

White youth: the Far Right, Punk and British youth culture

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**White Youth:
The Far Right, Punk and British Youth Culture, 1977–87**

Matthew Worley and Nigel Copsey

Teesside University (Nigel Copsey)

Email: n.copsey@tees.ac.uk

University of Reading (Matthew Worley)

Email: m.worley@reading.ac.uk

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Abstract

'White Youth' recovers and explains the relationship between far-right organisations and British youth culture in the period between 1977 and 1987. In particular, it concentrates on the cultural spaces opened up by punk and the attempts made by the National Front and British Movement to claim them as conduits for racist and/or ultra-nationalist politics. The article is built on an empirical basis, using archival material and a historical methodology chosen to develop a history 'from below' that takes due consideration of the socio-economic and political forces that inform its wider context. Its focus is designed to map shifting cultural and political influences across the far right, assessing the extent to which extremist organisations proved able to adopt or utilise youth cultural practice as a means of recruitment and communication. Today the British far right is in political and organisational disarray. Nonetheless, residues tied to the cultural initiatives devised in the 1970s–80s remain, be they stylistic, nostalgic or points of connection forged to a transnational music scene.

Contributor Notes

Nigel Copsey is professor of modern history at Teesside University. He has published extensively on the far right in Britain. His major publications are *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (2000; 2nd edn, 2016) and *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (2004; 2008). He is currently researching the relationship between Britain's post-war far right and popular culture. This subject is explored in Copsey and Richardson (eds) *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism* (2015).

Matthew Worley is professor of modern history at the University of Reading. He has written extensively on British interwar politics, including a monograph, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, published in 2010. His current research is concentrated on the links between politics and youth culture in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. To this end he is writing a monograph and has published related articles in *Contemporary British History*, *History Workshop Journal*, the *Journal for the Study of Radicalism, Punk and Post-Punk* and *Twentieth Century British History*. He is also a founder of the Subcultures Network that recently published *Fight Back: Punk, Politics and Resistance* (2015).

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Introduction

On 18 August 1979, the Conway Hall hosted the inaugural London concert of Rock Against Communism (RAC), a movement conceived within and supported by the far-right National Front (NF). Reports of the evening provide mixed accounts. For anti-fascists keen to oppose the gig, a sizeable police presence – supported by strategically-placed vans belonging to the London Met’s Special Patrol Group – ensured protesters were soon escorted to the nearest tube station (Goldman 1979: 9; Ellen 1979: 17). For Joe Pearce of the Young National Front (YNF), the failure of the relatively well-known Skrewdriver to play tempered expectation that the gig would kick-start an ‘anti-commie backlash’ against ‘left-wing filth in rock music’, particularly Rock Against Racism (RAR) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) initiated by members of the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP).¹ Skrewdriver, a punk band from Poulton-le-Fylde (near Blackpool) that released two singles and an album on Chiswick Records in 1977, had amassed something of a skinhead following on their move to London in the same year, among whom was a small core of NF and British Movement (BM) activists. The band’s singer, Ian Stuart, had in turn joined the NF in early 1979, thereby becoming a well-known ‘face’ in far-right circles prior to the Conway Hall gig. Come August, however, and Stuart stayed away, stating ‘record company pressure’ as an excuse for his no show (Brazil 1979: 18–19; Stuart 1979: 17).²

¹ ‘Rock Against Communism’, *Bulldog*, No. 14, 1979, 3. In ‘Rock Against Communism Hits the Headlines’, *Bulldog*, No. 15, 1979, 3, the event is nevertheless reported to have been a success.

² ‘Record company pressure’ probably related to Rough Trade’s decision to stop distributing

In the event, only two bands performed – The Dentists from Leeds and White Boss from Coventry.³ According to Vivien Goldman, who reported on the gig for *Melody Maker*, the crowd was overwhelmingly male (Goldman counted five women) and relatively young. About 150 people attended, with pictures of the gig revealing skinheads, punks, mods and assorted hairy youngsters bouncing around to sets that included odes to the ‘Master Race’ and protestations of Nazi innocence (Verrall 1981: 12). In between, a teddy boy DJ – Mike’s Bluejean Bop – flew the confederate flag but reportedly played mainly punk tunes by the Sex Pistols, Devo and, most surprisingly, the Tom Robinson Band, best-known as RAR stalwarts and releasing ‘Glad to be Gay’ on an EP in 1978. For her own part, Goldman chatted to Tony Williams, the NF’s Ipswich organiser, about Britain’s imminent descent into racial chaos, resisting his request to come back to her place after last orders. Apparently, Goldman’s Jewish origins were no longer an issue for Williams if she renounced Zionism (Goldman 1979: 9).

At first glance, the lacklustre nature of RAC’s launch may seem simply to demonstrate the limited nature of the far-right’s appeal to British youth in the 1970s (Shaffer 2013: 458–82). Dig deeper, however, and it provides a way into, first, a significant juncture in far-right politics; a ‘cultural turn’ that eventually spawned a global network of

Skrewdriver’s records on hearing of the band’s NF association. So the story goes, Rough Trade staff spent the day of the gig smashing every copy of every Skrewdriver record kept in their warehouse.

³ The *NME* mistakenly reported that a band called Homicide played. They did not.

Nazi-aligned music scenes. Beyond the NF's White Noise Club distributing records throughout Europe by the mid-1980s, the Blood & Honour franchise launched by Ian Stuart and others in 1987 soon boasted divisions in Germany, Scandinavia, the US, Australia and elsewhere (Shaffer 2014: 111–24; Langebach and John Raabe 2013: 249–64; Brown 2004: 157–78; Lowles and Silver 1998). Second, the emergence of RAC reveals the contested and politicised nature of British youth culture in the late 1970s and 1980s. This, after all, was a time when the left organised ANL–RAR carnivals to combat the influence of the far right and gigs were often broken up by mobs of NF and BM supporters (Worley 2012: 333–54). Just a month before the RAC gig, Sham 69's performance at London's Rainbow theatre had been brutally cut short by a BM assault headed by its notorious Leader Guard.⁴ In the weeks after, a Crass gig at Conway Hall and a 2-tone revue at Hatfield Polytechnic saw the appearance of anti-fascist 'squads' organised to physically beat the fascist threat wherever it arose.

