

# GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

Chances are, if you've followed Punk Rock and picked up records from the early 80's that came from the west coast of the United States, you've seen Glen E Friedman's work.

Any observant wax peruser will note Glen's images on large magnitudes of record sleeves - a fixation that was birthed some years earlier whilst chronicling neighbourhood skateboarders and later carried on to document the Hip Hop eruption that proceeded Punk. In an era before widespread photography and videotaping,

Glen's shots were the ones that put a face to much of underground music. A vital distinction with his pictures is that they were taken as an insider looking out, at a time when his subject matter was being dismissed as an irate, reactionary fad by society at large. In each instance, by the time the outside world had caught up, it was already over and Glen had moved on to something else. He stands alone and is quick to distance himself from the photography industry; a sector devoid of substance and integrity - ideals which Glen holds close to his heart. Friedman is a broad-spectrum artist, whose principled mind-frame extends to social activism, political awareness, the promotion of clean living and shunning any corporate interference in his work. His images have been compiled in a series of self-published books and continue to inspire generations of people. At

forty-eight years of age, Glen shows no signs of cynicism or becoming jaded. His pictures have stood the test of time and never been equalled in spite of often-times relying on little more than a cheap camera and being in the right place at the right time. For the first time he's in Ireland to launch an exhibition of his work at Smithfield's Lighthouse Theatre. Earlier in the evening as the final touches were being added to over forty mounts, we sat down surrounded by Friedman's iconic imagery for the below conversation.

(Photos of Glen taken in The Lighthouse after the interview)



**RIOT 77: When did you get in and what have you been up to?**

**GLEN E. FRIEDMAN:** I just got in yesterday morning and we haven't been doing a lot really ... ate at Cornucopia ... just been setting up here and making sure the show looks good.

**RIOT 77: Are you happy with it?**

**GLEN:** Yeah, I am actually. It's a nice venue and I think it looks well. It's good.

**RIOT 77: Obvious question; why Dublin and why now?**

**GLEN:** Why not? It should have been done a long time ago. The guys from Candy Collective invited me over here after I had done a talk in New York and I guess with this whole Photo Ireland festival that's on, it was an opportunity to do it in a nice space where we didn't have to worry about any commercial sponsors and could do it properly. Never been here before and Dublin's a major city with a lot of good people in it.

**RIOT 77: This is just a one off, there're no other dates on your visit?**

**GLEN:** That's correct. I'm going to Belfast on Sunday, just to visit, because I've never been to Ireland before and figure I should see it. But different versions of this show have been touring around the world for the last ten years.

**RIOT 77: I see you've dug out some Baby Paul Cullen photos here. Is that specifically for this exhibition, given his heritage?**



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**GLEN:** Absolutely. Depending on the city, if there's something appropriate or something in particular that I can put in there to make it a little different from the last city I was in, I try and do that. I was trying to hook up someone with good Irish roots and Baby Paul Cullen has those pretty good. Other than that I shot the first pictures of Everclear from House Of Pain way back when he put out his first single. I did the cover. This was before he found his own style. I shot a picture of him when he was still sounding a lot like Rakim and was working with Ice T. I couldn't find those photos though and wasn't even sure if he had a lot of fans over here, so with Baby Paul having passed away recently, I decided it would be fitting to go with him and a nice homage to his family.

**RIOT 77: Yeah he died last year, didn't he?**

**GLEN:** Uh huh.

**RIOT 77: Drugs?**

**GLEN:** That's what they say, that's how it appeared, but his family say otherwise, so I'm not exactly sure.

**RIOT 77: You became a photographer because you hated photography.**

**GLEN:** Uhuh ... I didn't hate it at the time, I just thought that better work could be done. I hate it more now. I hate it more in the last fifteen or twenty years; it's really fallen to shit. There was only one photographer back then that I thought done any sort of decent work and no one was doing what I was seeing on a daily basis. I always thought I could do something better, so I tried it and worked hard at it to make it happen.

**RIOT 77: Do you think there can ever be too many photographers? I'm talking in particular about gigs today, where there're more people taking photos than there are watching the band?**

**GLEN:** Yeah, I think it's ridiculous. I personally don't like to photograph if other people are, unless I think I can do something different. I mean if you're all together in the same spot, unless you're superior to the other people I don't even know why you'd bother shooting. Unless you're so inspired by that band and really want to get your shot, then you shouldn't be there. If you don't love the band and aren't really inspired by what's going on and you're just shooting to document it, you should leave it to someone else who's heart is really in it. I guess if there's five people all shooting because they really love the band and their hearts are in it, then at least stay the fuck out of the way of people enjoying the show. It's distracting,

especially if you're using a flash. You should also enjoy the show yourself if you claim to be inspired by the music. If you're just shooting for the sake of documenting, I think that's boring and uninteresting. Photography's a whole different sport these days.

