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#23 | AN ANIMATED MUSIC PRESS | JULY 2004 | FREE!



## NOFX

## BAD RELIGION

**PLUS:**  
VELVET REVOLVER SEX POSITIONS AUDIO KARATE AS I LAY DYING AUTOPILOT OFF  
FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND EVER WE FALL THE WEIGHT MISERY SIGNALS DEICIDE  
SOMETHING CORPORATE BRAID REGGIE & THE FULL EFFECT KEELHAUL OUTLIE  
KILLSWITCH ENGAGE THE GAMITS LEFT ALONE PECCATUM & MUCH MORE!



# BAD RELIGION

## Bad Religion is Burning

*This is a little less than 1/2 of the complete article that ran in the retail version of AMP Magazine #9. The issue with the full article can be purchased through [AMPmagazine.com](http://AMPmagazine.com), or [Interpunk.com](http://Interpunk.com). We are running both the NOFX and Bad Religion pieces from our most recent retail issues for, well... several reasons. First of all, they might arguably be the two most important punk bands of all times. Secondly, they both touch on very important stuff about our current governmental situation, and maybe this will be a great opportunity to get people even more informed for the upcoming election. Thirdly (?) of all, they are both on this year's Warped Tour, so it just seemed like a good excuse to have a couple of our favorite bands in the magazine again, so here you go. Enjoy! —Scott*

By Jack Rabid

**B**AD RELIGION HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN America's best and most exciting punk rock band for the last 17 years, since returning in 1988 with their third LP *Suffer*, but they've been the most lyrically fascinating as well. This combination of singer Greg Graffin and guitarist Brett Gurewitz's superior songs, Graffin's sensational singing, and such continually contentious lyrical matter has made them stand alone in a field of one in all three distinctions in the punk rock community. Indeed, not even the plethora of bands that have been inspired or influenced by Bad Religion have ever come close to them in any of these three characteristics. And since Gurewitz's return to the band after a seven-year absence, they've seemed completely and totally invigorated, nay, burning, once again, with all that's made them such a tremendous juggernaut of musical power on the one hand, and classic punk rock social critique on the other. In short, they're as inspiring now—to a music fan or musician who wants substance with their music as well as style and a great hook—as they were on their 1981 debut EP or their classic 1982 first LP, *How Can Hell Be any Worse*.



And with five of their first six LPs newly remastered and reissued, and a first new LP in *The Empire Strikes First*, there's rarely been a more opportune time to speak with the group's two principal songwriters. In particular, as the title of the new LP implies, Graffin and Gurewitz have unleashed an LP brimming not only with their usual killer melodies, "ooohs" and "ahhhs" backing vocals, and speedy choruses to die for,





Photo courtesy of Epitaph

but their words have never rung truer, or felt more consequential, than they do right at this moment, 24 years into their long and roundly respected career. (Note, with a gold LP in 1994's *Stranger Than Fiction*, they've long appealed to alternative rock fans in general as well.)

As I note in the interview below, I was quite curious and even looking forward to *The Empire Strikes First* more than even most of their

LPs, because I was sure they'd have a lot to say on the current charged political climate—while using their perspective and long experience to speak in deliberative terms. And they didn't disappoint. This in turn led me to anticipate this interview, and sure enough, with the slightest prodding, both Graffin and Gurewitz coolly and easily launched into the feelings that lay behind their new work. ♦

Indeed, what fertile ground for a Bad Religion LP! Here we are buried in the severe fourth year of a Bush II administration that has betrayed every single campaign vow of moderate Republicanism its leader made, and that instead has foisted on us a hard-right administration that's run roughshod over the environment, labor, constitutional rights, the public purse, and most egregiously of all, the

concept of war as the last resort (not the first!); while also pursuing a religious slant that has the country's scientists signing formal papers of protest. All of these have been topics discussed on their previous 11 LPs, so Bad Religion seems just purple with intelligent, unexpressed, sarcastic rage on *The Empire Strikes First*. You won't be able to miss it on two of the three best songs, the spine-tingling "Let Them



