

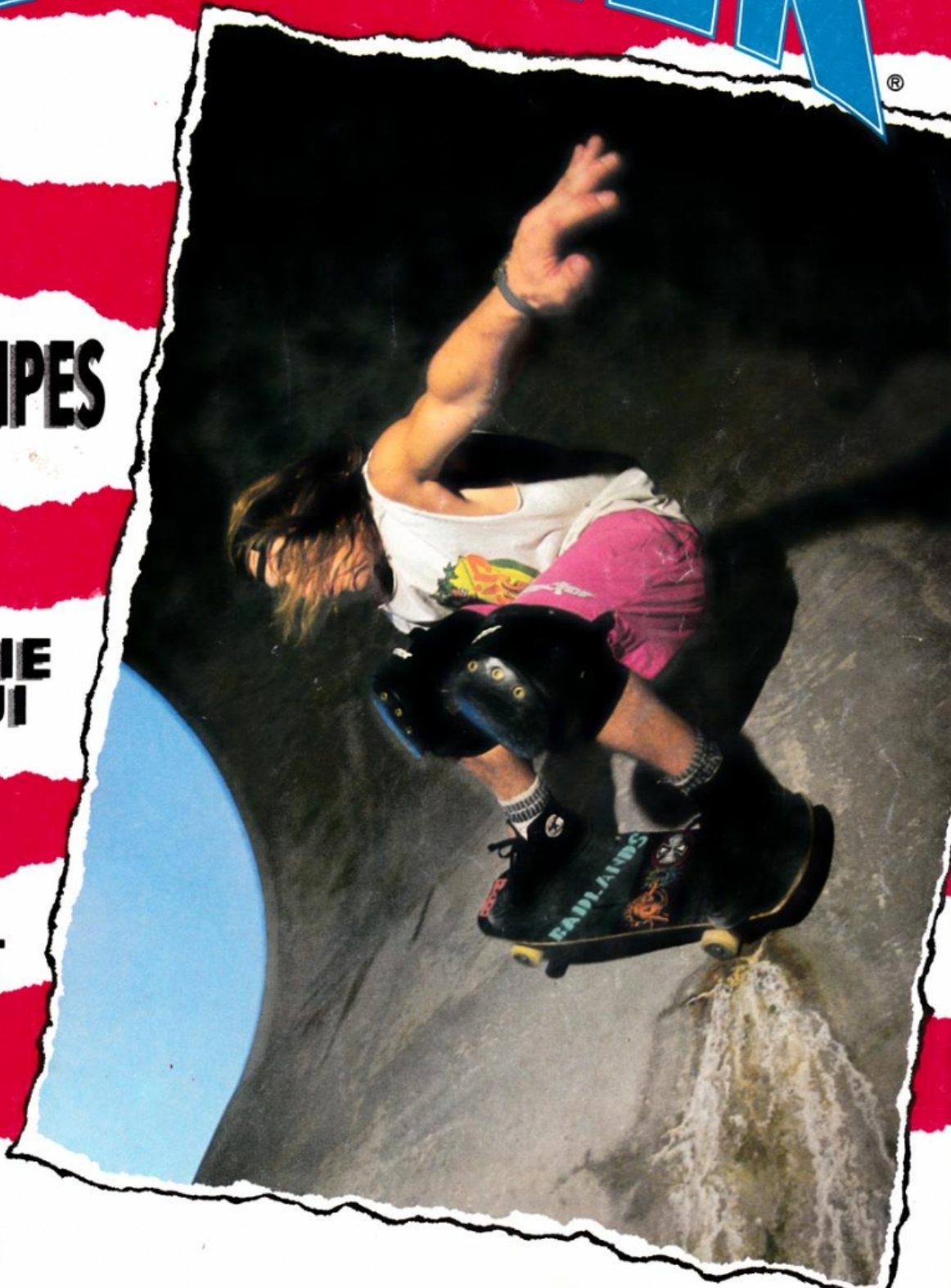
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Bad Religion has been cranking out hard-hitting California-style punk rock since 1979. Not only do their songs have more depth and meaning than the last two books you read, they also unleash enough pile-driving power to whip any crowd into a frenzy. From their first self-titled Ep to their latest Lp (*No Control*) the members of Bad Religion have maintained a standard of musical and lyrical intensity that is unmatched by their peers. **by MCM**



Suffer was considered the best punk rock record of 1988 by many people and *No Control* seems to be getting the same response. Are you going to sell out now that you're established again?

