climax, it was the end of something" (Jackson et al.).

Rejuvenated inclusivity and political activism were reincorporated into the scene. One of the ways to decrease violence and support inclusivity, many directly opposed slam dancing at their shows (Andersen, 2015). Positive Force was an important aspect of the political activism of Revolution Summer. Positive Force was a collective of mostly teenage punk fans who worked together to "try to politicize the DC scene and put an emphasis on protest politics" (Mattson, 259). The group directly sought out to bring young people to action, and especially to incorporate the DIY ethos of punk into their movement. They had organized anti-Apartheid protests outside of the South African embassy, arranged for volunteering, set up benefit shows, and held well-publicized meetings open to everyone (Marcus, 87). Along with that, another form of activism that became popular during Revolution Summer were vegetarianism, veganism, and animal rights.

The creativity that was seen during Revolution Summer was incredibly ambitious and influential on future punk music. Post-hardcore began to fully develop as these bands experimented with what hardcore could be. Bands like Rites of Spring, Embrace, Beefeater, Kingface, Dag Nasty, and Gray Matter spearheaded this movement. The musical creativity of Revolution Summer resulted in the birth of both post-hardcore and emo.

Beefeater combined breakneck tempos with crunching guitars, being held together by slapping bass lines. They were heavily influenced by funk and reggae (Jackson et al.), were incredibly political, and sought to have people politically reexamine themselves (Crawford, 69).



Gray Matter brought a garage-poppy, increasingly melodic energy to the DC hardcore punk scene. Their lyrical content was filled with emotional angst and a sense of coming-of-age, with Geoff Turner of the band saying: "a lot of those lyrics are about that—how to bust through this next phase in our lives. And survive it..." (Crawford, 66).

Gray Matter - Burn no Bridges (1986):

"Burn no bridges to stay warm

Can't keep running from the rain

Can't live my life on the edge of the storm

Kill confusion by killing options"



Dag Nasty had "crisp and ferocious performances [that] evoked the fire of the early hardcore scene but were wholly resonant with the present moment" (Jackson et al.).

RIES of SPRING

Rites of Spring is where emotional lyrics really began to be placed in the spotlight. Building off of all that was discussed so far in the hardcore scene and utilizing influences through the experimentation of bands such as Hüsker Dü, Rites of Spring managed to directly oppose the jockiness of hardcore, created a community driven by vulnerability and connection, and were highly influential in post-hardcore and emo. Due to this, they are often cited as the first emo band. "The group ushered in a new, contemplative, emotionally raw lyrical delivery" (Crawford, 77).

"Rites of Spring in particular, had such a huge impact on Washington, DC and everything that came afterward"
(Crawford, 79).

Rites of Spring consisted of Guy Picciotto, Mike Fellows, Edward Janney, and Brendan Canty, forming in spring of 1984. Guy Picciotto, singer and lyricist, was a major Minor Threat fan. From that influence, Picciotto was able to "harness all of the anger, disillusionment, paranoia, and fear to which MacKaye had given voice...turned every last drop of it on himself...it was to shake yourself" (Greenwald, 11).

The vulnerable and heartfelt lyrics of the band directly challenged the macho posturing that became so prevalent within the punk scene at that point" the band also were "musically unique through how they "defied musical and stylistic rule" (Dischord 2023).

As soon as you drop the needle on their self-titled record, your ears are immediately blasted with all instruments that the band has to offer. The music itself is driven by grunchy, feedback-heavy, and careening guitars, being both incredibly tight and incredibly sloppy at the same time. The band's take on hardcore is a lot more melodic in song structure and vocals. The poetic and vulnerable lyrics are an incredibly important part of this band, as they directly confront the macho jock nature of hardcore. In many of the tracks, Picciotto sounds as if he would burst into tears at any moment. The major themes in the lyrics include that of emotional vulnerability, hopelessness, heartbreak, self-deprecation, regret, denial, and nostalgia. The nostalgic feelings occurring throughout Revolution Summer are shown through these lyrics. Nostalgia is also an incredibly important lyrical theme within emo.