The objective of this article, therefore, is to denote the moment, site and practice of the far-right's attempt to colonise and cultivate British youth culture. The first section will outline the political and socio-economic context in which British fascism developed into the 1970s, locating the moment of 'crisis' that allowed far-right appeals to gain traction. Section two will delineate sites of far-right recruitment among young people; in particular, it will explore attempts to claim youth cultural styles and forms of

⁴ 'Nazi Nurds Wreck Sham's Last Stand', *Sounds*, 4 August 1979, 10; 'Rudie Bam Bam', *Sounds*, 3 November 1979, 10.

popular music as conduits for fascist politics. Finally, the article explains the practical expression of far-right engagement with British youth culture, outlining its contingent strategies and approaches. By drawing from a mixture of archival and relatively obscure material, the article seeks to demonstrate just how and why the far right utilised the cultural spaces associated with punk to propagate racism and fascism. It serves also to complement the more typical focus on leftist efforts to channel punk towards politically-progressive ends (anti-racism, anti-war etc.), suggesting the far-right's appropriation of punk and skinhead styles forged a distinct subculture aligned instead to the politics of Nazism and ultra-nationalism. That fascist efforts were limited and repelled should offer succour. But the cultural mediums it sought to claim and the initiatives it developed from the 1970s remain pertinent at a time when the threat of far-right resurgence continues to resonate.

The Moment: Is Britain dead?

The 1970s saw British fascism emerge from the doldrums in which it had laboured since Sir Oswald Mosley's heyday during the 1930s.⁵ Its principal vehicle was the National Front, formed in 1967 from an amalgam of far-right subsects. John Tyndall, a former member of the National Socialist Movement and Greater Britain Movement, served – with

⁵ The term 'fascism' is used to refer to a generic concept. The authors understand fascism as the most extreme point on the far-right of the political spectrum, a fundamentally anti-democratic position that advocates aggressive forms of ultra-nationalist politics and often includes virulent racism.

some interruption – as chairman from 1972 to 1980, overseeing a fluctuating membership of around 15,000 in the mid-1970s and a series of notable local and by-election results. In 1977, the NF registered some 119,000 votes (5.3%) in the Greater London Council elections and almost 250,000 votes in municipal contests held across the country. There was even talk of the NF supplanting the Liberals as the third party of British politics behind Labour and the Conservatives (Walker 1978; Fielding 1981).

In terms of policy, the NF platform centred mainly on issues of immigration and racial identity. The Front's manifesto for the October 1974 general election promised a ban on all non-white immigration into Britain and repatriation of 'all coloured immigrants' (National Front 1974: 17–19). Such demands were typically wrapped in the language of patriotism, moral conservatism and strict social discipline (law and order, capital punishment), fusing events such as the arrival of Malawi and Ugandan Asians into Britain with questions of economic and socio-cultural development. Scratch beneath the surface, however, and the NF's ideological basis revealed itself to be informed by a crudely racist worldview imbued with conspiratorial anti-Semitism. Though not openly National Socialist, many of its leaders – including Tyndall – took their inspiration from Nazism; Hitler's route to power, via a mix of electoral politics and street-level mobilisation, formed the NF's basic *modus operandi* (Pearce 2013: 81–2).⁶ As for the NF's 'rank and file', disgruntled

Conservatives and empire-loyalists would mingle with unabashed Nazis and the virulently racist (Billig 1978). Disillusionment with the Labour governments of 1964–70 and 1974–79 (combined with a growing sense by which 'the left' was associated with students and middle-class intellectuals) served to open up a political space for the NF amongst what had previously been Labour's core working-class vote.



RAC NEWS

Rock Against Communism hits the headlines!

THE FIRST RAC concert, which was held in London recently, really rocked the music establishment. The first major papers squealed pathetically about "Nazis" and "Fascists"!

Since then Rock Against Communism has been getting regular publicity, including a full hour debate on Radio One!

Rock Against Communism has really got the music establishment worried. They know that RAC is a movement of ordinary White rock fans, and they know that it is growing in support all the time!

THE BANDS

DENTISTS - Rocking Against Communism!

WHITE BOSS - "Nothing But A White Wog!"

THE CROWD

ROCKING THE REDS!

Now you can officially join Rock Against Communism! For only £2 a year you will receive an official RAC membership pass, a free RAC badge, a quarterly magazine called *Rocking The Reds!* and all the latest info on what's happening in RAC! *Rocking The Reds!* will only be available to RAC members. It will not be sold to non-members, so send off your £2 to join Rock Against Communism now.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

AGE _____

I enclose £2 for membership of Rock Against Communism.

RAC TRACK

THE ENID
DAMBUSTERS MARCH/
LAND OF HOPE & GLORY

The Enid have released rock versions of the *Dambusters' March* and *Land Of Hope And Glory*.

The Enid are said to be "rather fond of GB". Patriotism rules OK!

⁶ Pearce admitted: 'Although the NF's position was always to deny strongly that it was a neo-Nazi party, one could not graduate to the inner-sanctum of the cognoscenti within the Party without tacitly accepting Nazi ideology [...].'

The NF was not the sole voice of British fascism. A tradition of far-right factionalism continued even as progress appeared to be made in membership and electoral terms. The National Party, founded in December 1975 by John Kingsley Read following a schism in the NF leadership, stood on a platform of racial populism propagated by an unstable mix of erstwhile Tories from the Conservative Monday Club and 'Strasserites' opposed to John Tyndall (Copsey 2004: 17–18).⁷ It too threatened briefly to become an electoral presence in the mid-1970s, winning two council seats in Blackburn and competing against the NF in London and elsewhere. On the streets, meanwhile, the BM propagated an openly neo-Nazi political brand that prioritised physical confrontation over the ballot box. Led by Michael McLaughlin, a Liverpool milkman who took charge from Colin Jordan in 1975 (following the latter's arrest for stealing women's knickers), the BM developed a reputation for violence that recruited pockets of support in places such as London's east end (Hill and Bell 1988: 135). Other smaller groupings existed, among them the League of Saint George, before the NF's disappointing general election performance in 1979 occasioned a round of splits and divisions that threw up the New National Front, the British Democratic Party, the Constitutional Movement and, in 1982, the British National Party (BNP). More generally, and amidst bouts of intra-fascist conflict, membership boundaries blurred across what was a constantly evolving and mutating fascist terrain.

⁷ 'Strasserism' refers to a strand of fascism named after Gregor and Otto Strasser that placed emphasis on anti-capitalism and mass action. Within the NF, it was propagated in the publication *Britain First* (edited by Richard Lawson).