Greg — I've heard reports that in Germany they're saying we already sold out on *No Control*. That doesn't make sense. We did it the same way we did *Suffer*—we went to a modest little studio and put it out in about a month. You have to take other people's opinions with a grain of salt. I always take the good with the bad.

Greg H. — And the ugly.

Brett — We're going to sell out, but not yet. I think that'll be around '97. We're going to be kind of like the Grateful Dead.

Greg G. — The chances of us selling out are very slim, because there isn't a company out there in their right mind that would give us a lot of money. The whole concept of 'selling out' is pretty absurd if you ask me. If a band still plays the kind of music you like, what difference does it make how well they're doing? People told us we sold out back in '83 and we had never been smaller after that record. How is that selling out? You could argue that selling out is giving people exactly what they want you to give them. It's taking an easy road.

Brett — Or you could argue that selling out

bad religion

would be turning your art over to a corporate conglomerate that's going to take your money and put it into weapons manufacturing. It's a matter of deciding whether you want to be working for a company that's involved in things you're against.

Does Bad Religion have a message?

Greg G. — Yeah—if you want to be happy, don't ever go into the music business.

Greg H. — Be excellent to each other.

Brett — I think it's good for people to be skeptical, to question and be anti. If you're brought up a certain way and your immediate surroundings and environment teach you a certain thing, you shouldn't just get swallowed up by it and believe it. You should question it and even go against it. Then, in the end, if it turns out that the thing held up and was worthwhile, you end up going back to it anyway. Through the process of being going against the grain, you become more alive, more vital, and you'll learn something in the process.

Greg G. — I agree partly, but the problem

is that if you really go against things, you hold yourself up for a lot of problems. However, if you flow with things it takes a little more creativity to be an individual.

Brett — I agree with that. But you can be actively going against something just by doing nothing. Kids don't have to go out and bomb their school. I have an apartment and I pay rent—I'm not living in a squat. I have a job; I'm in the system. Part of my way of protesting is being in Bad Religion and spouting out my views at people. My reason for doing this, for being anti, isn't to change the world, it's to change myself. If you try to make a big fuss, you're probably not going to change anything.

Greg G. — People are too reactionary. They wouldn't listen to you anyway. The rule I try to live by is to always be an individual. Some say you're vain if you always

try to measure yourself against other people, but I think it's the only way to be an individual and to question things properly.

Do you think that kids in America are encouraged to be individuals?

Brett — Are you kidding? I think the entire world population is turning into a giant vanilla wafer. People are encouraged to be homogenous.

Greg G. — It's really repulsive. All the advertising you see is so misleading. It takes a pretty mature attitude to say, 'I'm not going to watch TV.' Unfortunately, all the young people in the world are growing up on TV, which tells you that you can get the best women if you drive the right car, you can make the most money if you go into the right field.

Brett — What makes it worse is that all the television sitcoms are geared toward the lowest common denominator so nobody gets left out and everyone will get the joke. It waters down the intellect of everybody.

Greg G. — There are a few alternatives of

course. You can't go with what's supplied. You have to separate everything out.

Brett — That's another quiet way to approach nonconformity. I don't watch any TV. Well, actually, I watch CNN, but even when I watch that I think it's bullshit.

I feel like they're telling me half the truth. Pete — Still, the media is a powerful source. I think that as long as you stay somewhat skeptical, you can read between the lines and gain something.

Brett — Radio is another really sad trend. It's totally prepackaged. The music they feed us on the airwaves has nothing to do with what the people want to hear. Take Metallica for example, they were in the Billboard top 40 for a long time and they weren't on any radio stations.