**RIOT 77: Do you think it's possible to over-document?**

**GLEN:** Absolutely. It gets boring and becomes redundant. Why do it? You're just getting in the way of other people's enjoyment. Let things develop on their own for a little while. You don't have to document every little step of every little thing. I think it does get overdone quite often actually. Society's need to fill space with advertisement-driven magazines and websites makes it boring. Take pictures when it's something really special.

**RIOT 77: Is that something you noticed more when digital photography arrived?**

**GLEN:** It wasn't solely to blame I don't think ... I mean there are some good things about digital photography. It made picture-taking a lot easier and all those shitty pictures that people take aren't ruining the environment anymore by people having them processed. All you really need for digital photography is good timing and a sense for composition; everything else is done for you. The fact that it's made it that easy and everyone calls themselves a photographer is kind of annoying.

**RIOT 77: You mentioned environmental awareness there. Do you struggle with your conscience when it comes to things like using gelatin to process your film or paper used to print your books?**

**GLEN:** I don't shoot that much and I do a lot of other things that make up for it. I rationalise whether or not it's worth it in certain instances. Do I want to cut down a tree to write a note on a piece of paper? When it's important you write it down or you print it out and to me all of my books are important documents and I know exactly how many trees it takes to print one of my books. I'm conscious of it and I think that's very important. I work to replace any trees that have been cut down and do what I can to make up for any harm I've caused to the environment.

**RIOT 77: Taking nothing away from the shots themselves, but the ideals behind the images you shoot always seem more important. Are you militant about only shooting subjects you believe in?**

**GLEN:** Generally I only work with people I care for. It is about the ideals and if they've inspired me, then I'm inspired to take pictures of them. There have been times when I've taken pictures of people who didn't necessarily inspire me, but they inspired my friends and my friends asked me to take pictures of them because they worked at a record company or whatever. There're a couple of examples of bands that I shot where we had similar political beliefs, but I didn't like their music. They had heart and believed in what they were doing and proved to me that they were worthy. But I think the best work is always done with bands that I'm inspired by the most.