The relative visibility of the far right in this period had multiple causes, primarily relating to the mood of 'crisis' and 'decline' that hung over Britain in the 1970s. Loss of empire, entry into Europe, mounting economic problems and the IRA's mainland bombing campaign ensured a resonance for far-right appeals to patriotism and national revival. Immigration, of course, provided a simplistic and prejudicial explanation for rising unemployment and related social issues, while the assertive militancy of the British trade union movement lent credence to the idea of political power no longer being the preserve of parliament. This, after all, was a decade of weak and minority governments, of sustained industrial unrest, high inflation, an unstable currency 'rescued' by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1976 and slowing economic growth that slipped in and out of recession (Tomlinson 2000; Hickson 2005). In short, the political and economic 'consensus' that had underpinned Britain's post-war reconstruction appeared to be crumbling as the general optimism of the 1960s gave way to the gloomy prognoses of the 1970s.

Given such a context, the preoccupations of the far right – racial and cultural specificities, immigration, nationalism, social order, anti-communism – bound themselves to questions of national sovereignty, identity and economic performance. Indeed, the ten years that separated Enoch Powell's evocation of the River Tiber foaming with blood and Margaret Thatcher's stated concern as to Britain's being 'rather swamped by people with a different culture' saw racial politics find a ready echo towards the shifting centre of

British polity.⁸ As mainstream political and media voices began to flirt with the language of the far-right fringe, so the tenets of fascism fed on the anxieties of a nation seemingly convinced of its on-going decline. In the event, Thatcherism's more constitutional expression of 'popular authoritarianism' served to curb the march of British fascism (Hall 1979: 14–20). Simultaneously, however, the presumptions and prejudices that fuelled the NF's growth made in-roads into British youth culture, seizing on the aggressive oppositionism of punk to construct a vehicle for fascism that rolled into the 1980s and beyond.



⁸ On 20 April 1968, the Conservative MP Enoch Powell caused controversy with a speech suggesting that immigration and proposed anti-discrimination legislation would lead to social conflict and racial violence. The River Tiber reference was drawn from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Margaret Thatcher's quote was given in an interview to the television programme *World in Action* on 27 January 1978 in relation to concerns about immigration.

The Site: On the streets

The 1970s saw the NF become a recognisable thread within Britain's socio-political fabric. Electoral broadcasts were transmitted in 1974 and 1979; interventions in local and by-elections brought media attention. Beyond the hustings and associated electoral paraphernalia, NF paper sellers took up position on street corners as the NF's insignia became a graffitied staple of the urban landscape. Processional marches, replete with drums, banners and rows of union flags, grew to be commonplace under the direction of Martin Webster, the NF's national activities' organiser. These, in turn, were typically met by anti-fascist protestors, paving the way for set-piece confrontations such as in Lewisham in August 1977. Though played down in the NF's public literature, the 'battle for the streets' provided an integral part of the Front's strategy. Racially-motivated attacks increased in accord with the far-right's influence, ranging from petty-vandalism and arson to physical assault and murder (Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council 1978; Renton 2006: 11).⁹

Essential to the NF's growth was the recruitment of disaffected working-class youth (Billig and Cochrane 1981: 3–15). Writing in the summer of 1977, Derek Holland noted the NF's need to counter the influence of left-wing parties mobilising 'youth' in support of causes such as anti-racism and anti-imperialism. For Holland, at least, himself a young student, the main 'battle ground'

⁹ According to Renton, 31 suspected racial murders took place in Britain between 1976 and 1981, as the NF marched and the BM mobilised to claim ownership of the streets. See also 'The Nazi Party' documentary shown on *World in Action*, ITV, 3 July 1978.

was education, meaning a focus on technical colleges, universities and schools via recruitment drives and leafleting against 'Marxist' teachers (Holland 1977: 9) – or 'political paedophiles', to use the language of the NF's annual conference. To this end, a Young National Front (YNF) was soon established, through which football tournaments and social events (NF discos) were organised in tandem with the dissemination of NF literature aimed specifically at young people (Pearce 1978: 5).

More effectively, perhaps, September 1977 saw the launch of *Bulldog*. Run, initially, as a 'one boy operation' by the teenage Pearce, the youth-orientated paper featured articles on local NF activism alongside crude cartoons, pieces on sport and, somewhat belatedly, music. Sales were undertaken at football matches, gigs and outside school gates, with appeals made to 'skins, mods, punks and teds' to lend their support against 'long-haired lefty poseurs'.¹⁰ Fortuitously, too, the selling of *Bulldog* to school kids elicited media attention, making Pearce's claim that circulation 'increased ten-fold, from several hundred copies per issue to several thousand' instructive if somewhat exaggerated (Pearce 2013: 62).

Hitherto, Britain's post-war fascists had struggled to connect with teenage youth. In 1956, at the first meeting of the youth wing to Sir Oswald Mosley's Union Movement, the speaker's message had been an impossible sell: 'We, the youth of Britain, have finer, more noble things in our lives than rock and roll'. As may be imagined, the sounds emanating from radios and Dansette record players

across the country drowned out the fascist call, leaving Mosley with a youthful cadre of approximately ten active members (Grundy 1998: 102 & 127). Two years later, in the wake of the 1958 Notting Hill race riots, Mosley also appealed directly to the racist proclivities of white working-class teddy-boys, claiming to admire their virility and masculinity. His sons, Alexander and Max, even adopted the ted-style. Again, however, such advances brought little to no lasting response (Dack 2015: 8–26).

Far-right appeals to youth fared no better in the 1960s. In 1964, when commenting upon seaside clashes between mods and rockers, an earlier incarnation of the BNP had detected 'a strong feeling of protest against coloured immigration'. Believing that it could harness such 'healthy' instincts to the cause, the BNP recommended pointing young people's attention towards groups such as The Bachelors, whose music is 'Western and tuneful, in contrast to the scruffy twitchings of the "Rolling Stones" type'.¹¹ Come 1970, and John Tyndall responded to reported incidents of 'Paki-bashing' by opining that the majority of first-generation skinheads were like 'lost sheep wandering in the city wilderness, desperately seeking some kind of leadership that they can look up to and some kind of cause in which they can believe'. His solution was simple: discipline, compulsory boxing, wrestling, judo and other combat sports. But if truth be told, and for all their supposed racist potential, this was not a constituency that Tyndall was minded to exploit. 'The fact is', Tyndall wrote without recourse to a crystal ball, 'that no group of people could be less politically or

¹⁰ *Bulldog*, No. 14, 1979, 3.