"For Want of" - Rites of Spring (1985):
"I, I believed that in forgetting I might set myself free
But I woke up this morning with a Piece of Past Caught
In my throat
And then I choked"

"If you took them to heart [the lyrics], you were bound to feel something" (Crawford, 81).

Picciotto sings his lyrics with so much passion, but makes them not incredibly detailed, making it so they are broad enough for listeners to be able to relate to. These lyrical themes began to connect the community of DC in ways that they haven't had before. "I was crying at some of those Rites of Spring shows...you looked across the room and all of your friends were doing the same thing" (Crawford, 80).

Rites of Spring

Spring - Rites of Spring (1985):

"Caught in time so far away
From where our hearts really wanted to be
Reaching out to find a way
To get back to where we'd been"

GREY MATTER
KING FACE
SAT. MAR. 30

AT: FOOD FOR THOUGHT
1738 Conn. Ave.
11 P.M.

EMBRACE SPRING

Rites of Spring immediately had a major influence on the DC scene. With Ian MacKaye fronting his next band during the Revolution Summer, which was inspired by the vulnerability of Rites of Spring. That band was Embrace, which was made up of three members of Faith with Ian MacKaye on vocals. Embrace is also often considered one of the major early emo bands.

Building - Embrace (1987)

"I can't get what I want
I'm a failure
Nothing seems to work out quite
The way I planned" AT 9:30 CLUB
SIX DOLLARS CUTT'S NECK

Through fighting back against the negative aspects of the hardcore scene in the form of Revolution Summer in 1985 and taking influences from previous bands earlier in the decade, the Washington DC hardcore scene incorporated more emotional lyrics in their songwriting. In turn, they

created the subgenre of emo, which from this point forward will continue to evolve in various ways.

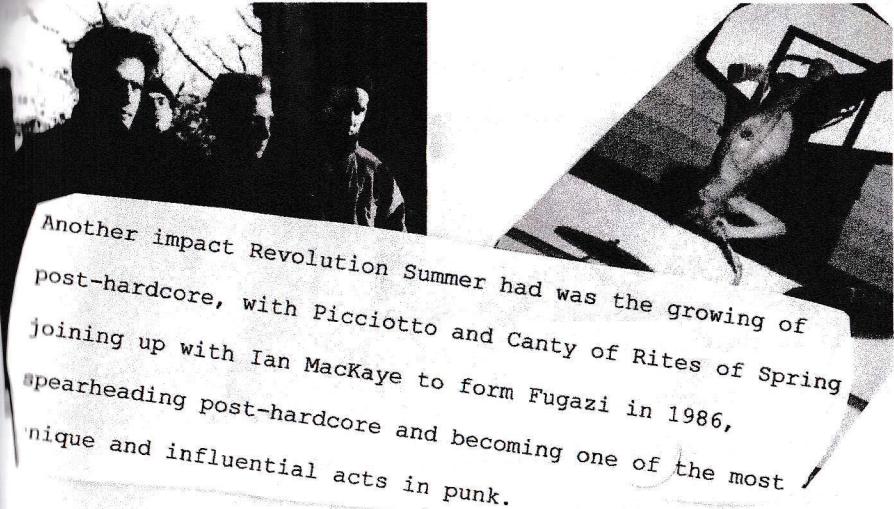
Emo's Evolution and the Aftermath of Revolution Summer

Now a somewhat accepted name for this style of punk music had been created: emo. Hardcore that is emotionally dense and vulnerable, with melodic song structure. Emo is also a sibling of post-hardcore, with each separately evolving and crossing over in unique ways. However, those who pioneered the subgenre of emo have not been accepting of the label, with both Ian MacKaye and Guy Picciotto rejecting the label because they believed that hardcore had always been emotional from the start.

