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The Far Right in the United Kingdom – how radical extremism was propagated and countered in youth culture through music in the 1970's and early 1980's.

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'Our job (Rock against Racism) was to peel away the Union Jack to reveal the swastika'

'Red' Saunders

'If Adolf Hitler flew in today, they'd send a limousine anyway'

The Clash

'White Man in Hammersmith Palais'

The far-right throughout history has always valued youth as its most critical asset. Its proliferation in the United Kingdom (U.K) in the 1970s and early 1980s was in no small part due to direct attempts to attract, recruit and colonise British working-class youth culture. This was done through the dissemination of fascist ideologies in youth spaces. It was, however, challenged by the 'left' – whose own attempts to shape youth culture to political ends centred on the anti-establishment music of the Age – Punk. This paper looks at the battle that engulfed Britain's street corners, concert halls and politics in the period, between the resurgent racist ‘right’ and its socialist counterparts. It addresses how the National Front (NF) failed in their attempt to shape Britain’s youth into the energised supporter base they hoped would make the Party a serious contender in mainstream British politics, and the reasons behind this failure, namely the untameable Punk music movement, its uncontrollable bands and its unconquerable fanbase.

A fitting starting point for this paper is Eric Clapton's performance in the Birmingham Odeon theatre on August 5th, 1976 - a notorious onstage meltdown in which he drunkenly declared his support for the anti-immigration politician Enoch Powell, despite being a white musician whose career was built on a profound respect for Reggae and the Blues,[1] and warned that Britain was in danger of becoming a ‘black colony.’ As Daniel Rachel notes, ‘His outburst, when reported, provoked indignation and was to become the starting point of a sixteen-year period in which politics and music combined with unprecedented force and energy.’[2] Despite heavy criticism in the press, with casual racism rife in British society, it appeared that Clapton was not apologetic. However, his tirade was not without consequence,

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[1] Goodyer, I. *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Manchester University Press, 2009. Page 10.

[2] Rachel, Daniel. *Walls Come Tumbling down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge, 1976-1992*. Picador, 2017. Page 1.

directly inspiring the formation of *Rock Against Racism* (RAR), a nationwide anti-fascist movement of street demonstrations and rock concerts. RAR combined with the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) to forge a cultural weapon designed to thwart the advance of the NF's increasingly powerful racist street movement and thuggish skinhead followers and fight back against the rise of far-right extremism in Britain.

The emergence of two radically different strains of Punk music highlights the fractured nature of youth culture in the period. Youth cultural spaces were recognised as a site of struggle between political activists who attempted to lay claim to music for revolution or reaction. Given this, Punk—as a musical form and a broader youth culture—became a contested site of political engagement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For revolution, most successfully, RAR was initiated as a means of reclaiming popular music as a progressive force. Simultaneously, the far-right moved to contest the 'left's' cultural turn. As Worley writes, 'Unlike the left, which tended to focus its attention on the content and production of youth cultural forms, the far-right's approach was applied more in spatial terms; that is, the colonisation of spaces in which young people gathered and lived.'[3] Punk emerged in the midst of all this - its meaning contested – born from a period of active youth disengagement from the political mainstream and a growing emphasis on 'new' spheres of struggles.

'Right' against 'left' in Punk music was a critical battle, inherent to its make-up. Since its inception in the 1970s, as a reaction to music in the charts that failed to represent Britain's disaffected youth, Punk attracted the world of radical politics. The central and later most commercialised bands of this new era, such as The Clash and The Sex Pistols, embraced unique anarchist ideas, and anti-authoritarian, radical left-wing ideologies. In opposition, 'Nazi Punk' began to emerge, using its anti-establishment image to promote a racist, far-right

[3] Worley, M. *Oi Oi Oi! Class Locality and British Punk* –Twentieth Century British History, Volume 24, Issue 4, December 2013. Pages 619-620.

agenda. As Worley and Copsey describe, 'The far-right's turn to youth coincided with the emergence of Punk, a musical culture that appeared to embody a reaction to the contemporaneous socio-political climate and prospective lack of a 'future'.'[4] These two opposites arose in an atmosphere of intense tribalism within youth culture. According to former *NME* journalist Paul Morley, 'The kind of music you liked was a matter of life and death.'[5] As Shaffer argues, 'In a very real sense, music became a battleground for the 'left' and 'right' in the 1970s.'[6] His evocation of violence is certainly not misplaced, as Punk gigs were often disrupted by competing political factions. Fighting and turf wars were frequent at concerts in the 1970s and early 1980s and would break out solely based on the distinctive physical characteristics of opponents, with their style conveying certain, crucially different, political ideologies.