¹¹ 'The Answer to Mods and Rockers', *Combat*, No. 17, 1964, 5.

ideologically motivated in their actions than Britain's skinheads'.¹²

Come the mid-1970s, however, and more concerted attention on youth coincided with Holland's recommendations and Pearce's *Bulldog* initiative. Pearce himself had noted the presence of hundreds of young people on the NF's demonstration at Lewisham in 1977, many of them football hooligans, but also a 'smattering' of second-generation skinheads. As an avid Chelsea fan, Pearce knew only too well that their supporters had the worst reputation for football hooliganism in the country; he also knew that many were aggressively racist. Pearce, therefore, deliberately targeted this terrace culture, initiating a 'league of louts' in *Bulldog* whereby hooligans were encouraged to send in reports of racist chants at football matches. The worst offenders were typically supporters of Chelsea, Leeds, West Ham and Newcastle. By the late 1970s, the NF was apparently selling several hundred copies of *Bulldog* at Chelsea (to crowds of around 9,000) with sales at West Ham a close second (Pearce 2013: 117–22).¹³

Parallel developments were on-going in Leeds, where the NF's regional organiser for Yorkshire, Eddy Morrison, similarly recognised the need to channel youthful discontent towards political ends. Throughout 1976 and much of 1977, Morrison headed his own variant of the British National Party, attacking left-wing meetings and organising 'vigilante

¹² *Spearhead*, April 1970, 3. Organising 'youth' had formed one of the NF's original objectives in 1967, but little progress was made until the mid-1970s. Thanks to Ryan Shaffer for this information.

¹³ *Bulldog*, No. 16, 1979, 4.

groups' to combat what he termed 'negro violence', before joining the NF at the turn of the year.¹⁴ Unlike Pearce, however, Morrison was a seasoned political activist by 1977, aged in his late 20s and entrenched in the factional world of the far right (Morrison 2003: 10–17). As a David Bowie fan, he was also attuned to the political implications of popular music. Bowie, after all, had alluded to fascism in interviews over the mid-1970s and thereby prompted – after Eric Clapton's drunken pledge of support for Enoch Powell at a concert in 1976 – the establishment of RAR (Widgery 1986: 42–43; Goodyer 2009: 10–13; Buckley 2000: 289–91). Accordingly, Morrison interpreted RAR as a 'carefully orchestrated campaign motivated by the Socialist Worker Party' [sic], writing to the music paper *Sounds* in April 1977 to urge a 'racist backlash' against RAR and envisioning a 'Rock For Racism' concert of 'all-white bands' headlined by Bowie but co-ordinated by punk rockers, hell's angels, teds and 'Bowie youth'. These youth cultures, Morrison reasoned, were 'the storm-troop stewards of the racism you'll never take out of the young' (Morrison 1977).¹⁵ From such daydreaming, RAC would emerge in 1978 (see below).

In effect, both Pearce and Morrison began to grope towards the idea of youth culture and popular music providing a political medium for the far right. In rather basic terms, they presented a response to the 'cultural turn' on-going across leftist politics through the 1960s into the 1970s, whereby growing

¹⁴ *British News*, January and February 1977 and March 1978.

¹⁵ Our thanks go to Jon Savage for providing us with a copy of the letter.

emphasis was placed on 'new' spheres of struggle – race, gender, sexuality, culture, language, consumption – beyond the traditional concentration on class and socio-economic production (Kenny 1995; Dworkin 1997). The early 1970s, for example, saw a protracted debate take place in *Marxism Today*, wherein the political meaning of the 1960s counter-culture and youth culture more generally fed into the Communist Party of Great Britain's attempt to re-imagine itself (Jacques 1973: 268–80). And while no such heavyweight theoretical musings emerged from the British far right, the movement's relationship to youth and youth culture did prompt at least some reflection. Thus, writing in 1980, Morrison urged 'white nationalists' to learn from the left's extending 'the revolution' into 'every area of society'. A youth movement, he insisted, was a means to counter this, to build an 'alternative society' within the system via bookshops, social clubs and amenities (Morrison 1981: 15 & 19). Not dissimilarly, Pearce's response to what he perceived as the left's adoption of popular culture was to contest it, applying crude claims to various musical forms and youth cultural styles.¹⁶ Most notoriously, the YNF's recruitment drive made in-roads into the resurgent skinhead culture of the mid-to-late 1970s, fostering an aggressive image that simultaneously reconciled territorial loyalties and socio-economic concerns with racial identity and a sense of purpose. In addition, the BM cultivated a core of young activists around the likes of Glen Bennett, Nicky Crane, Gary Hitchcock, Gary Hodges and Charlie Sargent, skinheads whose youthful presence did much to align the revived subculture with racial politics and neo-Nazism.

¹⁶ *Bulldog*, No. 14, 1979, 3 and No. 18, 1980, 3.

Again, the context is important. The far-right's turn to youth coincided with the emergence of punk, a musical form, style and culture that appeared, ostensibly at least, to embody a reaction to the contemporaneous socio-political climate and prospective (no) future. Political symbols, slogans and signifiers of 'crisis' formed a core component of punk's iconography. Where the early designs of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood comprised swastikas, images of Marx, situationist references and quotes from Buenaventura Durruti, so the Sex Pistols' first release, 'Anarchy in the UK' (1976), coincided with the government's application to the IMF – the song's title providing both a totem of the country's sense of decline and a cry for self-emancipation. As for The Clash, they delivered songs of barbed social commentary that referenced 1976's Notting Hill riot, unemployment, boredom, hate and war. Not surprisingly, therefore, punk could be – and was – read in political terms, be it to align use of the swastika to incipient fascism or find a proto-socialist consciousness in punk's urbanity, DIY approach or lyrical focus. Amidst punk's cultural assault, the 'progressive' and the 'reactionary' often intermingled (Sabin 1999: 199–218).

Certainly, on the far-right, younger activists such as Pearce and Morrison saw in punk the 'frustration of white working-class youth' (Morrison 1981: 20). Pearce, who shared Morrison's Bowie fixation, acknowledged RAR's ability to use music as a means to politically mobilise young people and began to feature punk bands in *Bulldog*; Morrison attended punk gigs in and around Leeds and sought out bands to support the NF (Pearce 2013: 128; Morrison 2013: 10–

17).¹⁷ Subsequently, as punk fractured and fragmented over the turn of the decade, so particular bands and scenes (2-tone, Oi!) were seen to represent a suitable fusion of aggressive rebelliousness and working-class authenticity akin to the self-perceived image of young NF and BM recruits. Or, to quote the BM's Chris 'Chubby' Henderson, 'the lads fought on a Saturday afternoon, and new punk bands sung about it later in their raw unrefined lyrics [...] now the boys would smash up a pub to the sound of The Clash or Generation X instead of the Four Tops' (Ward and Henderson 2002: 60–2). In particular, the blunt social realism of bands such as Sham 69 and those formed in their wake was described by Pearce as 'music of the ghetto. Its energy expresses the frustrations of white youths. Its lyrics describe the reality of life on the dole'.¹⁸