Jay — Bad Religion is another example, in terms of our popularity. You hear bands that play on the Sunset Strip on the radio all the time. We could sell out any club within a 25-mile radius of this point for five nights in a row and you'll never hear Bad Religion on the radio.

Brett — Right. And nowadays college radio—which used to be a forum for alternative music—is almost as formatted as commercial radio. We can't get Bad Religion on the college radio charts, even though our last two records were definitely in the top fifty most popular underground records. If it doesn't sound like R.E.M., kind of industrial like Ministry or Nine Inch Nails or alternative metal-ish like Sound Garden or Jane's Addiction, forget it.

Greg G. — And what kind of a message does that send out to everybody? People who want to be in bands then realize, 'I

The entire world population is turning into a giant vanilla wafer. People are encouraged to be homogenous.

better sound like one of these bands if I want to be popular.'

Brett — I think eight of the top ten college radio airplay songs last year were on either major labels or their subdivisions. Major labels don't want what happened in the early eighties to happen again. Back then all these indie labels sprouted up because there was a vacuum in the marketplace. Groups like Black Flag sold big numbers and the majors weren't in on it because they were caught with their pants down. So now they're like, 'We'll just sign up everybody, we'll flood the college radio stations with promo, and if anyone gets popular we'll already be in on it.'



Left: Bad boys, good band (left to right), Jay (bass), Brett (guitar), Greg H. (guitar), Greg G. (vocals) and Pete (drums). Above: Greg Van Dusen. Photo: Ken Salerno.

Do you think the capitalist ideal—pursuit of money—is the root of all the homogenization and compartmentalization in the world today?

Greg G. — It's not necessarily money. A lot of those bands you see on MTV aren't

If you're brought up a certain way and your immediate surroundings and environment teach you a certain thing, you shouldn't just get swallowed up by it and believe it.

making money, but they're looked at as successful. I think if you see it on TV, if you see it in ads, that today is what's thought of as success.

Brett — But he's talking about whether the homogenization is caused by corporations and, if so, why are they causing this? It does have to do with money and power, which are basically the same thing because money is power and power is freedom. People want to keep the lowest common denominator as low as possible so everybody can feel like they're someone. It's like an opiate for the masses. They don't glorify the genius rebel outcast guy who goes against, they glorify the average Joe who doesn't stand out.

Greg G. — Then you're arguing that homogenization is motivated by money, because average Joe is the consumer.

Brett — But it's more than that. I think it's politically motivated. That's how you keep the masses in line.

Greg G. — You can only make judgments like that in retrospect. There's no committee making political decisions. That might be a less prominent reason.

Jay — It's a quick way to make sure everybody stays happy.

Brett — I don't think anyone's masterminding it, but it happens. There are people who understand that it's happening and think it's good. When I was in school, they started a new grading system. You wouldn't get graded on how well you did on tests, just on how well you completed your work. If you didn't do all the work but you got A's on all your tests, the best you could get was a D. That's putting an extra burden on the guy who's smarter so the other guys can catch up. What's the point of that? All this homogenization is trying to create a human vanilla wafer, a Big Mac. You shouldn't cut off the tall guy at the knees to make the short guy feel better. (Continued on page 100)

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MINISTRY

(From page 77) People think that the panacea, the nirvana, the utopia is getting a major label deal. It's not. That's the beginning of your whole can of worms. I found that out the hard way and now there's no temptation to go back to the other side. I don't dig limousines."

It's this uncompromising attitude that shapes Ministry's bleak portrait of a big bad world ruled by money, greed, ignorance and exploitation. They aren't exactly the darlings of Warner Brothers' roster and they don't care. They've got a big message with big music to match. Are they merely cheap entertainment or a platform for AI to spew forth his revolutionary dogma? AI: "We're escapism to some. To others we reconfirm their beliefs. Maybe we present them with some new ideas, stir up their shit a little. That would be nice."