To explain Punk music's divided youth culture, one has to look at the historical context to its rise: the socio-economic situation of the U.K into which it exploded. The post-war period was characterised by a range of socio-economic developments, which challenged long-standing patterns of British life. 'Reconstruction' brought immense demographic shifts, occasioned, for example, by immigration from the Commonwealth. By the 1970s, fault lines had begun to appear, due to the industrial unrest and unemployment that became symbols of the Age. Large-scale unemployment, which peaked at 3,278,000 (11.9%) in 1984, became a permanent feature of Britain's economic landscape, while old, working-class industrial regions fell into a decline from which many have yet to recover.[7] The collapse of 'consensus'

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[4] Copsey, Nigel, and Matthew Worley. *"Tomorrow Belongs to Us": the British Far Right since 1967*. Routledge, 2018. Page 119.

[5] Frank, Adrian Goldberg & Jim. "A Time When Gigs Were Violent." *BBC News*, BBC, 10th Sept. 2015.

[6] Shaffer, Louis. "Radicals in Harmony: Skinhead Music, International Networks and the Transformation of British Fascism, 1967 to Present." *Stony Brook University*, ProQuest LLC, 2013. Page 75.

[7] Worley, *Oi! Oi Oi! Class Locality and British Punk*. Pages 627-628.

in the 1970s shattered many people's dreams of progress and prosperity.[8] Although the economic crisis was a global phenomenon, Britain's exposure to it was particularly severe: with high levels of inflation and low levels of economic growth that came to be known as 'stagflation'. The Clash sang bitterly about *Career opportunities / The ones that never knock*, and many of the generation that made up the youth cultures of Punk, who had lived their childhoods in the expectation of increasing affluence and security, felt betrayed. Goodyer argues that Britain in the 1970s was 'a place and time where the multiple legacies of an imperial past became entangled with messy realities of economic distress.'[9] As the old certainties of life and politics started to splinter, the NF rose accordingly. Worley writes that 'The 1970s saw British fascism emerge from the doldrums in which it had laboured since Sir Oswald Mosley's heyday during the 1930s.'[10] Its predominant vehicle was the NF. The power of the far-right in this period had multiple causes, but none more integral than the mood of crisis and decline that hung-over Britain.

These socio-economic conditions were ripe for the birth of an extremist political movement. The NF was formed in 1967 and used street activism focused on immigration to campaign for Britain to follow a strict white-only protectionist policy. As Rachel illustrates, 'Support for the National Front strengthened alarmingly throughout the seventies, and with candidates pledging to Keep Britain White, they polled progressively higher at national and local elections.'[11] The era was defined by industrial strife and the politics of class and race,

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[8] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism.* Page 13.

[9] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 7.

[10] Worley, M. *Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of Consensus*. *Contemporary British History*, Volume 26, No. 3, 2012. Page 343.

[11] Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge*. Page 2.

with the NF showcasing tenets of far-right movements everywhere and exploiting crises. As Leon Trotsky said, 'Fascism is the politics of counter-revolutionary despair'. Goodyer summarises - 'During the 1970s the tightly circumscribed nationalist perspectives of the British far-right merged with a worsening economic crisis at home and abroad to create a sense of desperation upon which reactionary politics could feed.'[12]