We should note that the NF's and BM's incursion into punk-informed youth cultures was controversial. Not only did it provide grist to the mill of RAR and provoke music press exposés of fascist attempts to corrupt young minds, but the shift toward young fascists attending gigs and listening to popular music proved contentious within the far right. Though the BM's *British Patriot* included a 1977 article wondering if swastikas and iron crosses signalled punk's embrace of

racist or nationalist politics, the far right's standard cultural position was far less circumspect ('Critic' 1977: 3–4). In simple terms, 'classic' art forms were associated with 'classic civilisations'; that is, culture was seen to reflect the strength and vitality of a nation or race. For both the NF and the BM, this meant a veneration of non-modernist art forms rooted in the European or British past. Wagner, Elgar, Purcell and Vaughan Williams were the musical 'heroes' of a John Tyndall or a Colin Jordan; pop music, by contrast, was an 'alien' and 'degenerate' cultural form that served only to distort Britain's true identity (Woodbridge 2003: 129–44). Thus, where Jordan looked upon punks as 'freaks' who shared nothing with 'real and radical racialism', so the *NF News* accused Johnny Rotten of being both culturally and politically a 'white nigger' (Jordan 1977: 3).¹⁹ In 1978, it seems, a few young skins were even expelled from the BM for their 'degenerate' taste in music, while 'elders' in the NF reportedly balked at the growing skinhead presence on marches and at organised events (Bushell 1980: 27; Jordan 2011: 64–73; Bean 2013: 223).²⁰ By the early 1980s, Tyndall was calling for 'white folk music' and classical records to replace the 'negroid-style' tunes played previously at YNF discos; the fragmentation of the NF in the early 1980s was even blamed on the

¹⁷ Pearce's personal preference was for 'futurist' bands such as The Human League and Cabaret Voltaire. His brother, Stevo (Steve), who DJ-ed at the Chelsea Drugstore pub on the King's Road, established the Some Bizarre label that specialised in signing electronic and industrial bands to major record companies. Stevo regularly denounced the politics of his brother.

¹⁸ 'We are the New Breed', *Bulldog*, No. 21, 1981, 3.

¹⁹ *NF News*, No. 10, 1977, 1.

²⁰ *NF News*, No. 23, 1980, 2. See also *National Socialist*, No. 3, 1981, for Jordan's take on skinheads: 'mindless oafs [...] tonsured, nihilistic hooligans being against all order, old or new, and for violence for violence's sake and the pure pleasure of damage and destruction' (reprinted in Jordan 2011: 69).

movement's being infiltrated by 'gays, the punks and the racial Trotskyites'.²¹

Partly as a result of this, the far-right's youth cultural activities gained a momentum of their own. Those involved cut across organisational divisions, paving the way for Stuart and Crane's Blood & Honour initiative that eschewed any formal affiliation to an established far-right party or organisation. Simultaneously, many of those who aligned to the NF and BM in the late 1970s comprised youngsters whose connection to fascist politics was vicarious, temporary or simply born of personal association. As Suggs (Graham McPherson), a young London skinhead friend of Ian Stuart at the time and lead singer of a band – Madness – that included NF/BM members among its audience, pointed out: '[You] go round all these kids houses and they've got, like, Union Jack jackets and British Movement shirts, and it's all this game of going down Brick Lane every Sunday marching for the British Movement and it all gets a bit heavy [...] It gives them something, "WE ARE SOMETHING" [...] There's a lot of horrible perverts backing all these things, but the average punter doesn't know what the fuck's going on. He sees the Union Jack, hears the national anthem, remembers what his old man was saying about the war ...' (Goldman 1979b: 1927). Read this way, joining or supporting the NF appeared a desperate grasp to retain some kind of cultural or personal identity in a changing world. Read another, it served as a wilfully anti-social gesture guaranteed to offend,

²¹ 'NF and BM link up in "Gay" Axis', *Spearhead*, May 1981, 17. The 'gay' reference was to Martin Webster, who had not followed Tyndall (who ran *Spearhead*) into the New National Front. It may also refer to Nicky Crane, the BM Leader Guard member.

provoke and intimidate (Walker 1982: 7–17).

For others, far-right politics became a vocation that found cultural expression in music and style. In effect, young fascists began to enter into youth cultural spaces, recruiting a smattering of punk-fans and skinheads to give political focus to their disaffection and territorialism. Hitchcock, speaking in 1980, remembered not being able to relate to punk at first, but 'all the clubs were either disco or punk and the discos never let us in, so we used to go to punk clubs to meet and have a beer' (Bushell 1980: 27). Bands, be it Sham 69, The Lurkers, The Jam, Madness or Skrewdriver, were adopted and followed; gigs, clubs, shops and pubs became contested spaces into which politics were projected as a result of left-wing and right-wing claims to their meaning or significance. Even the music press served as a site of political debate, as young NF members were encouraged to challenge the cultural politics of *Melody Maker*, *NME* and *Sounds*.²² Though it took time for an explicitly 'white power' scene to emerge in Britain, the early 1980s saw the likes of Skrewdriver, Brutal Attack and The Ovaltinees performing at punk gigs in and around London.

Things had changed by 1984. The far right had all but moved away from contesting youth cultural forms and styles towards forging its own particular variant, releasing its own records by its own bands to an audience defined by a stylistic off-shoot of a skinhead culture that resisted claims to its identity. Black MA1 jackets, high-boots, fully-shaved

²² *British News*, No. 43, 1978, 10; Letters, *NME*, 18 March 1978, 62; Letters, *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63, 15 July 1978, 51 and 21 October 1978, 63.

heads, Celtic crosses and Nordic symbols became the 'uniform' of a Nazi-skin some way from the more polished look of the 'sussed' or 'traditional' skinhead (whose musical tastes lent towards soul, ska and early reggae).²³ For a time, however, the far-right encroached into mainstream sites of youth cultural expression, appropriating its forms and endeavouring to colonise its spaces. The results were ugly, with gigs broken up and bands tarnished with political stains that often proved hard to remove.