Eat War" ("that's how you ration the poor"), and the title track, which, by the way, makes superb, and definitely intentional appropriation, of the old 1979 Eddie & the Substitutes L.A. punk favorite of their youth, "American Society," (Instead of "don't want to drown," it's "don't want to live."), and, as they reveal below, Agent Orange's old favorite "Everything Turns Grey." (The same Agent Orange that The Offspring admitted stealing from for their first smash hit.) Biting lyrics such as "We strike first/And we're unrehearsed/Here we go ahead, this day's the greatest show on heaven and earth/C'mon and get your money's worth!" send shivers to anyone contemplating the needless slaughter and destruction based on a false premise of sham self-defense.

But the LP isn't merely a referendum on a runaway, even nightmarish Federal government that's divided its citizens worse than ever and turned the rest of the world's populaces against us. (More from the title track: "But even 10 million souls marching in February couldn't stop the worst/Ca-ca-ca-ca-couldn't reverse.") Nay, they address

a number of other different, more general ideas as ever. For instance, if The Empire did nothing more than give us "Los Angeles is Burning," one of those great all-time Bad Religion songs (this LP's "American Jesus," "Atomic Garden," "Faith Alone," or "20th Century Digital Boy"), that would be fine. It's the perfect vehicle for this band—call it "think locally, comment globally." They use the recent devastating L.A. fires from last autumn as a spur to critique the myopic human disregard for realities of the environment (a particular specialty of Graffin, with his newly minted Ph.D. from Cornell in evolutionary biology, and street-intellectual Gurewitz—this is one of Gurewitz's songs), pinning the destruction on human complicity where it belongs, even while weeping for it. (Nature's firewalls of brush have been built into and around in L.A. and San Diego outskirts by acres of new housing, making such disasters both inevitable and unstoppable.) It's not only a pertinent, everlasting subject that's a bridge to a denunciation of modern media infotainment; it's a monster song, with a chorus to match. Try to stop singing "When the hills of Los

Angeles are burning/Palm trees are candles in the murder wind/So many lives are on the breeze/Even the stars are ill at ease/And Los Angeles is burning," and shudder at its greater implications. Songs of this quality are enough to make one stay a rock fan forever, convinced forever of its crucial "burning" relevance in the hands of the best and most honest bands.

Oh, there's more! The extended coda of "Beyond Strikes Worse," long a Bad Religion treat (think Generator's "Only Entertainment," and The Process of Belief's closing "Bored and Extremely Dangerous") is another great moment, as is the plaintive plea of "Atheist Peace"—in a world of violent religion-related extremism and hatred. And the latter's sister track "God's Love" not only has one of their classic bridges, but is the latest in their theme of religious fundamentalist damage, going back to 1980's "Bad Religion," up through "Fuck Armageddon, This is Hell," "God Song," and "Operation Rescue." And the suicide bomber examination "Live Again—The Fall of Man" might be construed as a 2004 update on their first LP's opener, "Only Gonna Die"







Photo by Anarchy Alicia  
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("from our own arrogance"), which reminds, as "How Much is Enough?" once noted, that "our surfeit may well be our demise." And it is just as important to talk to Bad Religion about their music and songwriting process as it is to discuss their lyrical themes, past and present, since the two are so continually intertwined. Indeed, the two explain below how, now that their partnership has resumed, they use each other to vet their new songs. And they sound damn happy about it, too! So you have that dichotomy presented, of their influences both musical and lyrical.

And since this is my fifth interview with these folks going back to 1989, it's my latest chance to plead for a proper reissue of the disowned but now (interestingly enough!) more generally respected second LP, 1983's *Into the Unknown*—though once again I don't think I had much luck in persuading them, even as the original

vinyl copies of the LP continue to fetch three digits. No, songs such as "Chasing the Wild Goose" will sadly remain unheard to all but the tiniest minority of their biggest fans. In any case, Bad Religion have a lot to say, both about the new LP and their newly reissued old LPs, and of an even wider range of topics on their minds.