According to the NF and its supporters, the country was being 'swamped' by migrant worker 'aliens'. As Savage illustrates, 'This was a society wallowing in a not entirely unpleasurable masochism and lashing out at scapegoats.'[13] The NF violently attacked ethnic minorities and all those who defended a multicultural society. Loss of empire, entry into Europe and mounting economic problems ensured that far-right appeals to patriotism, a glorified imagined past and national revival had a resonance. Immigration provided a simplistic and prejudicial explanation for these crises and related social issues, and as is still the case, the scapegoat tactics used by British racists won a certain sympathy, evidenced across Britain today by the Brexit vote and the correlated rise of the BNP and UKIP. Amidst a generalised attack on immigration in the national press, much of it aimed at the arrival of Malawi Asians in May 1976, the NF fielded dozens of candidates in local elections, gaining, for example, a combined 44% share of the vote with the National Party in a council by-election in the South London constituency of Deptford.[14] As a result of the Front's electoral success, racist ideologies held on the fringes of British politics were now being echoed in the mainstream.

The responsibility for the accelerated rise of the far-right in Britain during this period can arguably be laid at Enoch Powell's door. Enoch Powell was a racist, reactionary politician

[12] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 17.

[13] Savage, Jon. *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2002. Page 157.

[14] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 11.

and one-time Cabinet member - an early example of the far-right populist leaders we see today such as Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro. His infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech was a very inflammatory reaction to the 1968 Race Relations Act. Though he was condemned for racial hatred and removed from the Cabinet, it inspired a spate of white supremacist hate crimes and, in the week that followed, there were several marches in his support. After Powell, still more strident voices of anti-immigrant hostility and racism would emerge, for example, the newly united NF, whose membership grew exponentially after Powell's speech. Stuart Hall wrote, 'It is difficult to communicate the severity of the race issues which passed, like seismic tremors, through society.'[15] The presumptions and prejudices that fuelled the NF's growth made inroads into British youth culture - as Worley and Copsey argue, 'Seizing on the aggressive opportunism of Punk to construct a vehicle for fascism that rolled into the 1980s and beyond.'[16] This exploitation of Punk and the cultural spaces of its youth for political ends was essential to the actions of both sides and formed the central thesis of the remainder of the paper.

Despite Punks' tendency to emphasise hostility and violence, the majority of bands associated with it were not white supremacists, and very few of the bands' members were affiliated with far-right organisations. So, why did the National Front attempt to colonise Punk and the youth culture that it spawned, exploiting the societal racial tensions that surrounded popular music to promote its racist political agenda?

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[15] Renton, Dave. *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982*. Routledge, 2019. Page 32.

[16] Worley and Copsey, *"Tomorrow Belongs to Us": the British Far Right since 1967*. Page 116.

Windisch and Simi define 'white power music' as 'any music produced and distributed by individuals who are actively trying to advance a pro-white racist agenda.'[17] Their study highlights how 'white power music' functions as a unifying experience for white supremacists across the globe, is a very useful recruitment tool, and how its popularity provides white supremacist organisations with a substantial financial resource.[18] These were the two main motives of the NF who attempted to claim Punk culture as a force of reaction. The NF wanted to use music to spread white supremacist ideologies amongst Britain's working-class youth and to attract political support in youth cultural spaces. There were those on the far-right who saw potential in Punk's cultural assault, picking up on aspects of its language and imagery to reinforce their racist worldviews. The far-right saw in Punk's disaffection a rejection of formal politics that opened a way to recruitment. Also, the commercial profitability of Punk was not lost on the NF, who saw popular music with a fascist message as a valuable vehicle to deliver propaganda to the next generation.

The NF started *Rock against Communism* (RAC) as a direct response to the successes of RAR, to give its youth supporters their own music with pro-fascist sympathies. RAC's inaugural London concert was hosted in Conway Hall on August 18th, 1979. Although the lacklustre commercial response to RAC may seem to demonstrate the limited nature of the far-right's appeal to British youth in the 1970s, this is in fact not the case. RAC's emergence reveals the far-right's attempt to cultivate British youth culture, utilising the cultural spaces associated with Punk to propagate racism and fascism. The skinhead subculture that was beginning to emerge certainly possessed a right-wing potential, and this came to the fore during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as economic and societal conditions intensified racist

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[17] Brown, Stephen Eugene, and Ophir Sefiha. *Routledge Handbook on Deviance*. Chapter - *Neo Nazi Music Subculture*, Steven Windisch and Pete Simi. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2019. Page 1.

