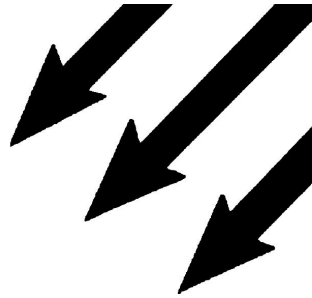


IT DID HAPPEN HERE ●



It Did Happen Here is an independently produced podcast that documents the fight against racist white skinheads in the 1980's and 90's. The 11 episodes feature interviews with many people who worked together in those days and reveal the unlikely collaboration between groups of immigrants, civil rights activists, militant youth and queer organizers who came together to successfully confront neo-nazi violence and right wing organizing in the Rose City.

The podcast talks to three core groups: the Portland chapter of Anti Racist Action; SHARP- Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice; and the Coalition for Human Dignity. In out-and-out brawls on the streets and at punk shows, and in behind the scenes intelligence gathering to expose right wing and white nationalist organizing, the three groups united on their home ground over and over to attack fascists—and they won it back.

You can listen to the podcast at itdidhappenherepodcast.com and find more zines by 1312 Press at 1312press.noblogs.org.



THE BALDIES & ANTI-RACIST ACTION



A HISTORY OF ANTI-RACIST SKINHEAD ORGANIZING
BY THE "IT DID HAPPEN HERE" PODCAST

Anti-Racist Action (**ARA**) was a direct action oriented street-level network of organizations that formed in the 1980's in the United States and Canada to fight the rise of neo-Nazi and white nationalist organizing. The Anti-Racist Action Network operated on four points of unity (taken from their website, 2009):

1. We go where they go. Whenever fascists are organizing or active in public, we're there. We don't believe in ignoring them or staying away from them. Never let the Nazis have the street!
2. We don't rely on the cops or courts to do our work for us. This doesn't mean we never go to court, but the cops uphold white supremacy and the status quo. They attack us and everyone who resists oppression. We must rely on ourselves to protect ourselves and stop the fascists.
3. Non-sectarian defense of other anti-fascists. In ARA, we have a lot of different groups and individuals. We don't agree about everything and we have a right to differ openly. But in this movement an attack on one is an attack on us all. We stand behind each other.
4. We support abortion rights and reproductive freedom. ARA intends to do the hard work necessary to build a broad, strong movement against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination against the disabled, the oldest, the youngest, and the most oppressed people. We want a classless, free society.

SHARPs (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) are skinheads who are explicitly anti-racist. The skinhead movement started in 1960's England as a multi-racial working class youth subculture, and Jamaican music like ska, reggae and dub was its soundtrack. As the decades passed, the style, music and politics changed, and white nationalism crept in with the advent of the English neo-Nazi band called Skrewdriver. It became important for skinheads to declare their opposition to the creep of racism and white nationalism, and thus the SHARP movement was born alongside bands like The Oppressed. Racist and neo-Nazis who dress like skinheads are commonly referred to as boneheads, and are often viewed as illegitimate in skinhead culture given the multi-racial working class solidarity at the heart of the movement. The Don Letts BBC documentary "The Story Of Skinhead" provides an excellent overview of the history of the skinhead movement.

Editor's Note: Several people appear in and out of these interviews in a non-linear fashion. They are introduced in an italicized font throughout the zine.

PART ONE: THE MINNEAPOLIS BALDIES & ANTI-RACIST ACTION



MIC CRENSHAW (MIC): Back in the 80s, I was a member of the Minneapolis Baldies, a multi-racial crew of anti racist skinheads that started around 1986. In 2019, I went to Minneapolis to do interviews for a book I'm writing about Black skinhead culture. I sat down with some of my old crew to talk about those days. I recorded these interviews in bars and peoples' apartments and coffee shops as reference notes for myself on my computer. There are also interviews with me in a lot of different settings. Let's start in about 1985, when I moved to Minneapolis.

I was a teenage kid, in Minneapolis, originally from Chicago. By the time I got to Minneapolis, I didn't really fit in and I was tired of always going to new schools and trying to find new friends. And so, that's when the hardcore punk scene started to appeal to me because I started meeting people from that scene and I was like "well, these guys aren't trying to fit in."

When you hear us talk about "the scene", or the punk scene, what we're talking about is a social net of people, places, concert venues, record stores, clubs, bookstores, places where we would organize and just spend time being around each other. That network of people and places is what we mean when we say "the scene".

