

FREE THINKERS

ISSUE #6







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FREE THINKERS
ISSUE #6
BY LIFETIME

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors: Reid Stewart & Michael Carter

Shapes & Colors: Michael Carter

Photos & Interviews: Glen E. Friedman, Stephen Wilde, Claudine Gossett, Rip Zinger, Ro Agents, Ruth Swanson, Sarah Meurle, Chris Macarthur, Russell Winfield, Chris, Brunkhart, Aaron Dodds, Trevor Graves, Richard Soto, Mike Selsky

Copy Editor: Leah Billas

Cover photo: Henry Rollins Fall 1982 Black Flag practice space, Carson, California by Glen E. Friedman
First spread: Jello Biafra Dead Kennedys 1982 at the Barn in Alpine Village, Torrance, California by Glen E. Friedman
Second spread: The Make-Up November 1995 NYC by Glen E. Friedman

GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL CARTER PHOTOGRAPHS BY GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

“I WAS CAPTURING SOMETHING THAT WOULD TELL THE STORY OF THE EVENING IN 1/60 OF A SECOND. I WAS CAPTURING THOSE MOMENTS TO SHARE WITH OTHER PEOPLE, TO INSPIRE OTHER PEOPLE, SO THEY COULD BE AS EXCITED AS I WAS.”

Most photographers spend entire lives hoping to be at the right place at the right time, witness to the birth of just one big social shift. Glen E. Friedman, on the other hand, was a there for three major cultural revolutions: Skateboarding, punk rock, and rap music.

As a high school kid in Los Angeles, Friedman was one of the skateboarders (later to be immortalized by the Stacy Peralta documentary Dogtown and Z-boys) who blew the limits off of skating by being the first to go vert in empty pools. After an injury sidelined him from skating for a while, Friedman got a 35mm camera and started shooting what his friends were up to. By age 15 he was a staff photographer for Skateboard magazine and regularly being published.

Skating led naturally into punk rock, and Friedman began snapping photos of an emerging hardcore scene with bands such as Black Flag, Minor Threat, and Dead Kennedys. And, on the strength of his punk rock photography, Friedman was invited to photograph some of the earliest hip-hop acts, giving him a ringside seat at the beginnings of rap music. While many of his photographs from each of those eras are cited as the “iconic” shots of the subject, for Friedman, shooting was always about being in the moment, not trying to capture something others would consider legendary.

I didn't think any of this stuff would get published after the fact and become legendary and iconic. You didn't think that way back then, you're just living in the moment. Something can only be iconic until it is respected, and it really wasn't that yet. But I knew that what I was shooting was important, be it Tony Alva doing a frontside air at the dog bowl, or Black Flag playing at a club in Los Angeles in 1981.

I was capturing something that would tell the story of the evening in 1/60 of a second, I was capturing those moments to share with other people, to inspire other people, so they could be as excited as I was.

It's difficult to imagine now, but in those days skateboarding was way out on the fringe and punk rock was even more remote to most people. Friedman, with his ringside seat, decided to share what was going on with a broader audience. But the time was not ripe.

That was really my idea, to expose these things to the general public, because I felt that needed to be seen. I contacted Sports Illustrated numerous times trying to get them to show what I was doing and what was going on, they never took it seriously, they never got back to me. I also remember trying to reach out to Time Magazine and Newsweek when the cops were beating the shit out of people at Black Flag shows, and Rolling Stone to let them know that this music was way more aggressive, progressive, and radical than anything else that was going on, even in New York up to that time. This was the hardcore shit, and to no avail, no one gave a shit.

Punk rock was, to Friedman, a natural pairing with the skating that was happening in Los Angeles at that time. Many punks were skaters and vice-versa.

It was very much an extension of skateboarding, an outlet for your radical behavior, outlaw attitude and wanting to release energy. Slam dancing, jumping around going crazy listening to fast music also inspired skateboarding.