[18] Windisch and Simi, *Neo Nazi Music Subculture.* Page 19.

attitudes across Britain. The skinheads reflected these prejudices in an exaggerated form. With their reputation for violence and nationalist views, skinheads were seen as a particularly attractive target for recruitment by the far-right. Concerning youth culture and popular music, the far-right's initial position was typically conservative. However, an influx in membership was desired, and skinhead street violence provided energy and a powerful medium to carry a fascist message when NF morale was low. As Nick Griffin, a prominent member of the Party, said, 'the skins kept the NF alive between 1980 and 1983.' The presence of young right-wing activists at Punk gigs soon encouraged NF organisers to forge stronger links to youth culture, with the formation of the Youth National Front (YNF) in 1977. As Worley and Copsey argue, 'Essential to the NF's growth was the recruitment of disaffected working-class youth.'[19]

Notoriously, the YNF's recruitment drive made inroads into youth culture, fostering an aggressive image and racial identity that gave its proponents a sense of purpose. The NF targeted concerts because it was where white working-class youth gathered together and young fascists began to enter into youth cultural spaces. This was a successful way of recruitment and a tactic which forever transformed the role of music in far-right politics. As a result of the floundering British economy and the overwhelming financial difficulties it brought, young, working-class kids were pushed towards their involvement with the far-right for 'something to do.' As Shaffer argues, 'The working classes faced a cultural crisis and suffered from an education-employment complex as they lacked their own identity, were vastly unemployed, and had little hope for the future.'[20] There appeared to be many valid reasons for supporting the YNF as a young member of Britain's underrepresented and disengaged working classes. Young people who lacked opportunity and access to higher

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[19] Worley and Copsey, *"Tomorrow Belongs to Us": the British Far Right since 1967.* Page 117.

[20] Shaffer, "Radicals in Harmony: Skinhead Music, International Networks and the Transformation of British Fascism, 1967 to Present." Page 75.

education could well believe repeated themes such as the Government favouring immigrants over them. They were given a shared community and a skinhead style and identity that made them feel empowered.

As Worley and Copsey argue, 'For a time, the far-right encroached into mainstream sites of youth culture, appropriating its forms and endeavouring to colonise its spaces.'[21] In terms of performing, RAC bands were soon forced underground, and a micro scene developed. As their racial politics became more overt, groups found gigs hard to come by. However, although 'Nazi Punk' was not initially as popular, the NF later developed 'white power' Punk bands through the Oi movement to greater effect. Most successful were Ian Stuart and Skrewdriver, a nationally recognised singer and band with racist sympathies. The impact of this group sponsoring fascism and the NF had a powerful effect not only on recruitment in Britain but connected the Party to fascists around the world. Skrewdriver became the 'godfather' of 'white power' music, and their hard rock sound revolutionised the scene in the late 1970s.

As Punk music became increasingly left-wing, and conditions continued to worsen for the majority of Britain's youth, a more radical movement began to emerge - the Oi Movement. Oi resented the middle-class identity that Punk was beginning to take on and was proudly situated in working-class ideals and rhetoric. It relied heavily on the machismo of hooliganism, and violence was endemic in its culture. The Oi movement, in the words of music journalist Stuart Maconie, became 'Punk's idiot half-brother', synonymous with arson, racism and football violence. As Brown argues, 'In providing a musical expression of skinhead identity that was almost exclusively male, and in foregrounding violence as a pillar of working-class lifestyle, Oi provided a point of entry for a new brand of right-wing

[21] Worley and Copsey, *"Tomorrow Belongs to Us": the British Far Right since 1967.* Page 121.

music.'[22] Though commonly associated with the far-right in Britain during this period, one could argue that this is too simplistic of a description for Oi. It was, in fact, a more complex phenomenon. In 1981, Punk poet Garry Johnson described Oi as 'being about real life, the concrete jungle, the Old Bill, being on the dole and about fighting back and having pride in your class and background.'[23] To be clear, Oi did contain elements that contributed to its demonisation as a 'Nazi punk' movement. But it also comprised a class awareness and a cultural heritage that suggested it was, in fact, more accurately a movement that reflected tensions inherent within the socio-economic and political realities of the period.