**RIOT 77: How do you respond to allegations of homophobia, misogyny or even Republicanism in your work?**

**GLEN:** Republicanism?

**RIOT 77: LL Cool J is a Republican.**

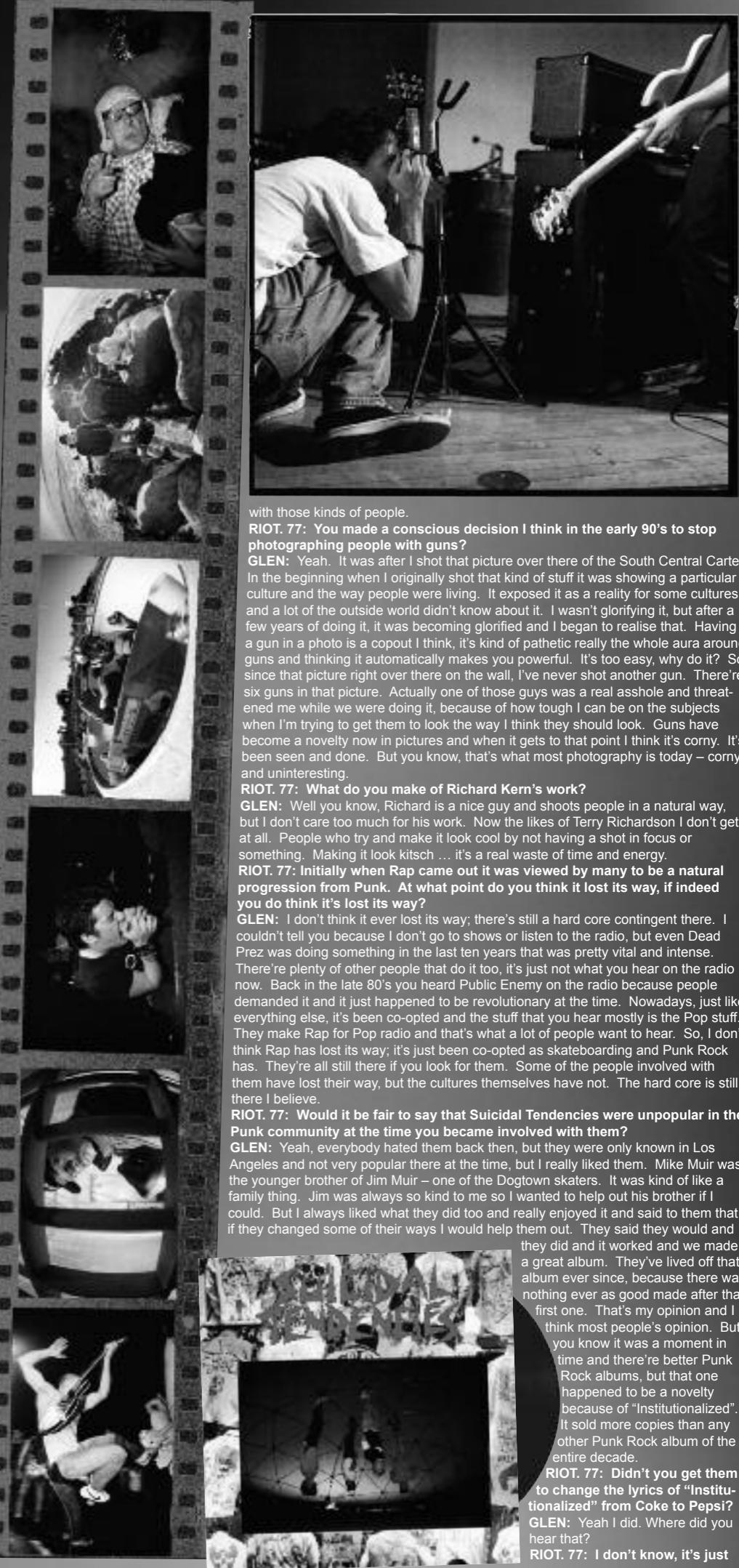
**GLEN:** When I shot him he certainly wasn't. I mean, I used to like Ted Nugent too. I try and shoot people at their peek, or even before they peek, when they still have some integrity and many of them still do, but some don't. That's unfortunate about LL Cool J, I didn't know he was a Republican now. That's pretty weird and hard to believe. I don't know anyone in my books who's a misogynist or homophobe necessarily.

**RIOT 77: What about Bad Brains or even sticking with LL Cool J, if Sonic Youth are to be believed in "Kool Thing".**

**GLEN:** I have no idea. I'm not a fan of Sonic Youth's music, but I like the people. I don't care for their music at all; it's incredibly boring.

**RIOT 77: Really? All of it?**

**GLEN:** All of it that I've heard. I saw them perform once when my friend's band was opening for them. Thurston and Kim are really cool, but I can't believe that anyone likes their music, quite frankly. But getting back to LL and a lot of Rappers who've made songs that could be considered misogynist ... I don't support that, but is that going to take away from everything else that those particular artists might have done? Honestly though, I don't know of any artists that were really like that when I worked with them. There were times in Public Enemy's ranting where people who worked with the group sounded homophobic and they would say anti-Semitic things, but generally it wasn't in the music itself and certainly wasn't when I was working with them. People are entitled to their opinions and in those times I generally won't work with or stop working



with those kinds of people.

**RIOT 77: You made a conscious decision I think in the early 90's to stop photographing people with guns?**

**GLEN:** Yeah. It was after I shot that picture over there of the South Central Cartel. In the beginning when I originally shot that kind of stuff it was showing a particular culture and the way people were living. It exposed it as a reality for some cultures and a lot of the outside world didn't know about it. I wasn't glorifying it, but after a few years of doing it, it was becoming glorified and I began to realise that. Having a gun in a photo is a copout I think, it's kind of pathetic really the whole aura around guns and thinking it automatically makes you powerful. It's too easy, why do it? So since that picture right over there on the wall, I've never shot another gun. There're six guns in that picture. Actually one of those guys was a real asshole and threatened me while we were doing it, because of how tough I can be on the subjects when I'm trying to get them to look the way I think they should look. Guns have become a novelty now in pictures and when it gets to that point I think it's corny. It's been seen and done. But you know, that's what most photography is today - corny and uninteresting.