The Practice: We are white noise

RAC was conceived in Leeds but raised in London. The Leeds punk scene was closely associated with bands such as Gang of Four and The Mekons, both of whom openly supported RAR and comprised part of a vibrant leftist milieu gathered around the university and polytechnic (O'Brien 2011: 27–40). In response, Morrison targeted punk gigs as

²³ This battle for skinhead identity was played out in various ways, but see fanzines such as *Hard as Nails*, *Backs Against the Wall*, *Bover Boot*, *Croptop*, *Skinhead Havoc*, *Spy-kids*, *Stand Up and Spit* and *Tell Us The Truth* for a rejection of the far-right's claims to the culture.

sites of recruitment and provocation, exploiting 'town versus gown' animosities to rally a small-but-violent 'Punk Front' of young NF supporters buoyed by punk's energy and anger but dismissive of left-wing (or 'student') claims to its political potential. A short-lived fanzine, *Punk Front*, was produced; gigs, especially those organised by RAR, were attacked; claims were made to the punk nights held at the city's F-Club.²⁴ In the event, such activities led to Morrison's arrest following a violent altercation between NF and ANL supporters at The Fenton pub in 1978, though not before The Dentists and The Ventz had formed to provide the nucleus of RAC.

The Dentists were led by Mick Renshaw, a close associate of Morrison in the Leeds NF; The Ventz by Alan Peace, who gave an interview to *British News* in September 1978 describing RAC as a reaction to SWP attempts to manipulate punk for its own ends through RAR. Though organisation was rudimentary, Peace revealed plans for a magazine, 'anti-communist' gigs and a record designed to 'let people know that there are bands around who won't be brainwashed'.²⁵ Just who those bands were remained a moot point. Beyond The Dentists and The Ventz (who soon withdrew, renaming themselves Tragic Minds), only White Boss from Coventry fully committed to the RAC cause. A few others – The Crap, Column 44 – were subsequently listed as due to appear at a cancelled RAC gig scheduled for early 1979, but Morrison's arrest and drawn-out prosecution all but curtailed RAC's

²⁴ 'Gang of Three/Quarters', *Temporary Hoarding*, No. 9, 1977, 11–14.

²⁵ Interview with Alan Peace of The Ventz, *British News*, September 1978, 6–7.

Yorkshire operation (Brazil 1979: 18–19). For this reason, RAC effectively relocated to London, featuring in *Bulldog* for the first time in mid-1979 as preview to the Conway Hall gig in August.

RAC's transferral to London was not by chance. The presence of far-right contingents at punk gigs had long been a source of controversy, resulting in music press and leftist criticism of bands such as Sham 69 for not doing more to distance themselves from sections of their audience. Indeed, it was Sham's decision to play an RAR gig with the reggae band Misty in Roots in early 1978 that provoked a schism in their following, paving the way for right-wing 'shows of strength' building up to the infamous 'last stand' at London's Rainbow theatre in 1979.²⁶ Just as Morrison's 'Punk Front' disrupted gigs in Leeds, so punk gigs in London occasionally saw territorial and subcultural skirmishes take on a political sheen – as when a group of BM skinheads flexed their muscles at The Lurkers' appearance at Woolwich Polytechnic in late 1978, or at Crass gigs in the capital in 1979. In and around the ANL–RAR carnivals of 1978, so NF and BM reprisals were meted out against 'the left' as punk and 2-tone gigs became increasingly politicised over the course of 1978–80.

²⁶ Sham's 'last stand' took place on 18 July 1979, ostensibly a farewell gig before Pursey formed a new band with Steve Jones and Paul Cook from the Sex Pistols. Instead it provided a rallying point for London's far-right to finally shut down a group they perceived to have used and betrayed them. Violence permeated the evening, culminating in a stage invasion amidst right-arm salutes and shouts of 'seig heil'. In the short-term, the Sham Pistols came to nothing and Pursey continued to play and release records with Sham 69 for another twelve months. But the event served as a pivotal moment in the band's history.

Some of this was covered in *Bulldog*: Attacks on 'reds' made it clear that 'white power had taken over', Pearce wrote in 1980, listing examples of occasions where NF or BM mobs had infiltrated or broken up benefits organised by the left.²⁷ Details of *Bulldog* paper-sales at gigs were given; the presence of NF supporters at concerts ranging from Bad Manners and Madness to UK Decay and Siouxsie and the Banshees were reported; incidents of racial or NF slogans being chanted were documented.²⁸ Simultaneously, the music press regularly bemoaned the repressive atmosphere brought to bear by far-right interventions at punk gigs in the capital, a mood captured in essence on singles by The Jam ("A" Bomb in Wardour Street) and The Ruts ('Staring at the Rude Boys').

And yet, despite the presence of a young fascist milieu at London's punk gigs, it took a while before any bands openly aligned to the far right. Skrewdriver only broke cover in 1982, with Stuart relaunching his band at a series of London gigs and issuing the single 'White Power' in 1983 on the White Noise Records label financed by the NF (Pearce 1987). In the meantime, RAC continued to exist more in name than in substance. *Bulldog* included an 'RAC News' page from 1979, featuring short articles on bands and an 'RAC Chart' compiled by Pearce or readers. An RAC fanzine, *Rocking the Reds*, also emerged, proffering a similar mix of features and reviews. In both cases, the political allegiance of a band or the intended meaning of a song was less relevant than the trigger response accorded to words

²⁷ *Bulldog*, No. 18, 1980, 3.

²⁸ *Bulldog*, Nos. 19–28, 1980–82.

such as 'white', 'England', 'riot' or images that evoked violence, fascism and ultra-nationalism. Thus, The Skids' *Days of Europa* (1979) was featured for its cover imagery of the 1936 Olympics and choice quotes about European pride and nationalism were attributed to the band's singer, Richard Jobson. Alternately, a song such as the Angelic Upstarts' 'Guns for the Afghan Rebels' – which condemned the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan – was extolled for its anti-communist sentiment.²⁹

Nor was RAC firmly committed to punk. Given their penchant for David Bowie, both Pearce and Morrison wrote enthusiastic articles about the new romantics and synth pop inspired by the Thin White Duke. To this end, Bowie was presented as the pioneer of 'white European dance music', with Morrison claiming to detect 'strains of classical and traditional Aryan music' within the songs of Spandau Ballet and Ultravox (Morrison 1981: 20).³⁰

Arguably, the 'highpoint' of the far-right's attempt to claim and colonise the youth cultural spaces opened up by punk came in 1981, when a gig held by three Oi! bands at the Hambrough Tavern in Southall precipitated a riot. Oi! was a term coined by the *Sounds* journalist Garry Bushell to describe 'a loose alliance of volatile young talents, skins, punks, tearaways, hooligans, rebels with or without causes united by their class, their spirit, their honesty and their love of furious rock 'n' roll' (Bushell 1981: 11).

²⁹ *Bulldog*, No. 16, 1979, 3 and No. 25, 1981, 3; *Rocking the Reds*, no number, 1982. The Skids' song 'Blood and Soil' also made the RAC chart in *Bulldog*, No. 26, 1982, 3.