Unfortunately, it was associated almost immediately with a far-right image, after the Southall Riot in 1981 which centred on a gig of three Oi bands. As Worley argues, 'Oi was accused of flirting with the language and imagery of National Socialism to provide a conduit for violent fascist attitudes to enter popular music.'[24] The riot served to derail much of the momentum gathered behind Oi, and the result was wide-scale media coverage portraying it as the soundtrack of choice for Nazi skinheads committed to racial violence and a stronghold of the far-right. This misnomer retains common currency today, even though the NF had no direct involvement with the gig. Major label interest cooled and bands began to distance themselves from Oi. However, although it is undeniable that Oi was surrounded by far-right elements, to define Oi in its entirety as fascist is a mistake. As a musical movement, it would be hard to not consider Oi as the genuine sound of Britain's streets at the time. For one, the far-right's attempts to claim Oi were resisted by the majority of those involved. As Brown argues, 'Whatever the political outlook of Oi, most of the band members protested vigorously

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[22] Brown, T. S. 'Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and "Nazi Rock" in England and Germany', *Journal of Social History*, 38(1), 2004. Page 169.

[23] Worley, *Oi! Oi! Oi! Class Locality and British Punk*. Page 606.

[24] Worley, *Oi! Oi! Oi! Class Locality and British Punk*. Page 607.

against being tarred with the fascist brush,'[25] and many were vocal in their opposition to the NF.

On the far-right, the failure to claim either Punk or Oi wholly for itself led eventually to the development of a distinctly racist musical movement around bands such as Skrewdriver, who appealed to a growing fanbase worldwide that were attracted to extreme right-wing politics and white supremacist ideology during the 1980s. Their emergence reinvigorated RAC, directing the NF to establish White Noise Records in 1983 and the Blood & Honour franchise. Despite such efforts, however, the Oi movement emphasises how far-right attempts to co-opt Punk, and its youth cultural spaces, failed. Even if far-right politics helped inform the identity of some within the skinhead subculture, the vast majority rejected the substance of the NF's fascist message.

This was predominantly due to a challenge by the 'left'. RAR was created by 'Red' Saunders, a London-based photographer and veteran political activist, who responded to Clapton's outburst with an angry letter to the music press, which called for the formation of a 'rank and file movement against the racist poison in rock music'.[26] This summons to action met with an enthusiastic response: 600 replies were received in the following fortnight. To combat the rise of the NF, the British music scene heralded an unusual alliance: the anarchic bands of Punk with Reggae bands such as Steel Pulse, performing on stage together in RAR sponsored concerts. This relationship symbolised the promotion of multi-racial cultural diversity central to the 'left's' political activism and ideology. As Goodyer argues, 'It was the changing fortunes of the British class struggle in the 1970s which prompted important elements on the 'left' to embrace the potential of cultural activism, and consequently to

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[25] Brown, 'Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and "Nazi Rock" in England and Germany'. Page 170.

[26] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 11.

establish the RAR.'[27] With the increasing threat from the NF, the socialists became more receptive to forms of struggle that appealed to constituencies outside of the unionised workplace.

It is crucial to appreciate the role played by Reggae as a bridge between White and Black youth. One example from the era highlights this fact. Two members of The Clash, Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon, were living in Notting Hill during the summer of 1976. Though the leafy suburb is now considered one of the most desirable locations in London, at the time it was filled mainly with low-income families and, more often than not, Jamaican immigrants. Their immersion in poverty and racially segregated socio-economic injustices would be a considerable influence on the band and their debut record. The neighbourhood was dominated by police brutality and oppression and it came to a head at the Notting Hill Carnival, the same weekend that RAR was born. The 1976 event combusted into a scene of riots and police violence, as over 3000 officers began using the highly controversial stop and search law to arrest many carnival-goers. The police used the law to overwhelmingly target Black youth for arrest, at the same time that they protected NF marchers. As a result, local Reggae bands began producing songs about clashes with the police—making them ideal musical spokespeople for RAR. It was the first major riot that mainland Britain had seen since 1958, with 456 injured and 60 arrested, and was an important founding inspiration for RAR. The now-infamous lyrics of 'White Riot' were born that day – *Black man gotta lot a problems / But they don't mind throwing a brick / White people go to school / Where they teach you how to be thick.* As Rachel argues, 'it was a deliberate foghorn to the masses. Take direct action.'[28] Similarly, Duncombe and Tremblay describe that 'When The Clash sang 'White Riot' it was a call to arms for Whites to build alliances with Blacks and other

