

FLOOD



BEASTIE BOYS
25 YEARS OF CHECK YOUR HEAD



PUBLIC ENEMY, NEW YORK CITY, 1987

VIEW FROM THE EYE OF THE STORM

A CONVERSATION WITH

GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

ALL PHOTOS © GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

BY KYLE MacKINNEL

A SINGLE LOOK AT THE STORIED LIFE OF PHOTOGRAPHER GLEN E. FRIEDMAN IS ENOUGH TO DISPEL ANY NOTIONS OF COINCIDENCE:

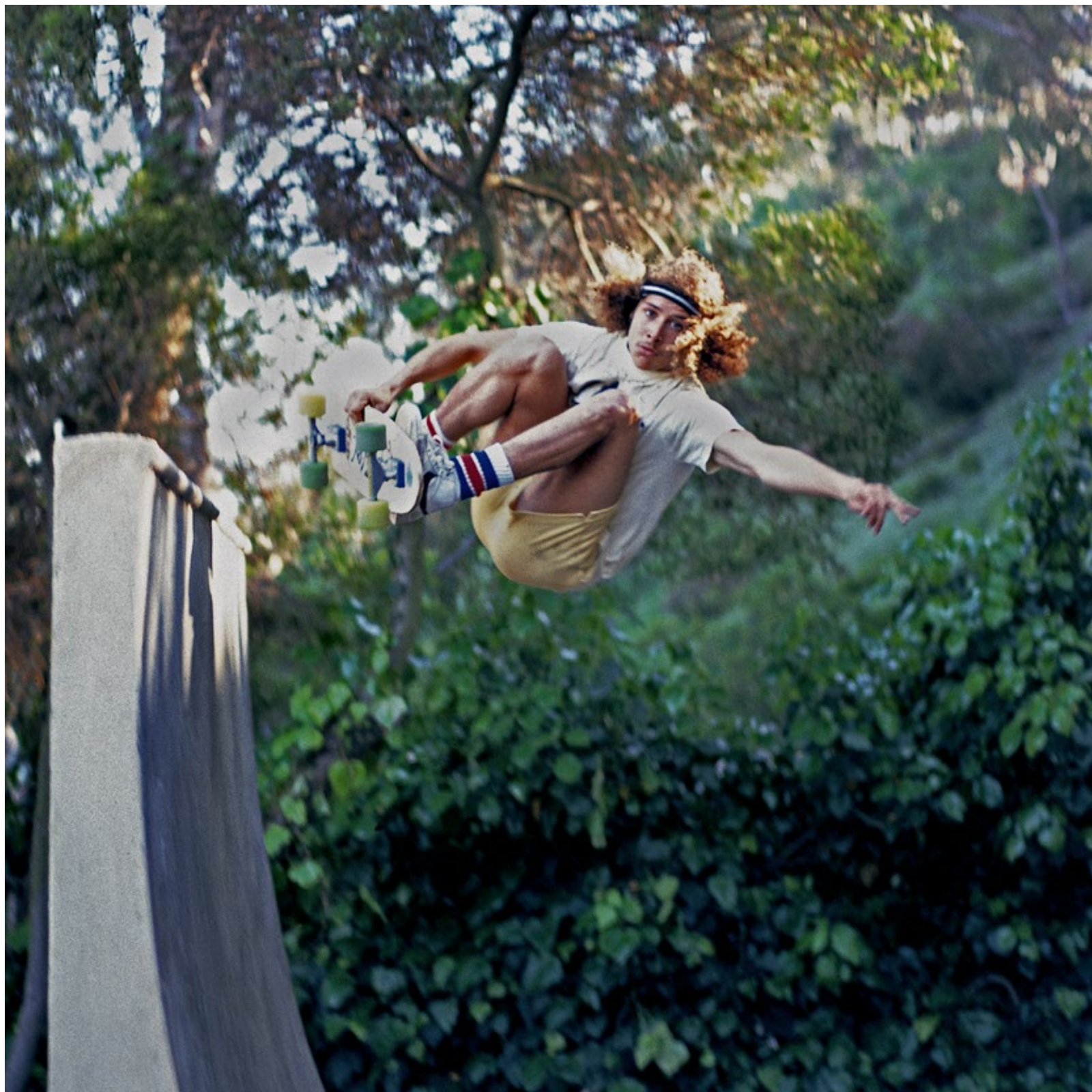
Surely no one person could possibly be in that many right places at that many right times. Were the *Check Your Head* cover photo his lone credit, it would still be enough to satisfy most creative minds. In his case, however, Friedman seems to derive a deep pride from exploring the cutting edges of culture, and for the past four decades this probing drive has led him to serve as a key player not only in the emergence of modern skateboarding, punk, and hip-hop cultures, but also in their evolution.

We can look at Friedman's origins as an East Coast transplant to the right side of the tracks in 1970s Los Angeles, managing through his plucky persistence to infiltrate the ranks of Dogtown and skate among such legends as Tony Alva, Jay Adams, and Stacy Peralta. The teenage Friedman's dynamic, participatory style of photography further endeared him both to the Z-Boys and to the editors of *SkateBoarder* magazine, where he would become a regular photographer and staff member.