³⁰ 'White European Dance Music', *Bulldog*, No. 25, 1981, 3.

The inclusion of skinheads in the Oi! milieu, however, ensured that a gig held in an area with a relatively large proportion of Asian inhabitants brought concern manifested in the venue being firebombed by local youths wary of the skins' association with racial politics. There followed a media-stoked moral panic, enflamed by the attention drawn to a compilation album, *Strength Thru Oi!* (1981), that combined a title reminiscent of the Nazi slogan *Kraft durch Freude* with a cover image depicting the BM's Nicky Crane. In truth, Oi!'s politics were contested and its primary focus one of class (Worley 2013: 606–36). Most of the bands associated with it denounced racism and Bushell garnered the wrath of the far right by deliberately not covering RAC or skinhead bands that expressed racist or fascist viewpoints. Nevertheless, the fact that some Oi! band members harboured right-wing pasts and its audience included a core of young NF or BM followers ensured Oi! was tarred with the 'Nazi' brush.

As this suggests, blunt punk rock remained RAC's music of choice. Beyond *Bulldog's* coverage of punk and Oi! bands unconnected to the far-right, a few young fascists began to join or form their own groups. The BM's Glen Bennett and, occasionally, Nicky Crane, played in The Afflicted; Henderson became the singer of Combat 84; Hitchcock helped his erstwhile BM comrade Gary Hodges form the avowedly apolitical 4-Skins. By the early 1980s, moreover, a smattering of bands – Brutal Attack, The Diehards, London Branch, The Ovaltinees, Peter and the Wolf – began to write ultra-nationalistic and explicitly racist songs that lyrically moved some way from punk/Oi!'s occasionally-patriotic dystopianism. Most of these bands had BM-roots or tendencies, thereby explaining perhaps their absence from the NF-

aligned *Bulldog* prior to RAC's official relaunch in 1983. Nevertheless, it was they who combined with Skrewdriver to form the nucleus of a distinctly nationalist, 'white power' scene in the UK. The clandestine gig in Stratford (east London) that marked RAC's return featured Skrewdriver, The Ovaltinees and Peter and the Wolf; the White Noise Club organised by the NF – but ostensibly non-aligned³¹ – was showcased on an EP that featured Skrewdriver, Brutal Attack, The Diehards and ABH from Lowestoft.³²

In terms of performing, Britain's nascent RAC bands were soon forced underground. For a time, support slots and the occasional headline gig enabled Skrewdriver, Brutal Attack and others to perform at relatively mainstream venues such as the 100 Club in Oxford Street. The Blue Coat Boy in Islington (Skunx, then Streets) also put on regular punk gigs in the early 1980s that attracted a far-right audience. The Agricultural pub nearby was a regular for young NF and BM skinheads in the 1980s. Over time, however, as the politics became more overt, so bands found gigs harder to come by. The music press steered clear beyond the odd exposé of a particular band's Nazi sympathies; anti-fascists organised as Red Action (later Anti-Fascist Action) mobilised to physically disarm the far-right threat (Red Action n.d; Hayes 2014: 229–46). Ultimately too, an audience baying for songs that extolled white pride and race hatred was

³¹ A White Noise circular insisted 'Our purpose will be, not to push party politics as such, but to promote the bands all over the world who have had the courage to come out and declare their Nationalist loyalties'. 'White Noise' leaflet, undated (circa 1984).

³² *Bulldog*, No. 33, 1983, 3. The EP was titled *This is White Noise* and released in 1984.

a limited one that few bands wanted anything to do with. Some, including the Cockney Rejects, literally beat BM and NF elements out of their gigs.

The result of such marginalisation was paradoxical. On the one hand, the banishment of RAC to the cultural and political fringe enabled cultivation of a distinct music-based subculture. From 1983, RAC gigs were necessarily held in secret to avoid censor or anti-fascist reprisals – a state of affairs still on-going today. Directions to meeting points were circulated surreptitiously; venues were often not known until the day of the event or found far from the usual music circuit. The RAC/White Noise Club's summer festivals, for example, took place on a Suffolk farm belonging to the father of future BNP leader Nick Griffin. Not dissimilarly, inability to access either the major or independent record industry necessitated RAC forge its own labels, media and distribution networks. Beyond the NF's White Noise Records, The Ovaltinees – formed as White Youth in Crayford and led by BM Leader Guard member Micky Lane – self-released their *British Justice* EP in 1983, before Skrewdriver negotiated a deal with the German Rock-O-Rama label that provided opportunity for others (Brutal Attack, Public Enemy) to make and distribute records across Europe and into the US. Fanzines also began to flourish in the mid-1980s, with titles such as *England's Glory* (Berkshire), *The Truth at Last* (Kent) and *The Voice of Britain* (Midlands) supplementing the more formal publications of *White Noise* and, from 1987, *Blood & Honour*.

In effect, a self-contained micro scene developed, with a growing collection of bands playing regularly together in Britain and abroad. Over the mid-to-late 1980s, the likes of British Standard

(Glasgow), Last Orders (Grimsby), New Dawn (Greenock), No Remorse (South London), Prime Suspects (Reading), Skullhead (Newcastle) and Sudden Impact (Croydon) became staples of the RAC circuit. Partly as a result, Blood & Honour morphed into its own music-based political movement ('the independent voice of Rock Against Communism'), nominally distinct from any recognised far-right party but replete with its own internal rivalries, financial disagreements and sex scandals.

On the other hand, therefore, punk's fascist outgrowth became consumed within a subterranean world of internecine political wrangling that simultaneously spread wider as it retreated underground. Not only did divisions on the far right break the connection between a dwindling NF and Skrewdriver in the mid-1980s, but the subsequent history of the White Noise Club and Blood & Honour was fuelled by money-squabbles and personal tensions that led, ultimately, to murder (Lowles 2001: 221–53).³³ Concurrently, all lack of pretence as to working through established cultural channels led the politics of RAC to become ever more extreme. If 'White Power' (1983) had seen Skrewdriver segue easily from songs of national pride to slogans of racial supremacy, then *Blood & Honour* (1985) and *White Rider* (1987) saw Stuart openly endorse the politics of National Socialism. By the same token, connections to far-right milieus on the continent helped transform the aesthetic and texture of RAC. So, for example, Nazi symbols and Nordic imagery began to

³³ On 10 February 1997, Chris Castle was murdered by Martin Cross (ex-Skrewdriver) and Charlie Sargent following a schism in Combat 18 relating, in part, to the subscription list for *Blood & Honour*.