[27] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 3.
[28] Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge*. Page 3.

oppressed minorities, who had something to teach young Whites about rising up and resisting the powers that be.'[29] What the song captures overwhelmingly is the spirit of RAR, the revolutionary ideological basis that gave it its power.

Many Reggae and Punk musicians united to fight racism and oppression throughout society. The 'left' attempted to align Punk to the anti-racist cause, cultivating affinities between Punk and elements of black youth culture. RAR had several components, including a record label, a monthly magazine called *Temporary Hoarding*, locally organised concerts and two significant events of tens of thousands of people. Both of these events were all-day music festivals. The first was the largest, on April 30th, 1978 in London's Victoria Park, with up to 80,000 attendees and an eight-mile march against the NF. Goodyer argues that 'At the very least, RAR could confront White music fans with the implicit logic of their musical preferences and ask them if it was not more joyful to embrace the multicultural reality of modern Britain than to stay locked into the regressive fantasies of white supremacy.'[30] Karen Sands O'Connor, in her study of the period and its literature, writes that young people embraced the ideology of RAR as well as the music. Many wrote about their experiences with racism and the police, and their desire to change society.[31] The anger and frustration felt by many young people in this period found a voice in musical forms such as Punk and Reggae. RAR, arguably, was explicitly aimed at getting Britain's youth involved in left-wing

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[29] Duncombe, Stephen, and Maxwell Tremblay. *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. Verso, 2011. Page 154.

[30] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 156.

[31] Sands-O'Connor, Karen. "Punk Primers and Reggae Readers: Music and Politics in British Children's Literature." *Global Studies of Childhood*, Volume 8, No. 3, 2018. Pages 201–212.

politics, and its music acted as an organising force for young people to express their anti-fascist political views.

It is the opinion of this paper that Punk music is best understood as a disobedient music form, capable of nourishing either right- or left-wing politics, but not indebted to do so. However, it is undoubtedly the case that, as RAR poet Steven Wells recalls, 'Punk would not have had so much impact outside London without the anti-fascist movement.'[32] The 1970s saw a sustained attempt to use music to counter racism, and RAR was widely successful at reaching a broader audience and garnering support from the general public. Between 1977 and 1979, around 9,000,000 ANL leaflets were distributed and 750,000 badges sold. On the strength of individual donations, the League raised £600,000 between 1977 and 1980. In 1978 alone, RAR organised three hundred gigs and five carnivals. Although Punk and politics have long made for an unstable mix, RAR was a great success in challenging the NF and provided invaluable opposition against its entire co-option of youth spaces. As Goodyer argues, 'Through its slogan, 'Reggae, Soul, Rock and Roll, Jazz, Funk and Punk: Our Music', RAR declared its intention to deny popular music to the forces of the far-right.'[33] The success of RAR, moreover, revived the idea of popular music serving as a medium for mass mobilisation, a crucial feature in the downfall of the NF.

Punk's power as a cultural movement in the period remains undisputed. In the words of Garry Bushell, writing for *Socialist Worker* in December 1976, Punk's aggression reflected the anger of a generation who had left school only to spend their time on street corners. It was working-class rebellion, a 'violent reaction to a society collapsing around them.' It is clear that Punk became more than music and served as a site of political exploration and conflict, through which many young music fans came into contact with an array of leftist political

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[32] Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982*. Page 60.