Looking at the impact of Revolution Summer aside from emo, there was a rejuvenation in punk that had reverberated out of DC as the years progressed. One of the most important and significantly noticeable effects of Revolution Summer was influencing the riot grrrl movement which sprouted up in the early-90s. To simply show how much the community of

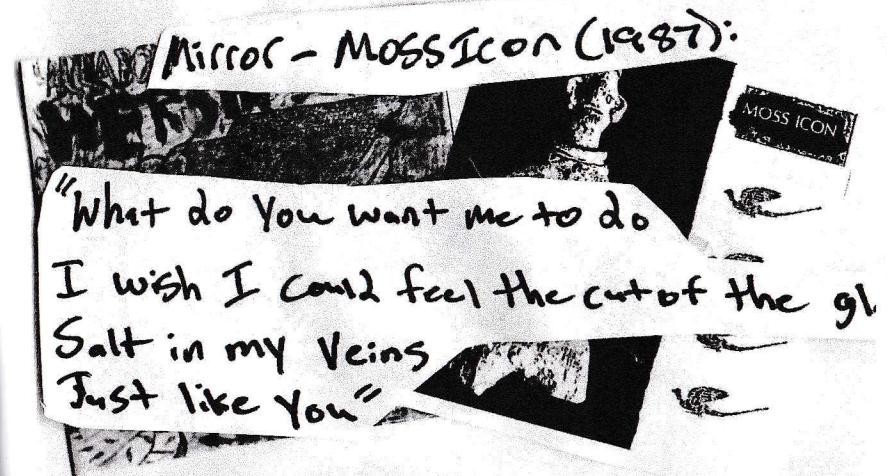


DC had changed and evolved, at Bikini Kill's first show in DC in June of 1991, Kathleen Hanna was thrown off by how the "people in the audience were dancing like mad for a band they had never seen before, cheering, and whistling after every song...Kathleen was thrown off balance...People aren't usually that nice" (Marcus, 76).



Another impact Revolution Summer had was the growing of post-hardcore, with Picciotto and Carty of Rites of Spring joining up with Ian MacKaye to form Fugazi in 1986, spearheading post-hardcore and becoming one of the most unique and influential acts in punk.

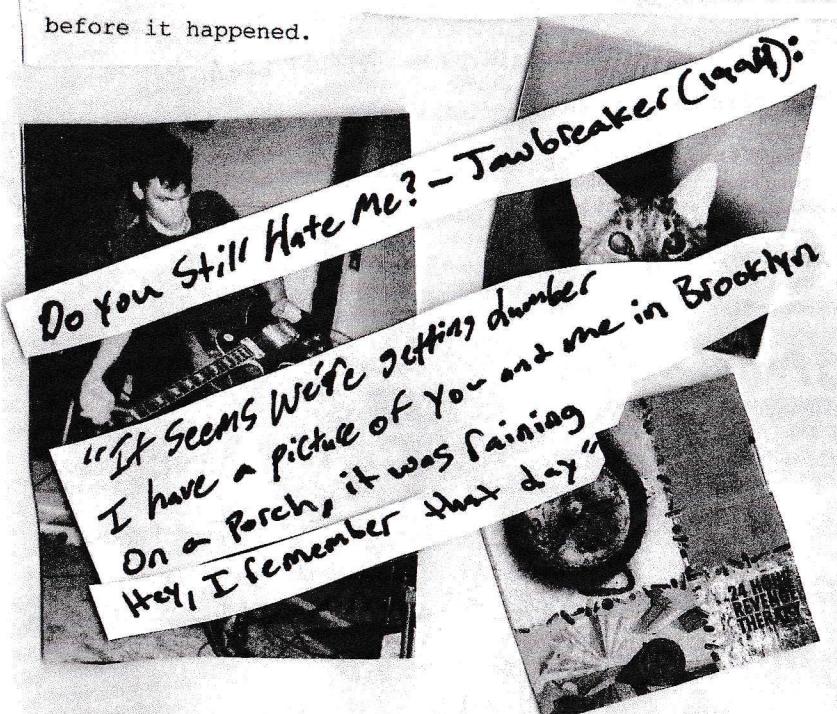
When it came to emo, its flame burned out relatively quickly in DC after Revolution Summer. However, its influence slowly spread to other areas of the country. (Greenwald, 17). In Annapolis, bands The Hated and Moss Icon continued emo on with its roots in hardcore. Into the early-90s in southern California, some artists began to incorporate harsher, screamed vocals with complex and abrasive melodies, which became known as screamo. These included artists such as Heroin, Antioch Arrow, and Swing Kids (Treble 2014).