Ministry is more interested in getting to the root of matters. They're purposely vague in lyric and message. Tracks like "Thieves," "Burning Inside" and "Stigmata" sputter about wildly, conveying a mood of brooding anger and the constant threat of violence. "Why not? There's bullshit and hypocrisy all around, from the Boy Scouts to the Catholic Church. We sing about the system but not in a topical, timely manner. Someone like Noriega is a consequence of an evil system, a puppet, just like Ministry was in the early days.

"Something that fascinates me is just who is this 'evil cabal' that does all the controlling? Bush? Barbara Bush? The Masons? Steve Albini? Stephen King?"

Intellectualizing rogue, pontificating braggart, Jourgenson, a one-time drug dealer, has very definite, sharply critical viewpoints that fuel Ministry's meaning machine. "This is not the land of the free. It is not a democracy. Do you know where your taxes go? Don't pay your taxes for a while and see just how free you really are. Right now, I think we're going through a new Victorianism: AIDS, sex is bad, drugs are bad. Do you think that a show like *21 Narc Street* could have happened in a decade like the Sixties? I don't.

"It's a hypocritical joke, a total facade that pot and certain drugs are illegal. Screw that holier-than-thou attitude. They should legalize it and tax it like they do everything else. They have to—no more Stingray missiles unless they start taxing a few bags of herb pretty soon. They've got to find a new way of taxing the poor. They've got Lotto now, a decent manner of taxation, so they don't have to tax the rich. They've already raised taxes on cheap wine—can taxed, legalized drugs be far away?"

"Damn the masses. The idiots that are running things can't even prop-

erly assimilate the new lower class, the homeless. To them, that's an eyesore. Still, I guarantee that just as they sell cheap electronics to keep the middle and lower classes safe and sedate, they'll soon have items for the homeless. That's just the nature of things."

Jourgenson and his Ministry of Truth don't just aim to smash the acid houses or burn the discos, they've got it in mind to break down the walls, tear through the fences and shake the foundations for real. Any fears, General Jourgenson, before going forth into battle?

"Yeah, running out of beer." ■

FURS

(From page 80) bit too cynical, but I don't think that's a bad thing."

The personal turning point that set John Ashton on his current non-sense artistic bent was an accident that threatened his ability to play and perpetuated the wait between full-length Furs studio efforts. "I was really drunk and I put my hand through some glass. It put me out of action for about four months."

The same incident alerted Ashton to the reality of a long-time drinking problem, one he had to deal with before the band could get back on its feet. "It took me six months to cure myself and now I'm happy. I'm not ecstatic, but I certainly don't look at things in the throwaway sense anymore. I realize what I've got. It may sound self-centered—actually, it may sound like complete bullshit—but the only thing that matters now is the music. It's true. Right now we're not sailing the crest of some commercial success wave. We had that, but we got really sick of it. I mean, Richard had been looking at himself in the mirror every morning and going, 'Oh no! You're the guy that made *Midnight to Midnight!*' He had to live with that. I know he wasn't happy. It was very much a veneer thing. He could cover up with a bit of glitz and a bit of glam. He hadn't got to that point where he'd realized that what we'd done before was really important!" ■

BAD RELIGION

(From page 79)

Greg G. — That could be interpreted as a real right-wing attitude.

Brett — But I'm not right wing.

Greg G. — It's hard to talk about equalization without sounding like a bleeding heart and it's very hard to talk about praising the genetic archetype of greatness without sounding extremely right wing.

Brett — But when you get down it, we're talking about individuality. We should glorify humanity in all its different forms and not try to stymie them. I think mass media stymies and brings down, rather than trying to raise up and enlighten people.

It seems that, whenever a group of people is rebellious and goes away

from the norm, the media manages to turn it into something that's fashionable and 'cool.'

Brett — That's why it's important to stay anti. As soon as the tide swings, you turn the other way.

Jay — Exactly. All of a sudden punk regalia is a big fashion thing. Guys on Melrose are selling ripped jeans for a hundred and sixty bucks.