So let's get right to it. But don't forget to pick up this new LP, and its 2001 predecessor, *The Process of Belief*, for proof of how punks turning 40 can beat the tar out of younger groups that weren't even born when they made their first record, or for how blistering and vital they remain. And check out the improved new versions of their early LPs, they're all wonderful and thrilling records as well! (This interview took place in the Epitaph Records conference room with myself and Gurewitz, taking a generous hour long break from running that powerhouse label—for

which I am grateful—with Graffin joining us on speakerphone from his house in Ithaca, New York, on the day before leaving for another mammoth U.S. tour—which was also nice of him. Also thanks to Hilary at Epitaph for arranging this and setting up the phone thing so that we could all talk together.)

**So let's talk first about the new LP before we get to the reissues.**

**BRETT:** I'm pretty proud of it, actually. It's hard to make a good record that will satisfy fans without being the same record you've done for so long. It has a lot of little nuggets of goodness.

**I say in my review that "Los Angeles is Burning" is kind of the "American Jesus" on this album, or the "20th Century Digital Boy," an instant single. In fact, I heard it on the radio driving over here just now, on 103.1.**

**BRETT:** Cool man, thanks. I like that one a lot and for me the true joy of that song was

having Mike Campbell be on it, from Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers. He does all the lead guitars and the solo. That kind of Easybeats' "Friday On My Mind" [sings guitar part of the great Australian band's 1967 #16 hit] part. That's him and he plays the solo, also. He does the bridge and that ring. Now that you know, you go back and listen and go, "Oh my god, that's so Mike Campbell." Yeah, so I'm really happy with how that came out. **Is that one of yours? My advance copy doesn't say who wrote what, but I guessed that was you, from my experience listening to your songs. I'm sort of at the point where I think I can tell, but sometimes I'm wrong.**

**BRETT:** Yes that's one of mine. If it's shamelessly poppy, it's probably me. [Both laugh.]

**I was really looking forward to getting this record just for the lyric shit, your band has always made me think about things of that sort, and this is a particularly crucial time for such issues, obviously, with the Iraq war, and the Bush administration.**

**BRETT:** I'm pretty proud of the lyrics this year and I also think Greg's are some of his best lyrics ever. He just wrote his thesis this year and he had a lot of notes and thoughts that were still very fresh that he could draw upon because he defended his thesis this year.

**Yeah, he's Dr. Graffin.**

**BRETT:** Yeah. I think because of that, those are some of his best lyrics ever. His lyrics were more concerned with those kinds of issues about belief and religion. My lyrics were far more political. But it makes for a nice dynamic on this record because you have religion and politics.

**Which are intertwined at the moment!**

**BRETT:** More intertwined now more than ever! It's two topics that have always been intertwined in our work. Right from our first 7-inch. It was a little less sophisticated back then, but it still made for a good brew.

**I actually tried to connect Greg's new song "Atheist Peace" to songs over the years like "Bad Religion," "God Song," and "The Voice of God is Government," and others**