The music we were listening to spoke to me cause it was hard and it had a lot of energy, and it had a message. My group of friends and I started rolling around together and at the time we were like straight edge, skateboarding together. Me, this brother Jason Nevilles who's a Native American kid, couple working class white kids, there was about 7 of us at first.

Around the time of our founding, national news stories and talk show segments began to bring publicity to the rise of neo-nazi skinheads. There was no popular media stories at that time of the real roots of the skinhead subculture. The news shows like Sally-Jessy Raphael and Donahue, and all that stuff that was on, they started giving a platform to all the white power boneheads.

These skinheads were often on talk shows with a panel of other guests, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, American Nazi party, White Aryan Resistance, Hammerskins and American Front. The public image of skinheads was that they were all racist.

We're like, "that shit is whack!" But it was like, within a matter of days, people started emulating that in Minneapolis and we wanted to differentiate ourselves from the Nazis, so we decided to call ourselves the Minneapolis Baldies. We also understood that in numerous cities there had already been Baldies cliques. There was Fordham Baldies in New York, there was actually a older Minneapolis Baldies in the 50s and 60s.

When we decided on a name as a crew, we decided on The Baldies because the moniker set us apart from the racist connotation that had become standard association for skinheads.

So we started to see these kids who were just copying what they saw on TV and they started showing up in the areas we were hanging out and coming to shows. We got wind that some of these guys were white power so we confronted them.

Jay Nevilles, AKA Gator, was a founding member of the Minneapolis Baldies. Jason is Ojibwe, Native American. Jay was also straight edge and still is today, meaning he doesn't abuse or use alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes.

JAY/GATOR: The Baldies started out of just a bunch of friends liking the skinhead culture. The more we got into it and started understanding what it was about, it was even cooler than we thought in the first place. Our plan wasn't to be anti-fascist or antiracist, we just wanted to have a skinhead crew. And then those clowns that were hanging around starting up stuff, we're gonna fuck these dudes up. Really the first dudes we fought were the 10th and Harmon punks.

MIC: The 10th and Harmon punks were a group of punk rockers that were a little bit older than us. They were more like professional punk rockers and like they look like the kids that you would see pictures of on postcards from England. They were all in bands. And they were kind of like the most popular cool kids. So I think when we came around, there became a little bit of a power struggle between those guys who used to be the coolest guys and us gaining popularity.

he had just come down from Portland with two other Baldies. They needed some money for people who were in Cincinnati to get out of jail. They were part of their group. So Maximum, we gave 'em money and Kieran wired that money to Cincinnati to get those people out of jail. You know, we were able to do those kind of things.

A brief excerpt from that centerfold interview with Kieran in MRR number 78:

CELINA: "Getting ARA mentioned in the MRR scene reports created a big response because people wanted to do something and we were the first thing that came out that involved kids organizing against Nazis. We have letters pouring in, you could see the sentiment out there and a lot of it was from anti-racist skinheads. Some people get this fear that skinheads are these supermen that can't be beat, but the fact is that any two people should be able to beat any one person if it comes down to that. One of the reasons why the Baldies won so much isn't because we're on some macho trip or that we're all huge people but because we've been able to get the numbers to support us and that's what's most important. For the most part, Nazis are not the majority of the scene and if the majority of the people in some way resist them by not speaking to them, not letting them into shows, or fighting them, they're going to be gone."

MIC: Maximum Rocknroll, and other fanzines and infoshops and show spaces and record stores made up a conduit of culture where people who didn't have personal wealth or resources could, through their efforts, create shared resources. Nowadays we're all familiar with online campaigns and how people use platforms and influence to raise ideas. Hearing from Martin shows us the continuum of media activism, and how for many, Maximum was a foundation for a life dedicated to social justice and personal cultural freedom.