Brett — I don't think you can really blame the corporations, though. The corporations wouldn't be doing it if people weren't consuming this stuff in mass quantities. People like to be able to sit in front of their TV, switch on the alpha waves in their brain and just gel. In fact, I think it's human nature. I would like it too. That's why I don't even turn the damn thing on.

Aren't you a teacher, Greg?

Greg G. — I'm a graduate student at U.C.L.A. studying biology and geology—paleontology basically. I teach undergraduates as well.

What attitudes do you see in your students?

Greg G. — I was just thinking about this the other day. Brett never went to college, he graduated high school with an equivalency exam, and I know for a fact that he could write a coherent treatise on something better than 99 percent of the students going to college. I'm not saying that he shouldn't be able to do that, but it says one thing: the people in college aren't there to educe their potential, they're there to get a diploma so they can say, 'Here, I went through this four years of bullshit, now hire me for thirty thousand dollars a year.' Most people in college are just too stupid to realize that their diploma is probably not going to make them much more money than another guy who's got more smarts than them. People look at a diploma as a sign of success. It's an object, a symbol, and that's why they want it.

Brett — I dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade, took the equivalency, and went to apply for a job. They said, 'School?' I said, 'U.C.L.A. graduate,' and they said, 'Okay.' I mean, they never asked to see a diploma. What, are you supposed to carry it around with you?

There are definite social/political messages in your songs. Does this belie an intent to change the world?

Greg G. — Hopefully what people get out of our songs is that if you change yourself, that's one step forward to changing things around you. I don't know of any songs I've written that flat out say it, but I think that if you try to change the world, you spend a lot of wasted time and before you know it, you're an old man who's led an unhappy, bitter life.

What are your influences, musically and otherwise?

Brett — The Ramones, Sex Pistols, early L.A. punk bands like Black Flag and the Germs. D.O.A., Elvis Costello, Rockpile, Buzzcocks,

anything poppy and confrontational. I haven't read much lately, but Vonnegut was a big influence on me. Thomas Wolfe.

Greg H. — Dr. Seuss, Mr. Rogers. Greg G. — I listen to all kinds of music, but when it comes to punk rock, I used to love stuff like the Germs. I like a lot of stuff from around the turn of the decade. The Gears, Sham 69. I used to listen to Discharge a lot because I thought it was so absurd. During the summer I like to pick up an old classic novel. Recently I read some Thomas Hardy. I've tried to read as many of the Steinbeck novels as I can. Most of my songs are not inspired directly by a certain book. A lot of them are inspired by the science writing that I come across.

Brett — I wrote a song that was influenced by a science book—"Big Bang" was influenced by Stephen W. Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. The lines 'Big Bang, big crunch/You know there's no free lunch' illustrate his concept that there is no extra energy in the universe. There's nothing lost. If it goes out, it has to collapse. It can't keep going forever.

What is Bad Religion's philosophical outlook? A song like "No Control" seems to imply an almost fatalistic point of view.

Greg G. — No it doesn't. It just implies that you should be very aware of the things you have no control over. Particularly in the second verse when it talks about 'History and future are the comforts of our curiosity.' That's implying that those are endeavors that can enrich your life if you study them, but you're always stuck here in the present day.

What about the line: 'If you came to conquer you'll be king for a day/But you too will deteriorate and quickly fade away.'

Greg G. — Everyone seems to strive to be powerful and better than the all rest. That line is of saying who cares if you make it that high or that far, it's only going to be for a very brief moment and then you're the same as everybody else—you're dead.

What happens when you die?

Greg G. — A lot of energy gets radiated back to the sun.

Jay — Come on, he wants you to describe it. He wants to know what it's like.

Brett — Remember what it was like before you were born? That's exactly what it's like after you die. It's really not that bad.

Do you believe people have souls?