## EARLY DAYS

Photo courtesy of Epitaph

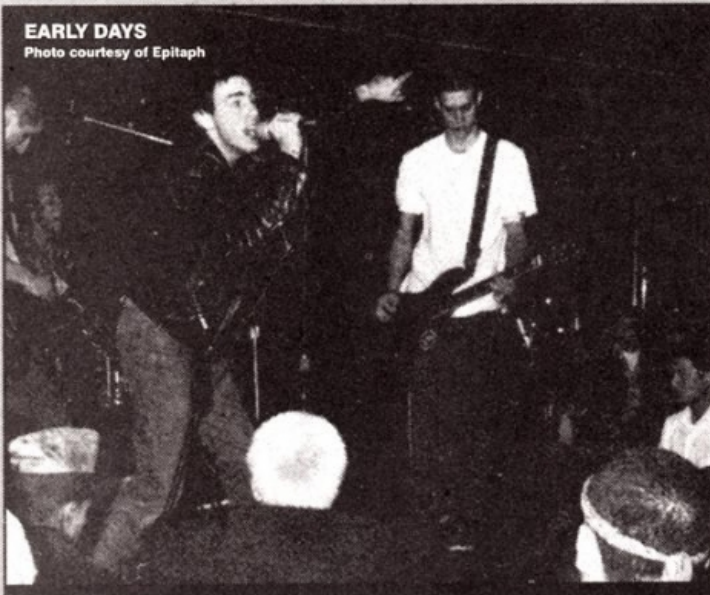
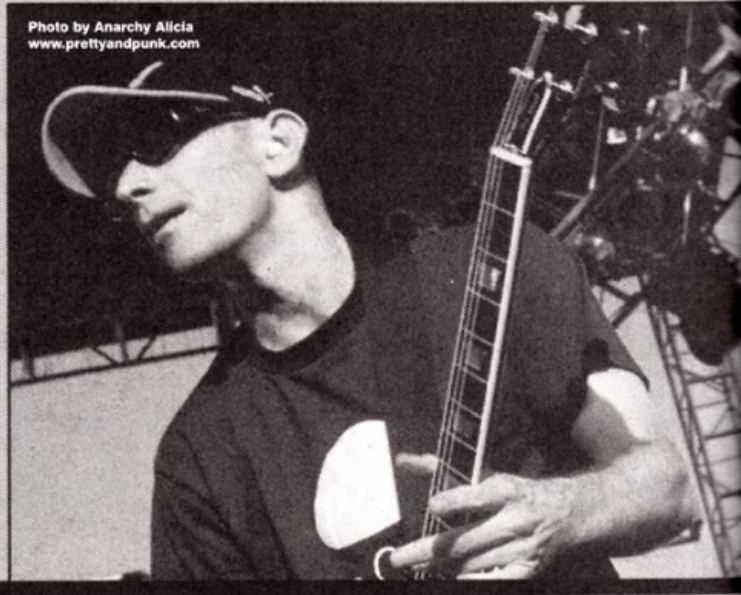


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like that.

**BRETT:** As we touch upon these timeless topics that we use every couple of years in the new record, rather than it getting stale, it almost feels like at least in terms of Greg's writing, he's really refined it, made an art of it. If you have an Atheist Peace instead of a religious war, it's quite brilliant. Who would have thought about it other than Greg?

**One of the things I found interesting is when the Iraq war began, I couldn't stop playing the Generator record you made back then. [Both Laugh] Now of course, that record's been newly reissued, with the two main tracks I'm referring to ["Heaven is Falling" and "Fertile Crescent"] as bonus tracks, so that they're there on the new CD even twice in case you missed it the first time. [Laughs]**

**BRETT:** It's good for you to mention that, because we opposed the first Gulf War, a popular war, which was actually sanctioned by the UN, and did have an international coalition behind it, which this one did not. And yet we were still opposed to it. At the time I had my reasons, but I just didn't feel that it was worth risking American lives to restore monarchy. Most people don't mention that aspect.

**BRETT:** It had nothing to do with democracy. We basically put a king back on his throne. An oil sheik regime.

**BRETT:** Yeah, we basically put an oil sheik back on his

throne. Well, the real interesting thing to look at it was...When was that, 1992? 1991-1992.

**BRETT:** We had a Bush in power; the economy was fucked. He was cutting taxes for the rich and attacking Iraq. Now, it's 12 years later: the economy is fucked, we have a Bush in power. He's cutting taxes only for the rich and he's attacking Iraq. It's like "Whoa! Wait a minute here! Is this déjà-vu or did nothing ever change in the U.S.?"

**I'm just glad that he doesn't have a son. [both laugh]**

**BRETT:** No shit! I guess the only other real difference is that there is no cold war anymore for this one.

**A slightly different context.**

**BRETT:** And much more dangerous to go out there unilaterally attacking helpless [GREG GRAFFIN JOINS THE CHAT, ON SPEAKERPHONE FROM HIS HOME IN ITHACA, NY:]

**You'll be happy to know, Brett was just paying you a great compliment on your lyrics to "Atheist Peace."**

**GREG:** Oh, you were? Thank you, Brett!

**BRETT:** You're welcome. You missed every word of it. [all laugh]

**GREG:** These are some of Brett's greatest lyrics also on this album.

**Ah, synchronicity! I think this one is even more lyric intensive than your albums usually are. That's the first thing I noticed about it. The lyrics just attack the senses; you**

**obviously both seem more inspired to write than ever in that sense.**

**GREG:** Yeah, well I've heard that too. One thing that I tried to do is to be very direct and concise, which, if you listen to an album like *Against The Grain*, that was almost the opposite approach—where I didn't care about concision at all, and I really just wanted to try to get as many vocabulary words as possible in a song.