[33] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 11.

causes. As Lehmann illustrates, 'Punk signified a means to forge a culture of engagement through which political ideas could be explored, tested and expressed.' [34] However, if Punk was inherently political, in that it critically engaged with the world of which it was part and served as a means to express anger and opinion, then it tended to resist being aligned politically. So, for example, Johnny Rotten of The Sex Pistols stated that he found NF politics 'ridiculous and inhumane'. But that did not necessarily translate into support for the 'left', whom Rotten criticised for being 'too separated from reality' and whose approach to working people 'comes across as a condescending attitude which isn't appreciated'.[35] Many Punk bands were willing to declare their opposition to racism and the politics of the NF, but remained suspicious of the motivations of leftist groups seeking to channel such protest into more formal support.

Punk reflected the world of which it was part, while also railing against it. As Worley describes, 'Punk married social commentary with stylistic innovation to forge a populist but subversive cultural force that commented on the wider socio-economic and political climate of its time.'[36] Where the 'left' saw Punk music as a medium for protest, a mouthpiece to propagate progressive ideas and register anti-establishment opposition, the 'right' applied a more spatial approach, seeking to claim ownership of the areas in which Punk's youth culture was given expression, in order to recruit support for their own fascist ideologies. Ultimately, however, neither the 'right' nor the 'left' proved able to conquer Punk and co-opt it into their ideological framework. Punk's inherent anger was aimed at authority in general, and that included 'self-appointed vanguards recruiting from the fringes of Britain's polity.' [37] After

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[34] Lehmann and Worley, "Bloody Revolutions, Fascist Dreams, Anarchy and Peace: Crass, Rondos and the Politics of Punk, 1977–84." Page 33.

[35] Worley, *Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of Consensus*. Page 12.

[36] Worley, *Oi! Oi! Oi! Class Locality and British Punk.* Page 612.

[37] Worley, *Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of Consensus*. Page 16.

all, '(Punk) was a way of feeling something, perhaps the only way of feeling left,'[38] and was not about to be told what to do.

This paper takes a similar line to that of Worley, in *Shot by Both Sides,* that 'while Punk may indeed be seen as a cultural response to the breakdown of the post-war 'consensus' in the 1970s, neither 'left' nor 'right' proved able to provide an effective political conduit through which the disaffections expressed by Punk could be channelled.'[39] More generally, it argues that the emergence of Punk and the increased visibility of parties to the 'left' and 'right' of the political mainstream were indicative of Britain's crumbling political 'consensus' over the 1970s. Punk was of immense socio-political value, providing a medium in which the injustices of the day and the establishment could be challenged. As Lehmann argues, 'The style, sound and aesthetic of Punk came loaded with potential meaning that took it beyond the realm of just music or fashion.'[40] Principally, Punk opened up cultural spaces to allow the disaffected youth of the day to begin to be able to break down social divisions.

To conclude, in summary, during the 1970s and early 1980s, the 'left' launched a cultural project against the NF with RAR, using mass popular mobilisation to combat racist politics. The 'right' then adopted a similar tactic with its own cultural forms and found a ready audience for RAC. As it was opposed, by movements such as RAR, the far-right constructed its own variant of Punk, Oi, reconfiguring the skinhead image into a distinct subculture, which ultimately slipped into a gradual decline over the coming decades. This early youth recruitment effort by the NF profoundly changed how fascists used culture for political purposes. The political and cultural alignments during the 1970's allowed the far-right

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[38] Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*. Page 165.

[39] Worley, *Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of Consensus*. Page 1.

[40] Lohman, Kirsty, and Worley, M. "Bloody Revolutions, Fascist Dreams, Anarchy and Peace: Crass, Rondos and the Politics of Punk, 1977–84." *Britain and the World*, Volume 11, No. 1, 2018. Page 1.

opportunity to contest and intervene into sites of British youth culture. Though U.K. 'Nazi punk' music merely limps on, an underground, terrible music scene[41], youth activities across fascist music in the 1970s started an active and dangerous process that culminated in the exportation of the NF's material around the world and the tried and tested tactics of youth recruitment that extremist groups still use today.