Brett — I've been trying to come up with a belief system to satisfy me about this question since I was about eleven years old and I'm not done yet. I'll probably come up with a new one next week. I don't really believe in a soul. The universe is energy, even the mass of the universe is just energy at rest. I think that consciousness is 'stuff' just (Continued on page 104)



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BAD RELIGION

(From page 100) like energy is. The universe has so much energy and there's so much consciousness also. When I die, the consciousness can't disappear, just like energy can't disappear. There has to always be this much energy in the universe, and some of that energy will be consciousness. As long as there's some consciousness in the universe then the collective soul is there.

Greg G. — What your talking about is gamma rays. If somebody could tell me what a soul is, then I could have a basis for judgment. The word soul has never, to my knowledge, been defined by anyone.

Brett — Your soul is your essence. Jay — My soul is my food.

Greg H. — Soul Train?

Greg G. — That's a basic recurring theme in the philosophy of science—you can't address whether something exists or not if you can't define it.

Truth is the same way. You can only define truth using the word truth.

Brett — You concoct a tautology and it becomes meaningless. Two plus two equals four, that's a truth, but all you're really saying is four equals four. It goes in circles. What I want to know is, can two plus two equal five? Because if two plus two could equal five, then, in my opinion, there could be a soul. But I can never get myself to that juncture. In other words, we have the capacity to reason, but some things you can't understand with reason.

To believe in some things you have to make a leap of faith.

Brett — Yeah, and I can't make that leap. To say two plus two equals five is a leap of faith. You can't understand how that could be true. There's no way your mind could ever say, 'Oh, I get it!'

Greg G. — The only reason two plus two equals four is because it's defined operationally. We can reproduce that concept over and over again. Two and two equaling five could be true if you could get someone who could make you believe it.

But it's amazing how much we rely on assumption and things other people have supposedly proven. That's a leap of faith right there.

Greg G. — But the underlying assumption is that you could go and do it yourself. That's the difference between science and religion. Even ordinary old you can, with the proper tools, reproduce scientific history.

Brett — This brings me to my next comment, which relates back to Stephen W. Hawking. In my opinion, basically what he's doing is searching for God. That's what the most advanced realm of physics is basically dealing with—the creation of the universe. If they could get a grand unified theory, it would be 'This formula equals God.' This is science, but his math is so advanced that for me

to believe him is just the same as me going to temple and believing the rabbi. It takes just as much faith. I just have an easier time believing it.

Greg G. — I still maintain that if you're given the right mental tools, you could start to understand it. Our scientific system or mathematical system doesn't know how to deal with the idea of infinity. That's where religion comes very close to science. Brett — But Stephen understands it. I know he does. He's sitting there in his wheelchair thinking about infinity all day.

What is religion doing for society?

Greg G. — In small communities religion serves an important social purpose. Personally, I think the belief part is very important because at least you're addressing a question. Any time you're driven to ask questions, that's good. I feel perfectly content with the fact that I don't have a religion. Some people feel empty or something. I have a great faith in a lot of the things I study, but it's not securing a place for me when I die. A lot of people feel empty if they struggle to find faith, but I don't feel that at all.

Brett — Wait till you're on your deathbed, buddy.

Jay — I believe in some kind of global harmony. I don't believe in man-created religions, which is what everything is now.

Greg H. — I believe in Nintendo.

Brett — My problem is that I go sit in a room and try to think up something that will be satisfactory to me. I'll think of something pretty good, then I'll go, 'That can't be it, I thought of it. If I thought of it, it's shit because I'm just me.'

Do you have a moral code of any sort?

Greg G. — Yeah, but that's probably instilled from my upbringing. Half of the things I do, half of the ways I think can be seen as anti-American, but the other half is what you would consider being part of the American ideal. My point is that your ethics are motivated by your upbringing.

Is there a universal moral code?

Brett — The universal ethic for me, if I could be the ideal me, is to smash the ego and the self-centered, constantly inward-looking creep that I am and to be thinking about others rather than myself. That's the way to be comfortable. The times I have done that, I've been happy. If everyone did that, everyone would feel good because no one would have their eyes focused in, they'd be focused outward on helping someone else. That, to me, is the universal moral gesture.

A final message for the readers?

Brett — A message for the readers? What have we been talking about this whole time? Okay, you want it in a nutshell—Just Say No.