**BRETT:** Such as rectilinear? Or sepsis?

**GREG:** I actually like that one. I like the use of rectilinear on that.

**BRETT:** I do too. "Rectilinear" actually came up in my new book.

**What have you two been thinking about a lot lately?**

**GREG:** We're going on tour for the rest of the summer starting on Tuesday, so I can't say I've been focused on too many worldly things, because I've been trying to tidy things ready to abandon.

**BRETT:** I think I've been thinking on music more than anything else and I'm not going on tour. Basically the Iraq war, and all these books that have recently come out that reveal what an impotent job Bush is doing keeping our country secure. And just frustration and the general vein of conservatism that seems to be flowing through what is traditionally been an anti-establishment counter-culture—by which I mean punk rock. It's really been weighing heavily on my mind.

**GREG:** Well, Jack you've been doing a lot of interviews. Have you noticed that, 'cause

when Brett and I got back from the European press junket, I realized that almost every journalist overseas asked me, and probably Brett as well, why there is such a load of bands that call themselves punk here that aren't willing to speak or even state any opinion at all.

**Right, mostly, all of the anti-war or anti-establishment songs I've heard have been coming from bands that aren't particularly punk rock groups.**

**GREG:** Yeah, that's what they were saying, and they were asking me a lot about my opinion on that.

**Although, the people you came up with have been the exception—for instance the new T.S.O.L. album. The Descendents had one on their new album.**

**BRETT:** The people of our generation, right. **We all saw The Clash when we were kids, so that's ingrained in our outlook of punk rock.**

**BRETT:** Some of us, like me, actually saw the Vietnam War on TV. We know what it's like. It's very odd for me to see young punk rockers who consider themselves dittoheads or fans of Rush Limbaugh. They consider liberal to be a dirty word and yet they consider themselves to be punk. This doesn't make any sense. Liberals have been responsible for every meaningful reform in the United States in the last 100 years. What is punk rock about a reactionary conservative? It's almost like a bizarre, mutated version of straight edge



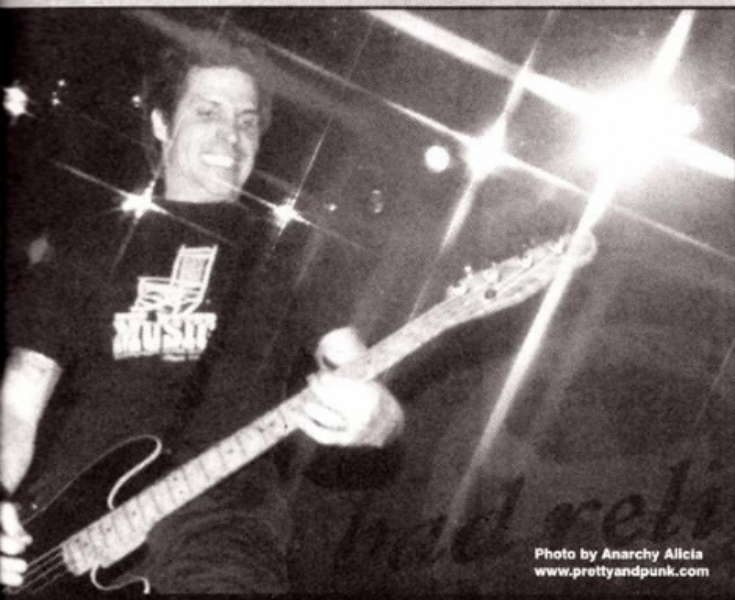


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**"We had a Bush in power; the economy was fucked. He was cutting taxes for the rich and attacking Iraq. Now, it's 12 years later: the economy is fucked, we have a Bush in power. He's cutting taxes only for the rich and he's attacking Iraq. It's like 'Whoa! Wait a minute here! Is this deja-vu or did nothing ever change in the U.S.?'"**

that was never meant to be! I said in an editorial once that rock 'n' roll itself was the ultimate liberal outbreak, because it was opposed by conservatives. Black people made it and we didn't want our white kids listening to that if we were conservative family values types!