MARTIN: The majority of punk kids in the community were there for different reasons; we're there for politics, we're there because 'cause we liked the music, we're there for the people, we're there for all the causes. These racist kids, you know, just such a bankrupt thing, that they're there for a couple years, not that there aren't lifers sometimes, but a lot of those suburban white kids, rich white kids with the Skrewdriver shirts that came in, that definitely there to start shit. Once they got the shit beat out of them, they just didn't come back. It's just such a bankrupt thing. They're just not gonna last that long. You know, just as an example, like the Antifa kids now, or groups like that or anybody like that. You know, they're doing bake sales, they're doing community outreach, they're helping people when their houses burn down. They're helping kids when they come out of jail, they're raising money, they're also putting their asses on the line. They're beating the shit out of these dudes. That's 'cause it's a sense of community, has a sense of purpose. You don't see any of these fucking stupid Proud Boys doing any of that, or any of those racist skinheads doing any of that shit, you know? Such a big difference.

any bullshit inside, and if we caught somebody that snuck in with a Skrewdriver shirt, say they had it underneath their jacket, they would get thrown out right away, too. That was one way of dealing with it. It was successful, but ultimately it didn't get rid of the skinheads. And after about two years, a second group of people kind of took over the organizing of it. And they were a lot more lax than we were and that was pretty bad. Then the third generation of people that came in, they actually had security, dudes from the punk scene that just went and beat the shit out of the skinheads and that really did take care of it. There were no more skinhead problems.

CELINA: At the height of the neo-Nazi problem in the late 80s, Kieran Knutsen, a founding member of the Minneapolis Baldies and ARA spent time on the road advocating for direct action as a way to fight racism in punk scenes across the country.

MARTIN: Kieran came out to San Francisco in 1989 for a Without Borders conference. It was kind of a loosely-based Anarchist gathering, an international thing. They had 'em in different cities every year. Kieran gave a workshop about Anti-Racist Action and militant anti-racism. It just was so different than all the other workshops. Kieran, he's a union president now for his local chapter, he had this really amazing ability to organize a meeting in a different way than other people had. He was just right there, really present. His politics were very hard, very militant, but very inclusive. It was just a really amazing thing and he just caught my attention. I was just like, "oh, this guy knows what the fuck he's doing." And also coming from the punk scene, we've always confronted racist skinheads, but it was really interesting to find skinheads beating the shit out of racist skinheads. And then said, "this is the way we dealt with it. We think this works." That workshop was crowded as hell, there were so many people there because everyone was dealing with skinheads at the time - again, 1989. And there was people from all over the country at that one workshop. And then I introduced myself and I brought him to the Maximum house and we did a long interview with him. We made it the center spread of Maximum, which was, god, what issue? I think it was number seventy-eight. So Kieran talks a lot about the Baldies, and ARA, and doing community organizing and their tactics for dealing with things and doing outreach with other cities. According to Kieran, it really helped ARA; that this group exists, that these tactics work. Kieran didn't shy away from the violence or beating the shit out of skinheads, but talked about, you know, working with the community and working with other groups and other people outside the punk scene to really confront and stop these racist skinheads. And it was very inspiring to other people in other cities to do the same thing and also probably start organizing other chapters in other cities. Maximum also had a surplus of cash from ad revenue, and stuff, so every end of the year, we'd give money away to different groups, different fanzines, different bands, different organizations. This could be, like, \$100, \$500, \$1,000. Kieran just reminded me of this story. He said the second time me and him met,

JAY: They're the ones who like got all I don't know, just weird. What are you talking about Al, you're wearing a fucking swastika t-shirt.

MIC: There was a black dude that had a bald head, I don't know if he would have called himself a skinhead, remember Pedro, walking Downtown with a swastika t-shirt. But then, that band Pure Hell, there's a picture of one of them with a swastika. So, you know, they do point out the fact that in the early days of punk.

JAY: It was a shock thing

MIC: All the old gangs in NY were rockin' that shit.

JAY: Back then like when Al was still wearing that shirt, it was punk. But things were changing, "yo dude there's actually for real nazi's around the scenes all over the place that are starting to make shit happen and you can't be wearing that."

MIC: The Swastika has been around since time immemorial as a symbol of spiritual significance in many cultures. In the era between World War One and World War Two, with the rise of the Nazis in Europe, the swastika took on new meaning as Hitler and Germany's Nazi party appropriated the symbol as an emblem for their fascist movement. In the years following World War II, the swastika has continued to be a symbol of fascism, racial hatred and white power. There have been elements of outlaw motorcycle culture, punk rock and street gang culture that have used the symbol for its shock value and to intimidate and offend onlookers. We in the Baldies had formed a no tolerance policy for the symbol and would actively confront anyone wearing it in public. To us, it was nothing more than a symbol of hate, even if you had your own reasons that were not based on racism for wearing it, that was no excuse. People often talk about the rebel flag, right, the Confederate flag as a symbol of hate, which it is for many people. I think throughout the history of the symbol, there have been some people who felt that it was a symbol of regional pride for working class people from the South. There was a group called Young Patriots, that was actually in alignment with the Black Panther Party for self defense. And they were a group of young white people who were actually anti racist. But because they were primarily based from the southern part of the United States, they used the rebel flag or the Confederate flag as their symbol. Symbols are tools whose meanings shift depending on how they're put to use. The original meaning of the swastika's centuries-old message of well-being and good luck was forever undermined when it became a hate and propaganda centerpiece and a direct representation of WWII fascism synonymous with exterminating humans. And the Confederate battle flag on someone in 1980s Minnesota was a clear message. It was a symbol of racist beliefs.