predominate over the union jack (Raposo 2012). The 'voice of Britain' became 'music for Europe'; RAC's punk-informed emphasis on social reportage and political commentary gave way to mythical fantasies of race and Viking warriors (Sabin and Raposo 2015).³⁴

That punk inspired a fascist variant should not really surprise. From the outset, its utilisation of the swastika and fascination with all things abject revealed dark impulses that led all-too-easily beyond the provocative or voyeuristic (Duncombe and Tremblay 2011). Punk's urbanity, combined with a skinhead revival that related to punk's social realism but envisaged itself to be a more authentic expression of street-level culture, further provided opportunity for the far right to connect to Britain's inner-city white youth. '[The] bully-boy sex-power of Nazism/fascism is very attractive', Jon Savage noted in 1976, 'an easy solution to our complex moral and social dilemmas [...] the cult of the powerful' (Savage 1976: 8–12). For these reasons also, the industrial music pioneered by Throbbing Gristle from 1975 likewise accommodated those whose interest in extremes led to Nazism, while in between emerged a neo-folk sound from the likes of Death in June, Above the Ruins and Sol Invictus through which the more esoteric roots of fascism were explored (Alexander Reed 2013; François 2007: 35–54). Ultimately, however, RAC forged a world of its own, flirting first with ideas of infiltration

³⁴ 'Voice of Britain' was the title of a Skrewdriver single released on White Noise Records in 1984; the slogan 'Music for Europe' appeared on the cover of the White Noise Club's magazine *White Noise*, No. 3, 1987, 1. By the 1990s, connections to Tom Metzger's US-based White Aryan Resistance had also brought Klansman imagery into the fold.

before constructing an underground Nazi subculture that wallowed in obscurity whilst simultaneously exerting a global reach.



Conclusion: Hail the new dawn (or a new dawn fades)?

The far-right's engagement with youth culture from 1977 comprised three overlapping processes designed to contest, colonise and construct. These, in turn, took a variety of forms, but all centred on utilising cultural mediums to propagate racial or fascist politics of various stripes. Initially, young activists within the far-right contested the political meanings projected onto punk by RAR and within the music press. They rejected any notion that punk's protest or intent was inherently 'progressive' or 'leftist', preferring instead to find affinity with the social realism and musical excitement generated by groups such as The Clash, Sham 69 and others. Bands, records and youth cultural signifiers were given alternative meanings; politics were refracted through the language, imagery and aesthetic of punk's early stirrings.

By 1978, as claims to punk's development were played out in competing musical forms and youth cultural styles, so the far right sought to colonise the spaces opened up over the course of 1976–77. Gigs were disrupted; stages, pubs and clubs were commandeered both physically and for paper sales. Perennial rivalries of style and territory took on political implications amidst the heightened socio-economic climate of the late 1970s into the 1980s. In other words, the far right moved to penetrate aspects of youth culture, subverting its sounds and styles to propagate its politics. Most obviously, punk, 2-tone and Oi! were each – in slightly different ways and to varying degrees – claimed as the preserve of the far right, while a skinhead image was adopted through punk to embody the imagined persona of the young white nationalist.

Ultimately, of course, such claims were resisted, countered and overwhelmed. As a result, the far-right necessarily constructed its own variant of punk/Oi!, reconfiguring the skinhead image into a recognisable but distinct sub-sect of the broader subculture and establishing alternative networks of communication. Though organised interventions occasionally reoccurred – as at the Greater London Council's 'Jobs for a Change' festival in June 1984 (Forbes and Stampton 2014: 101–5)³⁵ – the

³⁵ At the event, a group of BM-led activists – among them Paul Burnley (Public Enemy/No Remorse), Adam Douglas (Skrewdriver) Chris Henderson (Combat 84) and Mick McAndrews (head of the 'Wolfpack' that followed Peter and the Wolf) – broke up a performance by The Redskins. As their name suggests, The Redskins (previously known as No Swastikas) were left-wing skinheads and active members of the SWP whose songs and style challenged far-right and media perceptions of skinhead culture and politics. Nicky Crane, who was also due to join in

visibly fascist presence at gigs receded over the mid-1980s. Similarly, while antagonisms between left and right continued at street-level, culminating in the infamous 'Battle of Waterloo' in 1992 whereat anti-fascists mobilised against those travelling to a Blood & Honour gig in Eltham, the politicised youth culture propagated by RAC ploughed an ever-deeper furrow as it evolved into the 1990s. Many of its original 'core' members journeyed also to the furthest-flung margins of British (and Irish) politics via connections to crime, hooliganism and the brutal terror-tactics of Combat 18 (in which Hitchcock and Sargent were integral).

Thirty years on, and Blood & Honour has finally fallen victim to the ageing process. Though its name was taken from the slogan that appeared on the daggers of the Hitler Youth (*Blut und Ehre*), decades of internal wrangling, splits and division have left a British rump comprised mainly of heavily-tattooed men in their fifties reliving their 'glory days' at occasional gigs in back-room pubs. As this suggests, connections to youth culture are now little more than nostalgic; no longer is there even a sense of mobilising a new generation of 'storm troopers' to the Nationalist cause. The English Defence League (EDL) may have briefly flourished amidst a climate of Islamophobia, building support on the remnants of the far-right's football hooligan connections.³⁶ But it, too,

the disruption, arrived late, deciding instead to intervene during a set by Hank Wangford.

³⁶ We may note here how increases in ticket prices, health and safety regulation and the transition to all-seater stadia have restricted the 'space' for political intervention into football and, indeed, music. Thanks go to Stewart Home for making this point.

descended into internecine disarray as it sought to deny its Nazi draw. UKIP, intolerant but not fascist, is now the principal vehicle of racial populism; a party with little in the way of youthful demeanour. Music no longer retains a dominant position within youth cultural identity.

To sum up, political and cultural alignments during the 1970s allowed the far right opportunity to contest and intervene into sites of British youth culture. The sense of 'crisis' and 'decline' that permeated the decade gave shape to politicised cultural forms seized upon by young activists in the BM and NF. That they were cultivated 'from below' is important, and explains how RAC transformed into Blood & Honour to develop its own political form and practice. And while it would be overstating matters to suggest that this in any way corresponded with the 'cultural turn' on-going across the left during the 1960s–80s, it nevertheless marked an attempt by the far right to forge a cultural politics that related to the lives of those it wished to influence, mobilise and recruit. If not quite a 'new dawn', then, RAC proved a far more stubborn and nefarious influence than its ramshackle origins ever appeared to warrant.

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