When we were going to a show back then, we were fucking excited. You were having fun, jumping around with your friends, letting off energy, which eventually turned into slam dancing when the music got so fast that you couldn't

be up and down within the beats per minute that was being provided by the band. The music got so fast that you had to just run all over the place just to get off the angst that the band was helping you release.

But punk rock was also an education. The political lyrics of bands like Dead Kennedys and Black Flag created awareness for Friedman and his skater friends that they hadn't had before.

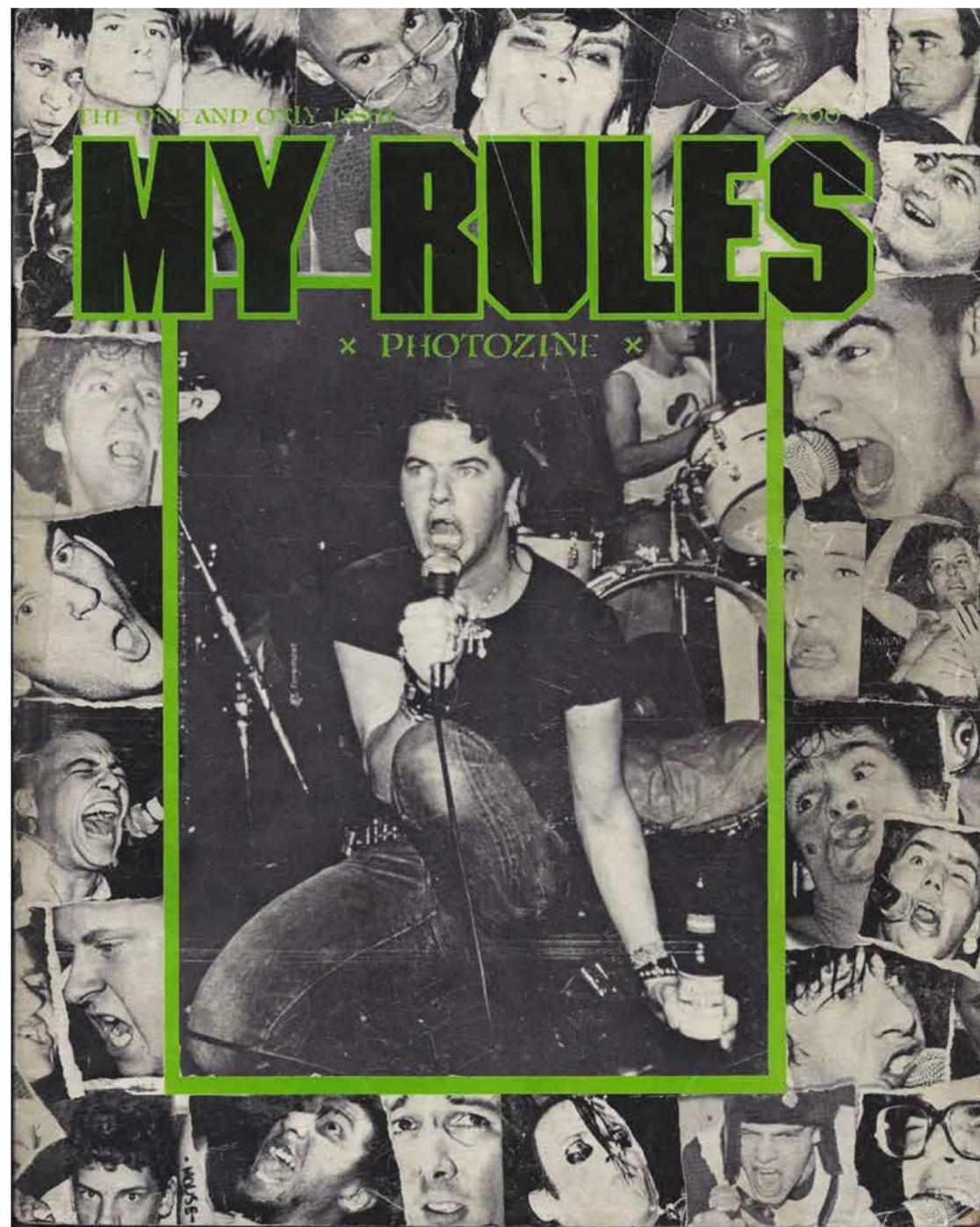
I was in high school at the time punk rock was starting to come out, where you start studying about government and politics, and policy and stuff. In American schools you don't learn much about politics. We learned about how our own government is run, but we don't learn about politics of the world and other systems. Punk rock taught you that there were other ways of looking at things, and ways of living. Punk rock was very, very inspiring to me and that's why I wanted to spread the punk rock message.