My friends and I, we'd step to them and be like "hey man, are you guys white power?" and they were like, "yeah, man we're the White Knights," (the White Knights being the neo-nazi skinhead gang) and we're like, "well, you know, that's not gonna fly around here. We're going to give you a chance to denounce that shit, and the next time we see you, if you're still claiming white power then there's and there's going to be a problem," and that was the beginning of it all.

The White Knights had been organized by a racist skinhead named Paul Hollis. One of my early memories of Paul was him having a conversation with me and trying to explain that he totally supported Black pride, but he didn't support Black power. So, from that point on, I understood that Paul's ideas tended to lean towards being a white racist. He ultimately became the leader of the White Knights and he went on the news to confirm not only that he was the leader of the White Knights, but that he was a lead organizer in the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. And from that moment, he was our enemy. Once the Baldies became aware of the White Knights and their affiliation with the Klan, confronting them became a priority. The Baldies were now on a mission. We were driven. Our main purpose was to confront, fight and ultimately banish the White Knights from our scene.

Once we confronted these guys who were led by a member of the Klan, that began like a protracted period of violence on the streets where we would see them and we fuck them up and sometimes they would see us and we'd be outnumbered and they'd jump us and we were carrying weapons everywhere. Shows were often violent. We started to build allegiances with people outside our immediate clique. We started to reach out to some of the gangs, the Black, Latino gangs, people in Native American community and their street organizations. We started to build an allegiance of people that would take a stand fighting against these white power skinheads. In addition to that we built with other punks and Anarchists. We used the anarchist bookstore as a center for our organizing and meetings and cultural events.

Early in our days of consolidating our image, look, and style, we discovered a book called Skinhead by Nick Knight. It was a history of the skinhead subculture starting in the late 60s in England, complete with pictures and information on Ska and Oi, the two musical genres that defined a soundtrack for the skinhead lifestyles. It also talked about various stages of social and political development, as well as the wardrobe and uniform associated with the subculture. This book made its rounds among the crew and before long we were all wearing the traditional skinhead styles head to toe. Many of us would mix our skinhead style with elements of hip-hop and gang culture, hoodies, Adidas sambas, baggier khakis, flannel shirts, those were things that people were wearing in the US, and then the skinhead style was bomber jackets, suspenders, buttoned-down Oxford's, Fred Perry polo shirts, jeans, Army fatigues, Doc Marten boots, creepers, brogues.

where to get free pizza from friendly local punks or what squat was safe to sleep in, was valuable information, kind of like an open-source yelp. For the punks, connection was the wealth we all built together. The network was woven into our lives at the time—along with a great deal of trust and varying overlapping degrees of privilege. That network made it easier to spread the word about everything, including how to fight racist boneheads.

MARTIN: San Francisco always had skinheads', but they were more like street skins, and then, nazi skins started coming in and infiltrating again. We had the American Front and Bob Heick was part of that. That all came out of San Francisco, which people don't realize. This was before he hooked up with Tom Metzger. Tim Yohannan, who was one of the main people from Maximum Rockroll and a couple of the other people, wanted to open up a club. So the idea is that I would come up there and help work on the magazine while these other people started trying to open up a club. Ultimately, Gilman Street was a byproduct of that move.

CELINA: 'Gilman Street' is an all-ages, volunteer run, non profit, pro-kid, collectively run music and social club located in a warehouse at 924 Gilman in Berkeley, California. In the mid 80s, there were few public music spaces that could be accessed by people under 21. The founders saw a need for a space where punk kids could have and play shows without getting busted by the cops or ripped off by promoters. Gilman's ethos was grounded in all ages collective organizing, where the audience had as much responsibility as the bands and the workers to make the show and the scene what they wanted it to be.