Greg H. — Be excellent. ■

MAIL DROP

(From page 8)

CRIMINAL PURSUIT

I'm pissed because cops won't leave me alone. I learned about the skatepark in Raleigh, NC but it's too far to skate. I've been kicked out of every mall in Durham and Raleigh. The only good skating I get is running from the law. Should I keep running?

Jerry

Probably In Jail

Yeah. Get them to chase you into a ditch so you can really get rad. T-ed

LIGHTNING RAD

In your January 90 issue a kid wrote in about almost getting hit by lightning. Well, I have a story to tell you about what happened to me:

Picture this, about eight kids skating a 12-foot-high ramp out in the country (in an open field). The sky got grim, no rain (yet), and it started to thunder. We didn't notice because we had the tunes too loud. I was doing a Smith grind when all of a sudden lightning hit the steel coping about three feet in front of me. I freaked! The ramp caught on fire. Luckily it rained hard enough so not a lot of damage was done. Now we always skate the lightning ramp in a storm because lightning never strikes twice. We hope!

Lightning Ramp Kid

Poughkeepsie, NY

HARDCORE HOSTESS

I'm a girl, I don't skate, I have a ramp and a lot of cool skaters come over to my house to skate my ramp. Am I stupid?

Some girl in California
U.S.A.

Well, it's a pretty bad sign if you have to ask. T-ed

BURIED TRIBUTE

I would like to thank you guys for sticking in there for almost ten years. The silent underground (me) keep quiet. We don't complain about things like harassment, school or the fact that we don't have shiny new boards, G&S pants, new Airwalks or \$15.00 shirts (which is too much at the mall). We just skate to be what we are. You guys revolutionized skating. From the early days of Duane Peters spinning an el rollo to Ray Barbee doing a kickflip-to-madollie. So, from the underground, I tip my hat and hope to see you in years to come. 1981-????

Dave

Team Quickness

CIVIL BITES

I just read your April 1990 issue and was completely pissed off. In your Mail Drop Tally Whack there were thirty-nine "anti-vampire" letters and only eighteen "I'm a

vampire" letters. Are you telling me no one has written in saying they support vampires? That sucks! People write in saying they hate vampires. Well who the hell are they? Do they know any vampires? I doubt it. They are just prejudiced toward a group of beings who are different than us. My point is, this type of prejudice is the kind that helps skate harassment thrive. So don't hate people because they have a different way of living.

Vampires are cool
Aston, PA.

THE ICE FAN COMETH

I just have to say I've been waiting all my life for a dude like Ice-T. The dude is someone to learn from. He's unselfish and realistic. I think skating should adopt a "syndicate" system, because from what Ice-T said, it works and is good.

Darren Hembd
Port Orchard, WA

CIVIC DISSENTER

I'm ticked off at the city council of the town I live in. They didn't ban skating or anything, they just don't keep the sidewalks clean. I launched a curb and as soon as I hit the ground I hit a rock or something, and I really slammed hard. It took a chunk out of my board, my knee and my shoulder. It hurt bad and now I get nervous every time I launch. I hate the mayor.

Some Dude That Skates
Mesquite, TX.

Sounds like you better work on your sweepers, bro. T-ed

GROSSOETRY

I read that article on Jeff Grosso in the recent February issue and his ideas, personality and experiences really made me think. It inspired me to write this poem:

The Sky's End

Out of the darkness on the cliff
Close your eyes and quickly drift
The stars above that shine so bright
Will guide you to a fervent light
Your soul rides over the sky's edge
Your body rides over the ramp's ledge

We sail into a darkened dream
Where no one can hear our hearts scream

You ride higher as you descend
Off of the clearing's end
You fly forever and cannot die
We all must find the end of the sky
We yearn to hold it in our hands,
The moon we see over midnight sands

If we do, hope it won't break
Like the sun did, for our sake
Ride far into infinity

The breeze will sweep just you and me
And, we forever shall descend
Until we reach the sky's end.

Juge