**RIOT 77: What do you make of Richard Kern's work?**

**GLEN:** Well you know, Richard is a nice guy and shoots people in a natural way, but I don't care too much for his work. Now the likes of Terry Richardson I don't get at all. People who try and make it look cool by not having a shot in focus or something. Making it look kitsch ... it's a real waste of time and energy.

**RIOT 77: Initially when Rap came out it was viewed by many to be a natural progression from Punk. At what point do you think it lost its way, if indeed you do think it's lost its way?**

**GLEN:** I don't think it ever lost its way; there's still a hard core contingent there. I couldn't tell you because I don't go to shows or listen to the radio, but even Dead Prez was doing something in the last ten years that was pretty vital and intense. There're plenty of other people that do it too, it's just not what you hear on the radio now. Back in the late 80's you heard Public Enemy on the radio because people demanded it and it just happened to be revolutionary at the time. Nowadays, just like everything else, it's been co-opted and the stuff that you hear mostly is the Pop stuff. They make Rap for Pop radio and that's what a lot of people want to hear. So, I don't think Rap has lost its way; it's just been co-opted as skateboarding and Punk Rock has. They're all still there if you look for them. Some of the people involved with them have lost their way, but the cultures themselves have not. The hard core is still there I believe.

**RIOT 77: Would it be fair to say that Suicidal Tendencies were unpopular in the Punk community at the time you became involved with them?**

**GLEN:** Yeah, everybody hated them back then, but they were only known in Los Angeles and not very popular there at the time, but I really liked them. Mike Muir was the younger brother of Jim Muir - one of the Dogtown skaters. It was kind of like a family thing. Jim was always so kind to me so I wanted to help out his brother if I could. But I always liked what they did too and really enjoyed it and said to them that if they changed some of their ways I would help them out. They said they would and

they did and it worked and we made a great album. They've lived off that album ever since, because there was nothing ever as good made after that first one. That's my opinion and I think most people's opinion. But you know it was a moment in time and there're better Punk Rock albums, but that one happened to be a novelty because of "Institutionalized". It sold more copies than any other Punk Rock album of the entire decade.

**RIOT 77: Didn't you get them to change the lyrics of "Institutionalized" from Coke to Pepsi?**

**GLEN:** Yeah I did. Where did you hear that?  
**RIOT 77: I don't know, it's just**



something that was in the back of my head.

**GLEN:** Yeah, I was a Pepsi drinker at the time actually (laughs). Also, I thought someone might mistake Coke for cocaine. I haven't drank Pepsi in a long time; I think I was twenty years old when I produced that album, but yeah I take full responsibility for that line. Its actually one of those lines that people really like too and it ended up working out really well. There's an original tape of that song produced by Spot and it's a really good demo. Different guitar, same drummer, same bass player and Mike singing and he sings Coke on it, so a version of that does exist out there somewhere. It's a really cool recording, if you can track it down its worth hearing.

**RIOT. 77:** Did your experiences working with Suicidal Tendencies in any way contribute to you moving away from Hardcore and Punk?

**GLEN:** I think that Punk Rock was just beginning to wane anyway. A lot of the bands that I cared about no longer existed and even Black Flag had lost Dukowski and were going in a direction that I didn't appreciate, but their artistic integrity told them that was the way they had to go. I didn't feel it at all and thought they were going down the wrong street ...

**RIOT. 77:** What's your cut off point for Black Flag?

**GLEN:** For listening to their albums?

**RIOT. 77:** Yeah.

**GLEN:** I only like "Damaged".

**RIOT. 77:** Really? You wouldn't even stretch it to the first side of "My War"?

**GLEN:** There's a song or two on "My War" that are listenable, but after that I can't even listen to the other records. They're horrible. But I'm very particular and I don't like a lot of records. To make up for it "Damaged" is my number one album of all time. I just love it. It's an incredible piece of work, with the exception of "TV Party", which I sing back up vocals on.

**RIOT. 77:** You don't like "TV Party"?

**GLEN:** No I don't.

**RIOT. 77:** Are you nuts?

**GLEN:** It's just too corny.

**RIOT. 77:** But it's supposed to be. They're poking fun.

**GLEN:** I know it's a parody and they were just having fun, but I like it when they're more serious.

**RIOT. 77:** Did you cross paths with other Punk photographers of the day like Ed Colver, Bev Davies or Jenny Lens? Did much of a community exist there?

