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Barred For Life: How Black Flag's Iconic Logo Became Punk Rock's Secret Handshake



Synopsis

Cataloging the legacy of the American punk rock pioneers Black Flag, this photo documentary uses stark, contrasting portraits to share the stories of the die-hard fans who wear the iconic four-barred logo tattooed on their skin. From doctors to homeless punks, stories range from the intensely personal to the absurd as each larger-than-life soul mugs for the camera. Adding to the idea that mixed messages can come from one unifying design, each image is highlighted with a personal quotation, a name and bio, and a Black Flag favorites list. Captured during an extensive tour through the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, this collection serves as a visual testimony to the hyper-distilled mythology that the band is more prevalent now than when it was in service, and serves as a soundtrack for those living as self-imposed cultural outsiders. Interviews with former members of the band, tattoo artists, photographers, and other relevant luminaries round out this ethnography and serve to spotlight Black Flag's vicious live performances, forward-thinking work ethic, and indisputable reputation for acting as both champions and destroyers of the punk rock culture that they helped create.

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Customer Reviews

How "The Bars" signify not only Black Flag's relevance three decades after their career, but the impact of punk upon those who in this collection were usually far too young to have seen a gig makes this photographic and journalistic anthology compelling. As I was born the same year as Dez Cadena and Henry Rollins, and as I grew up watching this L.A. scene, I admit some

surprise. Everybody interviewed with the icon is younger (with one exception: Ron Spellman, a second-generation tattoo artist a few years older) than me--or therefore the famous Hank whose arms, torso, and back became ever more inked as his power as the band's longest-lasting singer dominated the band's image and presence. Why tattoos perch or crawl over the bodies of the hirsute or hairless hundreds in these pages portrayed, whereas earlier punks did not tend (as chronicler Stewart Dean Ebersole, Spellman, and Chuck Dukowski concur) to decorate themselves with so many or so "graphic" an array of body art remains more an observation than a consideration. Yet, the generational gap between those who come after the band who choose to don The Bars and those who heard the band in its heyday persists. While I wish this aspect was explored more, this isn't a sociological treatise. It's an angular presentation that mingles Ebersole's own rambling memoir of life in Red Lion PA with his coming-of-age with the Flag. Interspersed are intelligent interviews with band members, Spellman, and photographer Glen E. Friedman. (Greg Ginn no longer talks to the press; Rollins talks to them but not here.

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