Two bands that majorly lead the evolution of emo in the early-to-mid-90s were Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate.



Forming in the East Bay in 1986, Jawbreaker fused emotional lyrics with catchy pop-punk melodies. They were incredibly tight live, and their lyricist and singer Blake Schwartzenbach took lines directly from his diary to incorporate into songs. Jawbreaker created a "sonic shotgun marriage between the bristly heft of hardcore, the songwriting sensibility of Cali pop-punk, and the tortured artistry of DC emo" (Greenwald, 20). Jawbreaker started building the bridge between emo and the mainstream a decade before it happened.



Sunny Day Real Estate were swept up the post-Nirvana 'alternative-rock' frenzy, forming in the shadows of grunge in Washington State in 1992. Sunny Day stood out from the "Seattle-based pack of post-grunge alt-rock bottom-feeders" (Greenwald, 28) through their poetic lyrics, intricate songwriting, and unique fusion of traditional emo with indie rock. Their 1994 release, *Diary*, showcased their ability to combine romantically poetic lyrics and twinkling guitar sections with loud and fuzzy ones. Their lyrics "signaled a new way to talk about passion" (Cohen, 2009). Sunny Day's lyricist and vocalist, Jeremy Enigk, was able to harness his convoluted and youthful subconscious into his lyrics. (Greenwald, 29). Themes of nostalgia, heartbreak, and sadness are all over this record. Something changed; a much younger crowd began coming to shows, with college and high school kids who typically did not attend



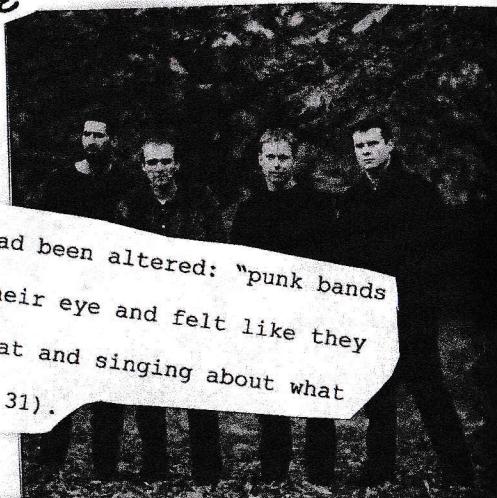
the punk shows that initially spawned emotional hardcore. A new and unique community began to form after *Diary*'s release, being one of continued emotional and vulnerability acceptance.



"Sunny Day is that voice inside your head when you want to cry...Listening to them made me feel that it was OK to feel the way I did. And when I started going to the shows, everyone was like me" (Greenwald, 31).

Sometimes - Sunny Day Real Estate (1994):

"Sometimes I can't lay down my Past
Sometimes I'm too blind to ~~see~~ see
You laughing at me"



The future of the subgenre had been altered: "punk bands all over got this gleam in their eye and felt like they could start shredding like that and singing about what mattered to them" (Greenwald, 31).

The label of 'emo', which many were conflicted over on its meaning up to this point, was harnessed by Sunny Day Real Estate through their emotionally dense musical style. "Music that was romantic but denatured of its political, traditionally punk rock content" (Greenwald, 32).

In Circles - Sunny Day Real Estate (1994):

"Oh I dream to heal your wounds
But I bleed myself, well I bleed myself"

Through these new forms of emo being developed, the genre continued to evolve up until the present day. The common lyrical themes of nostalgia and vulnerability on top of gritty and melodic song structure lead directly back to the

Revolution Summer in the Washington DC hardcore scene. A movement which in itself was fueled by nostalgia, being a push back against the toxic environment brewed by hardcore going into the mid-80s. A community was harmed and in decline, so those involved in Revolution Summer worked to rebuild that inclusive and open community. Emo rose up during the Revolution Summer as a way to combat against the macho energy of hardcore, further connecting those in the community with its honest and heartfelt lyrics. Emo brought acceptance of emotional vulnerability to the foreground, creating a new community and subgenre itself.