Both skating and punk rock were seen as an outlaw culture and the police often clashed with Friedman and his friends, even when they were just trying to have fun. Those clashes further politicized Friedman.

The police created the rebels. That's the funny thing. We used to have police telling us to not skate in the streets and chasing us off of peoples property, then here I am just going to see a band play in a legal venue and why are the police chasing me now? Why are the police threatening my life because I just walked out of a punk rock show and they don't like the way my friends look. That would politicize the shit out of a person you know?



Ian MacKaye MinorThreat 1982 at the 9:30 club in Washington DC



"MY RULES Photazine" Burning Flags Press - Glen E. Friedman (November 1, 1982)



Jay Adams 1976 at the "Tear Drop" West Los Angeles, California

Friedman's photos of early LA punk shows are some of the best visual records of the era. But initially he was hesitant to shoot punk rock shots at all. Eventually, the excitement of the scene outweighed his reasons for not carrying his camera.

I probably took my camera to 1 out of 10 shows? who wants to take there camera with them to some fucked up neighborhood, late at night to take pictures? Of what? A dark dingy little place with no lights? There wasn't necessarily anything that beautiful, but it was radical, and it was exciting, so every once in a while I would take my camera. I almost felt like it was my personal responsibility, I gotta tell people what the fuck is going on here. I only took pictures of the bands that inspired me.

Many of his friends from punk and skating fell into heavy drug use and dealing, with very negative consequences for some. Friedman, however, was never on board with that, at least voluntarily.

I was forced in fact to do drugs sometimes, physically forced, and eventually I ended up doing something really fucked up and realized I would never do that again. No matter what peer pressure I got, no matter what physical violence I had threatened towards me for not doing it. I just decided at one point when I was 15 or 16 that I would never do that again. I think it's cool to make that sober lifestyle popular by putting a cool label on it, Ian MacKaye wrote an interesting song about it, tells the story, and it inspires kids. It would have been great if I had that when I was fourteen, maybe it would have stopped me from letting people force me to do something I didn't want to do. So yeah, I could call myself straight edge, but I owned it way before they invented it.

Punk rock also exposed Friedman to veganism, which he embraced and never looked back. He's been a vegan for 25 years and counting. And he wishes everyone else would be, too.

When I became vegan 25 years ago, I had to walk a mile to get soy milk. Nowadays people have Whole Foods. It's a miracle! Being vegan now is so simple, it's nothing, it was a real effort 25 years ago.

The lifestyle and the political aspect behind being vegan is really important to me, and how it affects the environment is the number one reason why I became vegan. I become a vegan because I saw how greedy it was to consume animal products. I couldn't live with myself. Just by changing my diet I could help make the environment a better place, and not be so wasteful with the finite source of food that we have on this planet.



BAD BRAINS 1981 at A-7 New York City



Opposite page: Original photo from Circle Jerks "Golden Shower of Hits" cover 1983





RUN DMC [MJ] 1985 Hollis Queens, New York



Beastie Boys 1985 first trip to Cali. Standing on the back of rented Lincoln on the PCH in Malibu, in town on Madonna's "Like A Virgin" tour

Previous spread: PUBLIC ENEMY w/ the '98 POSSE - Hempstead, Long Island NY - December 1986 / Original cover photo for "Rebel Without a Pause" single



Rick Rubin 1986 Early visit to California, at the Cabuenga "World Book and News" Stand, Hollywood California

His album covers for punk bands eventually made their way into the hands of seminal hip-hop producers Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons who began hiring Friedman to photograph bands they produced.