Or we can examine the iconic photos and record covers that Friedman shot of early hardcore punk outfits like Minor Threat, Black Flag, and Bad Brains, many of which appear in his several photography books, including his debut zine, *My Rules: Photozine* (1982), which moved ten-thousand copies to become the best-selling zine of the punk era, as well as *Fuck You Heroes*. In 1983, Friedman would leap across the mixing desk, producing the debut album by Suicidal Tendencies (in addition to taking the cover shot). His photos of Public Enemy, LL Cool J, and Run-D.M.C. are iconic.

But perhaps it's more pertinent to focus instead on Friedman himself. Take heed of his uncompromising mode of cultural discourse and refreshing ability to say what he means with brutally honest abandon. Friedman's history of inserting himself into the most crucial moments of scenes has allowed him to transcend simply documenting them—he's contributed something vital to their nature.

But don't trust my vantage. See it from Glen's own perspective, firmly entrenched at the molten core of the zeitgeist.



TONY ALVA, PACIFIC PALISADES, CA, 1977



BAD BRAINS, WHISKY A GO GO, WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA, 1983

IS IT A STRANGE FEELING FOR YOU TO COMMEMORATE THINGS AND HAVE NOSTALGIC CONVERSATIONS? DOES IT FEEL CONTRARY TO WHAT PUNK CULTURE WAS ACTUALLY ABOUT?

That's a good question. You know, saying something is twenty-five years old today [like it's a big deal], it's all bullshit. But if it helps people remember something or it inspires people in some way, then what the fuck? I mean, it got us to talk. I don't commemorate those things myself; I barely celebrate my own birthday.

WHICH PASSION DID YOU DISCOVER FIRST? SKATEBOARDING, MUSIC, OR PHOTOGRAPHY?

As a kid, skateboarding came before all of it because there was no punk rock and there was no hip-hop before I started skateboarding. When I moved to California in third grade, the first thing someone gave me when I got off the plane as a welcoming gift was a skateboard. I wasn't far away from getting my first camera for Christmas, but I didn't have a camera yet and I certainly wasn't in love with photography yet.

Politics came before both of those things, because I was a kid in the '60s. I grew up in one of the first integrated school systems in the United States. Most people only knew "Cowboys and Indians." I actually had a Native American friend who was in my class—and also black friends who were persecuted, [who] I saw being treated differently when I was in fucking first grade. Some of the earliest memories I have are [of] my political life, other than watching cartoons like *Underdog*. I fought to be a

part of it, to make a difference, and to try to inspire other people by what I was being inspired by.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO STEP BEHIND A CAMERA?

Skateboarding was my culture, and I think I was [part of] one of the first generations of skateboarders who were *pure* skateboarders. Everyone else before, it was “the waves are flat,” or “we’re getting to school and we’re going to use our skateboards, but we’re surfers.” That’s where it all started. But I was drawn to skateboarding. It was wheels, and it was radical terrain.

As a skateboarder, I [was] thinking, “Wow, what I’m seeing in front of me is more exciting than even what I’m seeing in the magazines,” which is exciting to most people. So I’m like, “I’ve just gotta start taking pictures of this.” I had my own perspective on it, and I thought, “I can do this, and I want to do this. I want this shit to take over everything.” I was playing Little League baseball before that. I was actually pretty good, and I liked baseball. But once I had a Bahne with Cadillac wheels, and I broke my hand punching someone in the face, and I couldn’t hit a curveball, it was on to skateboarding. That was it. I didn’t look back until forty years later, ‘til I started playing softball with Adam Horovitz.

WHAT WAS YOUR PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO HIP-HOP?