Some may argue that Punk has always been in bed with fascism. As Dominic Green wrote, 'Punk's politics began in creativity and generalised disgust, but ended in stupidity and fascism.'[42] Arguably early Punk music glamorised violence and fascist imagery. The Clash, for example, emerged from a rehearsal group called London SS, and The Sex Pistols used the swastika symbol frequently. However, in the context of Punk's deeply provocative, anti-establishment nature, 'The wearing of the swastika served notice on the threadbare fantasy of Victory, the lie of which could be seen on most urban street corners.'[43] Early Punk bands use of Nazi imagery 'went little further than pointing at the older generation and goading them.'[44] After all, outside its circle of young followers, Punk was despised, seen by millions of older people as disrespectful. Sociologist Dick Hebdidge wrote, 'No subculture has sought, with more grim determination than the punks, to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval.'[45]

Dominic Green's, then, would be a pessimistic and naive misread of Punk's role as a style, culture and rallying call for youth against oppression across the U.K. in the period. Its lessons are just as relevant today. The extent and depth of this movement's victory over

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[41] Whelan, Brian. "Britain's Nazi Punk Scene Is Alive and Limping." *Vice*, 19 Feb. 2013.

[42] Green, Dominic. "Probing Punk's Politics: Dominic Green." *Standpoint*, 23 Mar. 2016.
[43] Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*. Page 166.

[44] Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982*. Page 61.

[45] Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982*. Page 60.

British Nazism were admitted by one of its most prominent members, Martin Webster. He acknowledged that the NF was prevented from marching, recruiting, or effectively campaigning due to the relentless opposition it faced from anti-fascists. However troubling we may find the recent electoral gains of the far-right, the NF's comprehensive defeat at the hands of the ANL's RAR movement across Britain in the 1970s and early 1980s inspired a tradition of militant anti-fascism that has continued to dog their efforts ever since. As Goodyer argues, 'It is the experience of crushing defeat which best explains British fascism's subsequent failure to make the leap to nationwide electoral credibility.'[46] Punk reminds us, in the most frightening year in modern history, that everyday experiences and grievances can lead to powerful desires for change and act as a motivator for protests against injustice. Similar to RAR, it is equally vital now for our communities not to isolate, but integrate, and come together to counteract injustice wherever it may be, particularly far-right extremism. Indeed, one way of doing this may just be playing your music louder than the enemy. Much louder. As Amy Glendinning reported in the *Daily Mirror* in August 2015, far-right groups protesting in Manchester were drowned out by house music as anti-fascist activists held a counter-protest. Around 40 members of the far-right Infidels and Combat 18 groups attempted to hold an event in the city centre but were met with boos, heckles and the music. As Bray states, after all, 'the tradition of using noise to drown out fascist speakers dates back to the beginning of the anti-fascist struggle'.[47]

Ultimately though, triviality aside, the goal should be making fascist behaviour and ideology so uncomfortable in public that those who abide by it are shamed into hiding. RAR made it socially unacceptable for fascist behaviour to exist not only in the political

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[46] Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Page 159.

[47] Bray, Mark. *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*. Melville House Publishing, 2017. Chapter 6, *Strategy Nonviolence and Everyday Anti fascism*. Page 187.

mainstream but throughout youth culture. As Bray writes, the success of the RAR campaign derailed the NF, who lost its target audience amongst working-class youth as anti-fascist opposition made it impossible for the Front to hold meetings or public rallies.[48] In the 1970s and early 1980s, an anti-fascist campaign of unprecedented scale won a temporary victory over the gathering forces of popular white supremacism. Of course, racial prejudice was not vanquished. However, similar movements in future will only achieve genuine success through the discovery of new, yet inspired, ways of youth, anti-establishment, cultural organising. As Renton argues, 'It will come from a generation attuned to the anti-fascist legacy, who assimilate it and surpass what went before.’[49] With right-wing populist movements again on the rise, from Brexit Britain to Trump and beyond, today’s RAR-inspired campaigns such as *Love Music Hate Racism* show that although the background music may change, the song remains the same. The fight against the far-right continues.

[48] Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982*. Page 171
[49] Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982*. Page 173

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