MARTIN: When we opened Gilman in '86, some of our first confrontations were skinheads, skinheads coming over from the city that were kind of street skins, assholes that wanted to beat everybody up. And, you know, anytime there was a fight at Gilman, we would immediately break it up, the bands would stop, everything would stop, and those assholes would get thrown out. We also had a policy, of course we wouldn't let any nazi skinheads in Gilman. So a lot of times there was huge confrontations at the door, but as Gilman went on, nazi skinheads started coming a bit more to Gilman, and these were the white boys from the suburbs, not so much from San Francisco. You know, Skrewdriver shirts and all that shit.

MIC: Skrewdriver was a northern English punk band with working class oi roots who embraced white nationalism in the early 80s. They were at one time the most notorious white power skinhead punk band in the world. To wear one of the band's t-shirts is to declare an allegiance to white supremacy.

MARTIN: We didn't let those guys ever come in, so we just had huge confrontations. There were definitely a lot of fights. We always won because they never got in there. The shows wouldn't go on with anyone fighting or doing

internationally. Maximum came out monthly for most of their existence, but at the peak, they published twice a month with a print run of 10,000 copies. They had yearly subscriptions, and sold wholesale to independent book and zine stores, and also to kids who would sell it at shows. The issues contained tons of reviews and interviews with bands, with a lively conversational letters section, classified ads, news, and the before mentioned reports from punk scenes around the world.

MARTIN: So pre-internet, this sounds a little odd, but Maximum Rocknroll was one of the largest international punk fanzines there was, and it was more newspaper-like. So we put a huge concern or focus on communication - printing other addresses, like, we had scene reports, letters, contacts, fanzine reviews, record reviews, record label reviews. So there was always a lot of pen pal writing and phone calls going on. This big, thick, and shitty on newsprint. We never went glossy 'cause the idea was just to keep it as inexpensive as possible and get it around as much as possible.

MIC: In these zines, these like, black and white paper rags, there would be scene reports from different cities. And there would be reports from the west coast, the southwest, the east coast. And you started to see, oh, these people are fucking having nazi problems everywhere right now. You'd reach out to people in those scenes. We built a network that way, and that network came all the way out to Portland.

MARTIN: For people that don't know, the scene reports in those early days of Maximum, again, pre-internet, is people from different cities, just kids, would just handwrite letters, talking about what was going on in that actual city. And it could be from a big city like Chicago, or a small town where there's only one or two bands. And we would always print them. And so, what the scene reports would consist of, mainly, is talking about which bands come from there, if they have a demo tape out, if they have a record out, always including addresses. And they'd talk about local fanzines or anybody else that's doing good; record stores, promoters. So we'd get these in, everyday we'd get...I don't know, couple of 'em everyday and every issue would have, what, ten to fifteen scene reports from all over the world, not just the United States. And again, like the title says, it's a scene report, exactly what was going on in that scene. You know, after internet, it's just so weird explaining this stuff to people, how it worked. But it really was mainly what it was known for, addresses and phone numbers.

MIC: When Martin describes the scene reports as 'what was going on in that scene' you might wonder why people wanted to know. Punk culture is highly migratory. Bands of course went on tour, but it was pretty normal for other people to get in the van and go along, drop out of their life and 'travel' with others or alone. They rode Greyhound, hitchhiked, hopped freight trains or got drive-away cars. Knowing anything about a town before you got there, like

Nissa was a member of the Minneapolis Baldies. She was one of a number of women who were core members of the Baldies.

NISSA: Lorraine was the one who shaved my head and I remember having to work up to it. Skinhead culture and the scene and the history of it, it wasn't as deeply important to me as it was to everybody else. Me, it was was a lot more about like looking fine and listening to cool music, being sharp and standing for something. But right then in that moment, one of the really important things we were doing was seizing that look back and if I was going to be a part of this movement and fight White Knights, if this is something we really believe in and we could stop it? I just felt like I gotta do this. I need to put my money where my mouth is. I really thought it was important to shave my head and be a part of that.