**GLEN:** Ed Colver was at a lot of the shows that I was at in Los Angeles. Bev Davies I never met, Jenny Lens I never met; they were older and weren't around much when I was shooting. I was shooting right when they pretty much stopped. They shot earlier, older scenes I think. There were very few people shooting when I was, but Ed Colver was there sometimes. Then when I was in New York it was kind of the same. I did meet Dylan Flash from Boston at CBGB's; he was shooting at the time. It wasn't much of a community to be honest. I was very involved in the music and I loved it so much. Photographers are generally weirdos or eccentrics and I consider myself a little bit



of the latter. It wasn't that I didn't get along with other photographers, but you kinda state your own and I was really against any voyeurs and people who weren't really in the scene but just took pictures of it. I thought that was kind of creepy. I took pictures of the people in the scene that inspired me. I didn't take pictures documenting what people were wearing or of every shit band that played on the bill. I only took pictures of the stuff I liked and I look down on the people who did that other shit actually. They got a couple of good shots here and there, but I didn't think it was much good. Those pictures don't speak to me; most of them are flat and have very little character. They look like shite to me.

**RIOT. 77:** Some of those guys, Ed in particular, has said he was out photographing five or six gigs a week. You didn't do that ...

**GLEN:** I don't know if there were five or six shows a week. I went out to all the shows I wanted to, but I didn't go to every show just to be in the scene. There were a lot of great bands, but there certainly weren't five or six shows a week that I would have been interested in seeing. If you're going out six nights a week and there're five bands on each bill, that's thirty bands in a week and there just aren't that many great bands. Not in my opinion, but again I'm very particular and I don't like a lot of stuff. I'm inspired by the best; not the mediocre. Mediocre means you have to work harder or play for other people; just not me.

**RIOT. 77:** Do you subscribe to the notion that Hardcore ended in 1986?

**GLEN:** Absolutely not. I don't think Hardcore ever ended; I think it's still going on today, it's just not for me to document because I'm not a youngster going to those shows. One part about why I would call it the "golden era" for want of a better term, of Hardcore was that it was being invented then. The whole style was brand new to everybody and there was nothing like it at the time. It was the template for what came after. Same thing with the skateboarding and Hip Hop that I shot – those golden eras set the tone for the genres from then on. So today Hardcore might not be inspirational to me because I got to see some incredible shit, but I'm sure there's stuff out there that's almost as incredible as the template for people growing up now.

**RIOT. 77:** What did you make of the "America Hardcore" book?

**GLEN:** I thought it was a piece of shit, just like the movie. I thought it was an atrocity; disgusting. The movie had its moments but overall it was poorly made and very disrespectful. The book was lame too. "Fuck You Heroes" is about giving these people respect, but the "American Hardcore" book gives no respect to its subjects. It just tries to make it gossipy and sensationalizes a lot of shit. I never saw those guys who wrote that book at shows. They interviewed a lot of people, including me, for the book, but they only used the sensationalist shit. When I was interviewed I spoke about my love for Black Flag, how important they were and how much of an inspiration they are. But they only used the parts when I talk dirt about them. I was so close to the band that I had an opportunity to see a certain bad side of them too, but that's not what's important about the fucking band. What's important is how great they were and the wonderful songs they made. You can have the whole story, yes, but don't just quote me on the bad part of the story, just because it's gossipy. Fuck that! You're an asshole for doing that. The thing is, I actually liked Steven Blush; he seemed a nice, friendly, decent guy. Does he know everything about Hardcore? Is he an expert on it? Fuck no! He doesn't know fuckin' shit practically compared to the people I know. He might have put on shows in DC ... so fuckin' what. He made a movie for assholes and people who don't know anything. It's got a couple of good moments; Ian McKaye never gives a bad interview. To see HR talk on screen is interesting because of what he's gone through in his life. But the movie sucks. One of my closest friends, too young to have lived through that period, loves the Bad Brains, likes Minor Threat and Black Flag, saw that movie and was completely turned off to Hardcore Punk. That's the opposite of what a movie I would make would do. I want to inspire people and turn them on, not turn them off. I have no problem with including ugly parts of a scene, but you don't have to sensationalize it. It's a shitty movie for assholes. Maybe a good movie on Hardcore Punk Rock will be made one day.