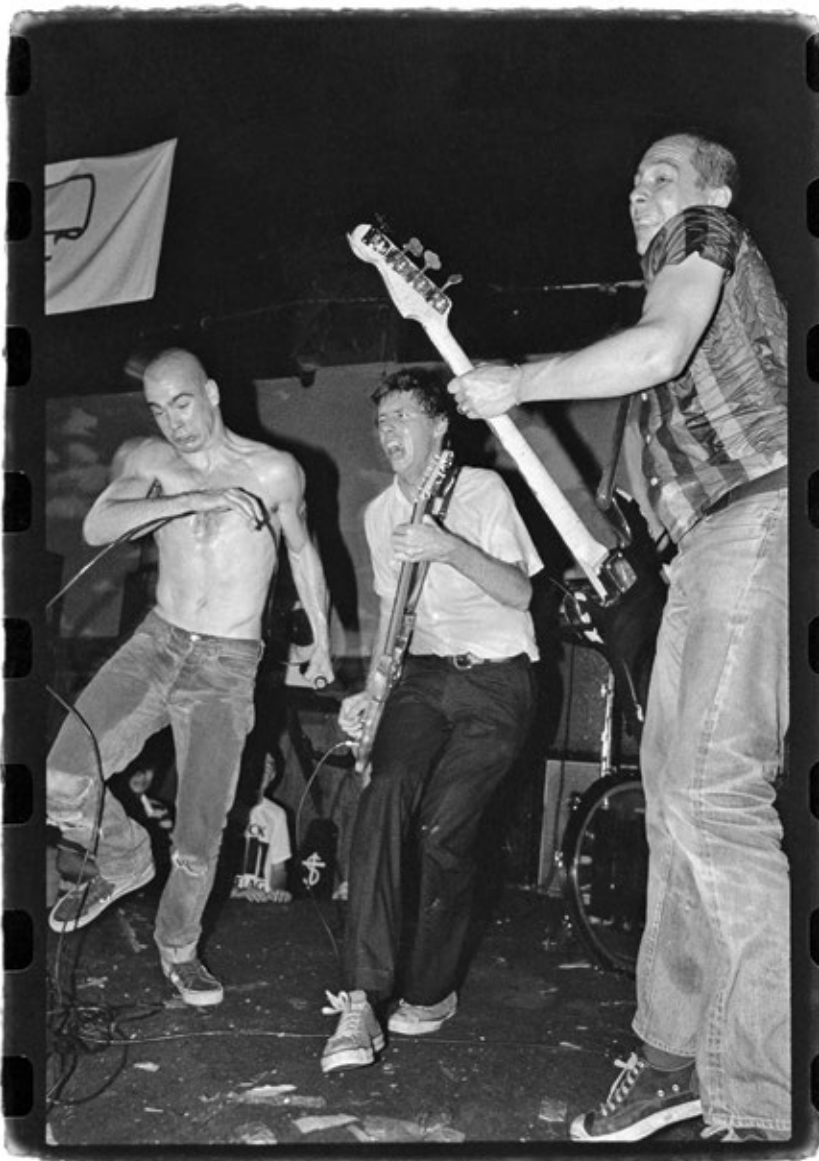
I made a friend who lived in Brooklyn. She introduced

me to hip-hop by sending me tapes. And we were punk rock friends; we met at a Circle Jerks show in New York City, but she was telling me about this new shit that was happening.

Adam Yauch was one of her childhood friends, and so I became friends with the Beastie Boys through her. I think Yauch invited me to go see a movie premiere in New York City at a [roller-skating rink] called The Roxy, where they were gonna show *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, the Sex Pistols movie. Everyone’s sitting on the floor watching a small TV screen, and as the movie’s over people start filtering in, doing the roller-rink thing around the perimeter. My friends told me, “These guys are coming here tonight—you want to stay and watch what they do.” And what happened was, a group of guys came into the center of the rink and just started dancing without roller skates. These guys were The Rock Steady Crew.

HOLY SHIT.

No one was there except for them practicing and people roller skating around them. The person who was spinning records played hip-hop and breakbeats, and it wasn’t a big scene yet. I saw that, and I was just blown away. It was like seeing [Tony] Alva do the frontside air. You don’t even know how to describe it. It’s some new shit that came out of fucking nowhere. It was kind of like, “Oh shit.” You know? Something’s brewing, something’s going on.



BLACK FLAG, CUCKOO'S NEST, COSTA MESA, CA, 1981

Punk rockers at the time were very open-minded people, and mostly artists, creative people. It didn't matter whether it was being played with guitars and drums and bass, or if it was turntables, or horns. Whatever was interesting and new and exciting, that's what we were into, and that's what punk was about back then. To us, [hip-hop] was just a new art form, new music, and a new culture that was going to become almost as rebellious as punk rock was.

When the Beastie Boys were on their very first trip to Los Angeles after *Licensed to Ill*, they were obviously breaking into that whole hip-hop thing, and they knew no one in LA. So I showed them all around and got them on radio shows. I was so fucking inspired, I just helped them as friends. I made this great photo session with those guys over a period of two or three days. That was a good time, and we did a lot of good work, and a lot of fucking around. Those guys are just totally hilarious. Had me crying every day—in tears with laughter.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE *CHECK YOUR HEAD* COVER PHOTOSHOOT?

I was out in LA, and I went to their studio. They had a fucking studio, you know? I mean, a recording studio which doubled as a skateboard ramp and a basketball court in a big room above a pharmacy.

They invited me to hang out with them while they were sequencing the album, we're playing basketball, having a good time. The whole vibe was just so incredible. And then they start playing me the music while we're playing ball, and I'm stopping while we're playing, in awe, like, "What the fuck is this?"

So we're listening to the record, and I was just floored by it. I was floored and I was really inspired. They were back to their own instruments—this was them. I said, "Let's have some fun like we did in the old days. Let's meet up tomorrow at the Capitol Records building and make some photos."

It was the last three shots of the first roll of the day, just them sitting on the curb. It was my idea to have them bring their instruments, and since Mike didn't play an instrument [that he could carry], to bring a shopping bag like a homeless person or something to hold his mic and his drumsticks. We really didn't take them out ever, but they were in there.

I stretched the roll and had an extra shot. Yauch is kind of laughing, as we were always joking most of the time, but as an artist I didn't necessarily want to portray that [then]. But as he's passed, certainly it's a beautiful picture to have of him. It shows his character and his heart. The first time I ever exposed it was the day after he passed. And I didn't even remember that it was there. **FL**

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BEASTIE BOYS, HOLLYWOOD, CA, 1991