At one point in time, there was a conflict between the women in the crew and the men in the crew about our sexism and not inviting the women to come to fights. And the women fought with us to be able and have the same right to come to the brawls with us. And from that moment forward, whenever we would go meet the Nazis to fight, it would be all of us not just the men. When people say skinheads sometimes people will mistakenly believe that one's head is shaven clean. For many skinheads, they would shave their hair short. Okay, so maybe a centimeter long, maybe a five o'clock shadow, and sometimes clean shaven. Skinhead girls often had either fully shaved heads, but more often you would see them with a fringe cut, or a Chelsea, where the bangs on the front side and back of their heads were grown out long. The experience of shaving one's head was a prerequisite to being a skinhead. Once you had shaved your head and you are a Baldie or skinhead, then it was something you kept up with. The reason skinheads shaved their head, was because we were known for our willingness to be violent and once in a fight, it was harder to pull one's hair if you didn't have any hair to pull. The fighting in and of itself, was something that was expected of you. We had violent enemies and we didn't wanna be with people who weren't gonna have our backs when we needed to protect ourselves. The degree to which fighting is and violence is scary, it is, because you can get hurt and you can get killed. But I think when you have people that stand with you, then there's a sense of courage and purpose, especially if the fighting is based in ideological beliefs that you're aligned with at the core of your being, then you're gonna be more committed to making it through whatever the situation is.

Marty currently lives in Atlanta, but Marty is a black skinhead from Chicago. Skinheads of Chicago or SHOC was a multiracial skinhead crew that was larger than the Baldies in numbers.

MARTY: As black men in particular we always have had to define ourselves. Self-determination has been one of our key points in our history in this country. Define ourselves before somebody defines yourself for you.

MIC: Since I was originally from Chicago and Chicago was one of the closest major cities, we did a lot of work to form an allegiance with SHOC. Simultaneous to our problem with the White Knights in Minneapolis, SHOC had a problem with Nazis in their own city, namely, CASH or Chicago Area Skinheads, and we would often take trips to each other's city to support each other in organizing and confronting the Nazis. Marty and some other Black skinheads from SHOC eventually moved to Minneapolis for periods of time. And we were basically family.

MARTY: I think it's important that as black men that we've been able to articulate our experiences in this country through the lens of real working class struggle and I think that's kind of how it's gone for me. A lot of kids from since, forever have always formed gangs or cliques or clubs. That's kind of how it started, with Irish working-class kids creating gangs and fighting against the nativist kids, you know gangs of New York, you know. There's a whole social tradition of working-class kids coming together to protect the neighborhood, to help each other, you know, it's always been this mutual support system that working class street kids extended to each other. We get tarnished with, with a negative brush. That's how America works. I think America has a history of shitting on it's working-class. But the biggest challenge, I find, is that trying to reconcile who we are as Black men and a largely white Europeans subcult. When I deconstruct that in my mind and what they really mean, you know, I look at British working-class youth culture. They basically identified with the Jamaican working-class who also identified with the American Blues artist, Soul R&B artist, whatever of the late 50s, early 60s, right? So, everything kind of points back here. American working class kids are the origin of musical styles, aesthetics from jazz, blues, hip-hop, R&B, gospel. We are rooted and authentic cultural expression. Expresses itself in gangs and the cliques, in the clubs, in the youth organizations or whatever that influenced the Jamaican kids, the rude boys, that influenced the British mod, Rolling Stones and all those white rock stars. They love Black R&B and American Blues artists. We are the essence.

MIC: Post War, working class, London youth culture gave rise to several different scenes identifiable by music and fashion styles, including Mods, Teddy boys, and Rockers. Skinhead culture developed in an intersection of the English Mod culture and Jamaican rude boy style, which Jamaican diaspora introduced from Kingston to England in the 60s, and from there cross-pollinated with the London scenes and across the country. Rude boys, which were basically Jamaican street cats that were cool, they were hip, they were with it, they had the style, and they were where it was when it was happening. Rude boys wore porkpie hats and fitted shirts, a look influenced by Black soul and R&B singers from the United States. Skinhead style rose to popularity again with punk rock in the late 1970s England, and that style filtered back here with the rise of American punk and hardcore.

PART THREE: CULTURAL ORGANIZING WITH MAXIMUM ROCK'N'ROLL



CELINA: In ARA, skinheads and punks united around a simple goal: to rid their cities of racist neo-nazis. ARA created a network that provided an effective solution to punks across the country troubled by racist skinhead violence. How was that network formed, in a pre internet time?