**RIOT. 77:** Do you rate any of the movies that have been made on Hardcore?

**GLEN:** None that I can think of.

**RIOT. 77:** "Another State Of Mind"?

**GLEN:** Nah! "Another State Of Mind" wasn't supposed to cover everything; it wasn't about Hardcore. I was very friendly with BYO and was there when all that was going on. It has some classic moments in it for



sure, but its one of many Punk Rock movies. It doesn't tell you what it's about and I don't like any of the bands in it, with the exception of Minor Threat. A lot of nice guys in that movie; they just didn't play in very good bands.

**RIOT. 77:** What??? You didn't like Youth Brigade or Social Distortion?

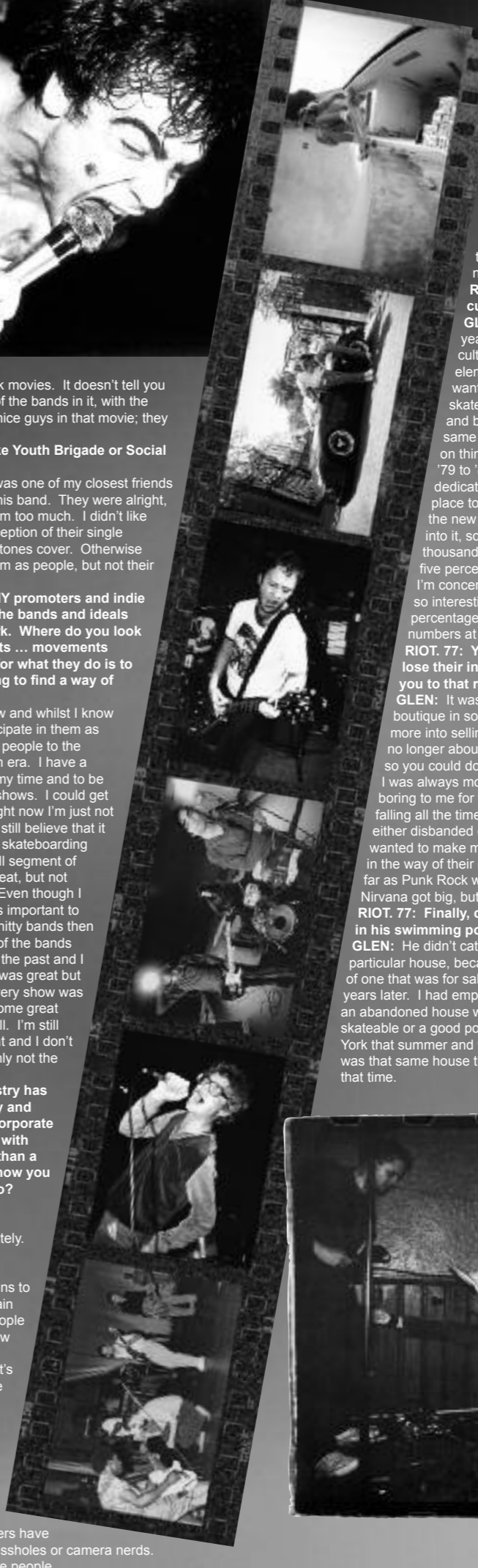
**GLEN:** No, I didn't. Shawn Stern was one of my closest friends back then actually, and I didn't like his band. They were alright, but to be honest I didn't care for them too much. I didn't like Social Distortion either, with the exception of their single "Under My Thumb" – their Rolling Stones cover. Otherwise they were kind of boring. I liked them as people, but not their music.

**RIOT. 77:** In line with fanzines, DIY promoters and indie labels of the day, you promoted the bands and ideals you believed in through your work. Where do you look to today to find similar movements ... movements where people's main motivation for what they do is to nurture a culture rather than trying to find a way of making a career out of it?

**GLEN:** I'm forty-eight years old now and whilst I know those cultures do exist, I don't participate in them as much. I'm still involved in exposing people to the cultures as they were in their golden era. I have a family now, which takes up a lot of my time and to be honest I got kind of bored going to shows. I could get turned on to it again I'm sure, but right now I'm just not as excited about it as I once was. I still believe that it exists out there though; in Hip Hop, skateboarding and Punk Rock, but it is a very small segment of those cultures. Not everything is great, but not everything is pre-packaged either. Even though I speak of a golden era back then, it's important to remember that there were tons of shitty bands then too. You look at those fliers; some of the bands were awful. I'm not bragging about the past and I don't miss the past. It's a time that was great but there were bad parts too and not every show was amazing. I just happened to take some great photos back then that inspire me still. I'm still turned on by them. I'm proud of that and I don't have to let that down, but it's certainly not the only thing out there.