They loved my photos. They freaked out because they had never seen a photo session like that before.

When I first heard Public Enemy, the Chuck D demos, I knew I gotta do this, I'm gonna be doing this, I'm down with this. I knew Public Enemy before they were even called Public Enemy. I got along with Chuck the first I met him, we met at the Run DMC Raising Hell tour at the Garden or something like that, and we got along like peas in a pod, best friends the first night.

At that time Hip-Hop was more commercial. They were the opposite of punk rock. It wasn't about being dirty and street, it was about really about people wanting to be glamorous and appear more privileged than they actually were.

Then came the early 1990s and the rise of gangster rap. Friedman was commissioned to shoot a number of album covers from prominent LA rappers.

At first I thought it was very important to show people that lifestyle. There was something very exciting about it at first. Anyone that's in it is not generally loving it. In helping Ice-T in portraying his lifestyle, or King-T, with these images, I felt that it was helping to tell a story that needed to be told.

Eventually, though, the violence and desperation surrounding South Central LA's gangster rap culture struck Friedman as hopeless and dark.

By the time I had done South Central Cartel that was just the end of it for me. Up to this time I was still impressed and enamored with presenting this lifestyle, other peoples' reality to the public to see this is how people have to live. It was the

first time I had been down to South Central since the L.A. Riots. It was just fucked up! I had been down there many times before with friends, but it was just fucked up, it was a whole different scene.

I had this epiphany after I saw the premiere of (the movie) Menace to Society. That movie really really moved me, in made a profound impact on my perspective. I'm trying to tell a story and trying to relay peoples' ideas, but I think I've got it now, I think I've gone to the brink of glamorizing it, right to the edge. I was trying to expose something and not glamorize it. I was trying to expose a side of the culture so people understood it. But I realized that I know kids like this, and that there is no value of human life, and it's all about being an asshole, badass and not caring about anything. That has always been the opposite of me. I always care about everything. I'm a really sensitive person. To that day I have never shot a picture with guns in it, and I am totally offended by guns. I'm not ashamed that I shot those photos, but I don't do it anymore. I fucking hate guns.

Friedman lives and works in New York City, where he owns and operates his own publishing company Burning Flags Press, and also showing work from his archives at galleries around the world. He's still taking pictures but not in the same way that he used to.

I'm not as inspired as I used to be. I leave that to the younger generation. If I had any artists pumping me up like that today, I would still shoot them. At the same time I don't feel obligated because photography is so simple now, and I would like to leave it to this generation; go out and fucking photograph your own shit. You do your own thing. It's your turn now.

Leaving counter culture photography to the younger generation, Friedman has focused his efforts on spreading the depth of his archive to as many as people as possible. In the last twenty years, Friedman has published a number

of important books such as "Fuck You Heroes", "Fuck You Too", "The Idealist", and "Dogtown - The Legend of the Z-Boys" to name a few. He's currently working on a new book titled "My Rules" which is named after a fan zine he self-published in 1982.

Because "Fuck You Heroes" is out of print, and "Fuck You Too" has been out of print, the new book is going to encompass the best of both of those books. "Fuck You Heroes" will be 20 years old in September next year. When I made "Fuck You Heroes" I didn't think I was going to make another book ever again, I thought that that was my book and I would never do another one again. Also I was really into showing off about being a good photographer, I made everything full frame, every photo in that book is a full frame image exactly as I shot it, nothing is cropped in the whole book. I thought that was really important to show that off, and felt that it was the essence of good photography, creating an image as you looked through the lens. I thought that cropping was cheating and something you did when you didn't have good photos. That was my perspective then, twenty years later I'm 50 years old, and I think it's ok to crop a photo from time to time.

"My Rules" is being released September 4th, 2014 and is the first book I'm not publishing myself. It's being put out by Rizolli. That's what I've been working on for the last year. I'm really loving this new book and fucking so proud of it, I hope that everyone gets to see it, I don't care how people get it, they could steal it as far as I'm concerned, if they want it they should have it!