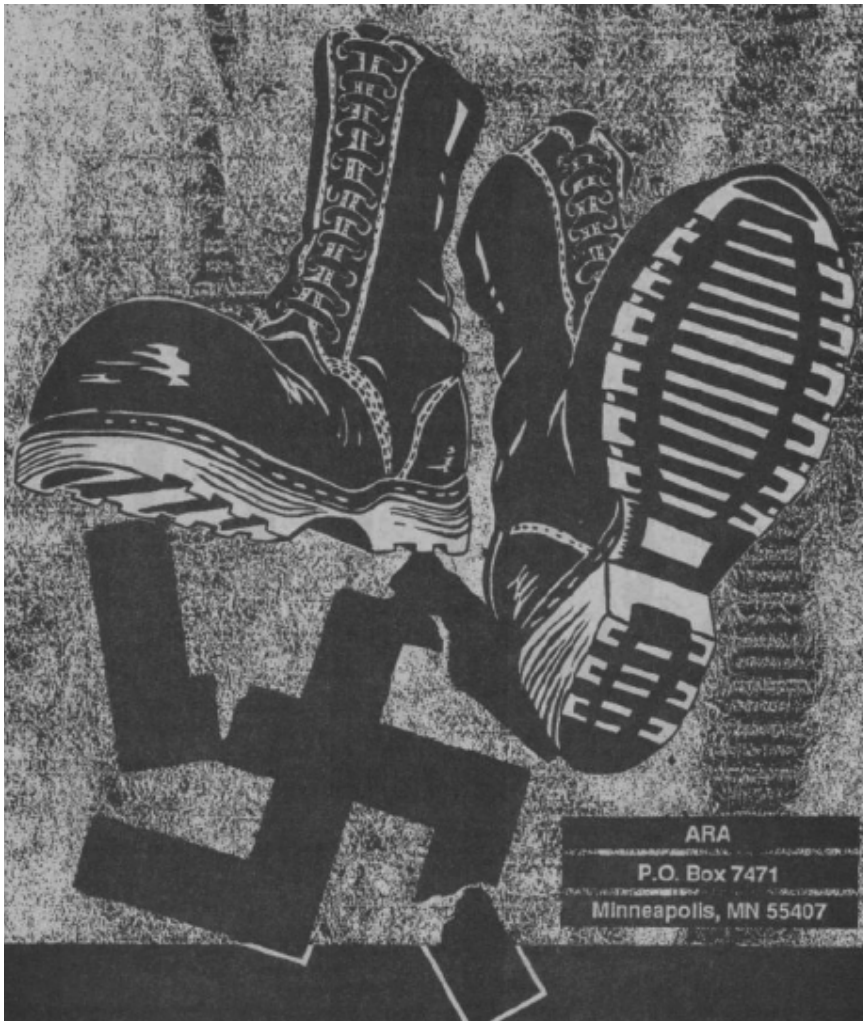
MIC: There was a punk zine called Maximum Rocknroll. There was another one called Your Flesh, and there were some of us in the punk scene who travelled a lot, or people who were in bands that were on tour, and they would meet people from different scenes and they would hear about what was happening in those cities and they'd get peoples' contact. You'd go in your kitchen and you'd pick up your clunky [laughs] telephone, dial the number, and you'd call somebody. Or you'd go to a phone booth. There were even chain letters.

CELINA: We interviewed Martin Sprouse, a long time associate of Maximum Rocknroll. Martin talks about the foundational role Maximum had in political and cultural organizing, especially for spreading fundamental concepts of humanity—ideas like anti-racism, queer liberation, anti war, feminism and animal rights. The zine's ethos and commitment to connection impacted scenes far beyond its Bay Area post office box.

MARTIN SPROUSE: My name is Martin Sprouse, my connection to this thing is through the punk rock scene, the early '80s punk rock scene. Grew up in Southern California, I was doing a fanzine with my friends Pat Weakland and Jason Traeger called Leading Edge. We started that in 1982/83, and did it to about 1985. Then, in 1985, I moved to the Bay Area, got an invite to join the staff at Maximum Rocknroll.

MIC: Maximum Rocknroll was at the time one of the most powerfully influential media outlets for punk and punk adjacent scenes in the U.S. and

When we were effective at what we were doing in the 80s, it's 'cause we were, we were kids, man. And we were friends first. And so we spent most of the hours of the day together. We went everywhere together, we hung out together, we loved each other, man, and so, that was the energy that we brought to the struggle. In this society that we live in, it's based on, you know, the commodification of human labor and splitting everybody into units in the nuclear family and all that kinda shit. You know, once people grow up and they get a career and they get money, they move on. And their self interests about their little bubble becomes a priority in a way that actually doesn't build community. And so figuring out ways to do that is crucial and this thing about the older activists, we actually have a responsibility right now to come out of our bubbles and come into activity with some of these younger people that are newer. Because all we've got is each other.