**RIOT. 77:** The photography industry has never been known for its integrity and you're in a minority who refuse corporate work. Are you more comfortable with being classed as a Punk Rocker than a photographer? Is it more about how you do things rather than what you do?

**GLEN:** Yeah, Punk Rock and skateboarding are what shaped my aesthetic and my way of life, absolutely. I'm definitely much more of a Punk Rocker than I am a photographer, depending on what Punk Rock means to you. I have a lot of respect for certain ways of doing things and certain people who do them that way. But you know there are still people out there who don't know about real Punk Rock. It's not the stereotype of beating people up and drinking beer; it's about thinking for yourself, having a mind and wanting to change the way things are to make them better. In that sense my attitude as an artist and as a human being is Punk. I never refer to myself as a photographer. I work with a camera, I like taking pictures, but photographers have such a bad rap and very often are assholes or camera nerds. I'm really hoping I'm not any of those people.



**RIOT. 77:** You've always tried to find the common ground between music, photography, politics, lifestyle choices and social activism. Are those links as strong today as they once were?

**GLEN:** They are for some people. For me in my own life they are. It just depends on how you live and what you decide to do everyday. If you think for yourself and lead your own life and don't get distracted by what's popular at the moment, then you're not influenced by all the other shit. I'm not a puritan, but capitalism creates false appetites and you have to have a strong mind, body and heart ... a consciousness that helps lead you in the direction of doing the least damage as possible to other human beings, sharing things and being compassionate. That's the kind of life I lead and it's a good thing to do – not because some preacher tells you or because you're thinking of an afterlife, you do it for the now.

**RIOT. 77:** You've said that subculture has now become pop culture.

**GLEN:** I think a lot of subcultures have been co-opted by pop culture, yeah. A lot of things that were once subcultures are now part of pop culture, absolutely. As I said earlier you'll always get your hard core element there though. But you know when I started taking pictures I wanted more people to be exposed to the culture and know about skateboarding and I wanted more people to know about this great music and be interested in it, because I thought it would inspire them in the same way it inspired me and maybe change their outlook and perspective on things. The main goal was to make living better for everybody. Like in '79 to '82 not every person involved in Punk Rock was hard core and dedicated; there were a lot of people there because they thought it was the place to be. Not everybody's heart was in it; they were there because it was the new thing. But maybe ten or twenty percent of the people were really into it, so there's your hard core. Now thirty years later instead of having a thousand Punks in all of Los Angeles, we have two million and maybe only five percent of them are hardcore, but its still there and that's cool as far as I'm concerned. Its unfortunate they had to co-opt something so beautiful and so interesting and so inspiring and certainly it seemed like there was a higher percentage rate of people who were really into it back then, but in terms of numbers at least there's more people now who are hard core.

**RIOT. 77:** You've given a date of 1991 as the time when people began to lose their integrity. What was it about that time in particular that brought you to that realisation?

**GLEN:** It was just a weird time for skateboarding. It was almost becoming boutique in some ways and a fashion statement more than ever. Stores were more into selling a look than they were a certain type of board. Skateboarding was no longer about rolling fast; it was about rolling still. They made the wheels smaller so you could do more tricks and couldn't skate fast. I was never someone for tricks; I was always more of a style person. Street skating is perfectly valid, but it's very boring to me for the most part, unless you're really aggressive with it and are not falling all the time. Then musically with Hip Hop all the bands that mattered had either disbanded or were beginning to make commercial sounding records. They wanted to make money more than they wanted to make art and let the commerce get in the way of their creativity. That seemed to be happening then more than ever. As far as Punk Rock was concerned ... that was interesting. It wasn't a bad thing that Nirvana got big, but the timing was interesting.

**RIOT. 77:** Finally, can you tell me about the time OJ Simpson caught you skating in his swimming pool?

**GLEN:** He didn't catch me skating. I actually met him on the street and told him to buy a particular house, because he was looking for a house in that neighbourhood and I knew of one that was for sale. I pointed the house out to him and he ended up moving in a few years later. I had emptied the pool to skate in it, 'cos that's what you did when there was an abandoned house with a pool in it. It was an easy pool to empty, but it wasn't very skateable or a good pool to ride. I had actually gone away to stay with my father in New York that summer and wasn't around, but yeah we did empty his pool and skate in it. It was that same house that he lived in when he drove his car back there after the long chase that time.