**BRETT:** Right. Good example. I find it very saddening and also very threatening and frightening that we have this. That punk rock, much of it is mainstream, and beyond mainstream now, that it actually has swung to the conservative side of the spectrum. Even when metal was mainstream, with groups like Def Leppard and Motley Crue, I'd very much doubt you'd hear these groups back in the '80s days of hair metal—I don't think you'd hear David Lee Roth sing how great Reagan is. [Jack and Greg laugh] Even that would have been shocking and he wasn't even punk. I don't get it. I've spent an enormous amount of time thinking about it. I'll admit, this is what I do. I don't have any simple answers, but you asked me what I was thinking about a lot lately. I heard kids say, "Hey, you should go to conservativepunk.com" or "Johnny Ramone is a conservative and he was in the first punk band ever." So there you go, punk rock has a "rich legacy" of conservatives.

[Jack laughs] It's like, "Hey dipshit, Joey Ramone wasn't a conservative." And the fact that Johnny was...

**Broke up the band.**

**BRETT:** Yeah! Nobody got along because of that. Joey,

Dee Dee, and Tommy weren't. The fact that this guy was conservative had nothing to do with the fact that he could downstroke on his guitar so well.

**GREG:** I know.

I actually saw Joey Ramone sing at a Jerry Brown rally in Washington Square Park. He sang "Censorshit." So there goes that! [all laugh]

**BRETT:** Right, Joey was very liberal and Dee Dee was very liberal. They wrote the songs, and Johnny never did. There's no such thing as a rich legacy of right-wing punk rock. Unless you're talking about Screwdriver, and that's always been the ugly antithesis underbelly to punk rock that we've always had to contend with it.

**Yeah, but by an extreme minority before, and rigorously opposed even in England, when they became the white power band.**

**BRETT:** Right, and the nazi punks have always been rigorously opposed to the U.S. even when Jello [Biafra, Dead Kennedys] wrote that song [1981's "Nazi Punks Fuck Off"] back in the day.

**GREG:** I think a lot of the kids are totally confused because they see pop punk becoming so popular that it's almost—well it is mainstream—so then they think the only way to rebel against it is to be "what's the most unpopular viewpoint that we could possibly express as a punker?" [Brett and Jack laugh] I guess it's "I'm an ultra-conservative punk."

**BRETT:** It's to love the lord

and vote for George Bush.

[Greg laughs]

**Don't laugh, my mom, who is a lifelong Republican, said she admires Bush so much because, in her words, "He's a good Christian man." And my mom is far from dumb. That's what we have to contend with on a larger scale than the punk rock sliver of the population, I guess.**

**BRETT:** It's very frightening when you have the leader of the free world with his finger on the button, with a strong, strong conviction that what he's doing is right, and yet he doesn't read books and he's a born-again Christian. So where does his conviction come from?

**I don't even think he had a passport before he got elected. That's awful. If he did, he sure didn't use it.**

**BRETT:** His conviction comes from God. He prayed and God told him that what he's doing is the right thing. That's where he derives his conviction. That's frightening.

**That's messianic.**

**BRETT:** And it makes the war a religious war, because it certainly isn't about [Osama] Bin Laden. The fact is we're doing nothing to deter Islamic extremists, in fact we're doing everything to foam it and rally their cause, while we sidetrack our effort to fight terror by invading Iraq and getting ourselves deeper and deeper into a quagmire.

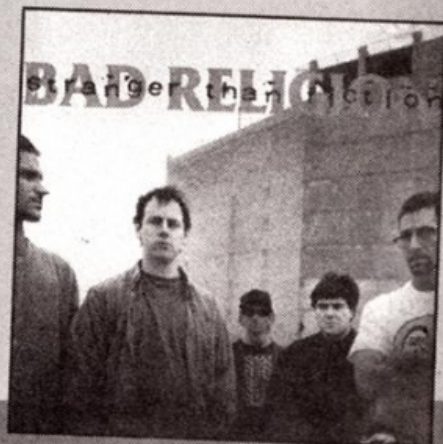
**JACK:** That's completely the thesis of the new Richard Clarke book,

Against All Enemies.

**BRETT:** Yeah, which I read. I finished it on the plane out here. He was the counter terrorism guy for the last several administrations, so he ought to know!

**BRETT:** I had to have my political pontification. Well that was my question, it allows you to speak unprompted by the interviewer. As a way of wrapping this up, when we were sitting here before you got here Greg, I was telling Brett how much I admire "Los Angeles is Burning" and he was talking about how aside from my initial thesis of the song, as being a comment on man's "hubris" thinking that we can outwit nature, particularly the Los Angeles area—

**GREG:** Ha ha! Yeah! That's right! Hubris! —with its complete lack of water sources, even after stealing the Owens River [a premise of the movie Chinatown as well] and the Colorado ever since. And now this tract housing

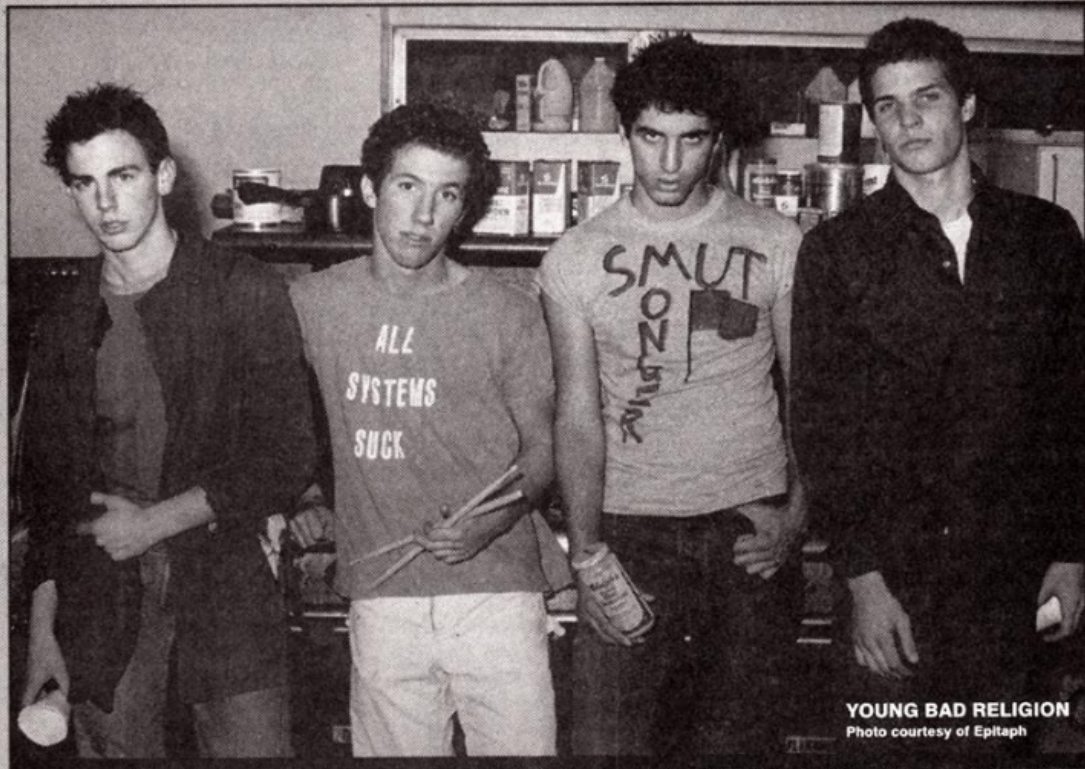




where there used to be natural firewalls. He was talking about how there was a great deeper meaning in the song about the shallowness of the news media and how it reports things. I was also talking earlier about some other songs that hearken back to previous themes, and I think "Los Angeles in Burning" in that sense hearkens back to another song on the recent reissues, the closing track on Generator, "Only Entertainment" doesn't it? **BRETT:** Quite a bit! Yes! The way the infotainment has completely co-opted actual information in our society.

**GREG:** If you look to an average teenage kid during the enlightenment period a few hundred years ago, and you look at the activities that they spent their time doing, it was dominated by reading—and of course today it's dominated by watching. That becomes reality for most people. How do they measure up to the images they are seeing on television and in the movies?

**BRETT:** What do you call it when the news media, rather than reflecting reality, actually conjure or create reality? I would call it propaganda. I wouldn't call it reporting. I'm really excited about the new video we're gonna be doing for "Los Angeles is Burning," because one of the images—it's going to be an animated video—one of the images will be the TV cameras. And instead of capturing the fire, the TV cameras will be spewing fire. It will be a very interesting and metaphorical depiction. **This speaks to what you were saying about politics,**



**YOUNG BAD RELIGION**  
Photo courtesy of Epitaph

that if kids are confused—and not just punk kids—it's gotta be partly down to their wanting to be entertained by their information. And then getting a distorted view of information besides, it's like a double play.

**BRETT:** I don't think you can blame the confusion on the media, though. It takes the very slightest amount of initiative. With the Internet and the amount of information out in the world that's available today, there's no excuse not to be informed.

**Yeah. That's a good point. Although it does also require curiosity in an age with an incurious president, as he's often described.**

**BRETT:** Exactly! You know, the [deposed Bush Treasury secretary] Paul O'Neill book describes him as incurious.

**I know, I read that one too. I like reading the ones by the lifelong Republicans who served previous Republican presidents who were there in the inside of this administration, as opposed to some biased armchair pundit on either side. They have more credibility, even for all the Bush attempts to discredit them. They just seem so vindictive at**

**being criticized and having their truths revealed like that.**

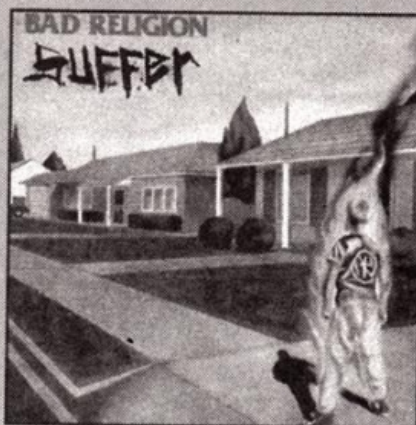
**BRETT:** Me too! Why aren't the whistleblowers getting more attention? Everyone pays attention to right-wing whistleblowers, yet when a liberal president gets a blow-job, they're like "Hey, let's impeach him!"

**It's pretty ridiculous, isn't it? Anything to add to that, Greg?**

**GREG:** I came across a book that you can read in only an afternoon. It's called Godless Constitution. This is by a history scholar from Cornell, who's an award-winning writer named Isaac Kramnick. It's a very short, little book, only about 170 pages, and it shows how the founding fathers, the true American fathers, struggled and spilt blood, so that we would remove all rhetoric of religion from the country's founding documents. And how corrupted they would feel if they were alive today! [all laugh]

**That's something I subscribe to myself, so that's fair enough.**

**GREG:** That's one of the most precious and important American legacies, I think and it's being trampled on. **I agree. Especially since 75 years later we're still fighting the Scopes**



**Monkey Trial, about letting our public schools teach evolution. It's insane! You're an evolutionary biologist Greg, so I know that it bothers you as much as me.**  
**GREG:** Oh, there's no better example.  
**Gentleman, Brett has an important record company I am keeping him from running, and Greg, you have an imminent tour to prepare for. Gentlemen, I thank you for your time and for your honesty, as Brett said.**  
**BOTH:** Thanks Jack! [Greg and Jack talk hockey for a few minutes and then they hang up. Pity about the Rangers, they agree.]