ARA flyer from MRR interview

PART TWO: THE MINNEAPOLIS BALDIES & ANTI-RACIST ACTION, BONUS EPISODE



When I first became a skinhead I didn't realize that the first skinheads were black rude boys. I almost felt like a metaphysical, cosmic, spiritual thing. I discovered this and I was drawn to it, but I didn't realize that it was my people who also brought it.

This next interview is with David Jeffries and Gator again, Jason Nevelles. Gator was a founding member of the Baldies along with Mic Crenshaw. Dave was a Black skinhead that came from Atlanta about a year or two after the Baldies started and quickly became close to the Baldies and became a central member of the crew. His role was so integral as one of the best fighters and one of the brightest personalities in the crew. So this is Dave, Jay, and Mic Crenshaw talking in Minneapolis.

DAVID: And you guys knew him, he had told me, he was like "yo, I know these cool dudes up here." Then I like noticed like little shit, like I would see his white power shit, and I'd think, "dude, that's spelled wrong." And he'd be like, "whatever, man." And I was like, "that's not how you spell white power." It's like N-E-G-G-E-R. That's... Did you notice that? Yeah, his shit was backwards and I would be like...

JAY: He didn't seem like a real racist to me, he just seemed like just a dumb white boy.

MIC: Most of the dudes that I met that were so-called racist, wanted to be cool with brothers on a certain level, but you just knew that like when we weren't around, and they were with their people, they were gonna be all hardcore racists.

NISSA: I recall this clearly: there was always the opportunity given, like cut it out. Join us. Learn the true history. White supremacy is a lie, you're being tricked by it, too. You guys, especially the men, you would actually try to talk to those guys sometimes. Especially individuals. But if they were having a concert or trying to go jump people in the name of white supremacy, they had to be stopped. And we did a great service to the Twin Cities that we stopped them. Minneapolis and St. Paul, the whole metro area would be a radically different place if we hadn't stopped them. That can only be considered defense and support of the community.

DAVE: I've always been around violence. It took me a long time to like, understand how it's so, like, immersed in our culture as Americans or living in America or whatever you want to call yourself. Dude, you grow up in an inner city here, you've been programmed.

JAY: Poverty is violence.

DAVE: Hunger is violence. Being treated like shit is violence.

MIC: One of the things that I've always been proud of is our relationship to violence and coming through the fear of getting hurt and actually taking a principled stand against things that we deemed, there had to be consequences for certain things. At the same time, I wanted to be careful about people not just glorifying fights.

JAY: That's was the times. That's just how it was. We all know nazi's only understand and respect one thing and that's a ass whooping. We used to talk to those clowns all day long and it didn't change them. But you gotta let them know you ain't coming to our town putting your roots down, think you're going to get a crew growin' in here. So I think the violence kept a lot more of the serious ones away. They're fuckin scared. They don't want to fight straight up, they want to jump people and do all their shady shit like they always do. They're not straight up brawlers. I mean, look how many threatening letters we got. "Oh, we're gonna come kill you." I'm like, dude, they had so much access. They could have gunned us down in a heartbeat. They talk a lot of shit and they don't back it up.

MIC: I remember them dudes came up to us to talk to us on the corners. But only when they drove away did they go, "white power!" Remember that?

JAY: I mean, how many nazi's came up to us and squared up?

MIC: None.

JAY: None.

MOBONIX: The best thing you can do is increase community. The ways you can increase community is through ownership, and that's owning your community. Owning your stake of the rock. Everyone takes care of those people, you know who's in that circle, you know what you're protecting, you know what you're fighting for. I typically say ownership. I think, I bring it back to the most basic element, ownership connotes owning yourself, owning your thoughts, owning your actions. And being right and knowing, knowing the difference. That might be a little bit more esoteric than what most people wanna hear because it's not something they can do today. It's something you have to practice over time and be disciplined about. What life is showing me is that those are the only things that really matter at the end of the day. Each person has to take ownership and has to be willing to plant this flag, and stand for that flag.

MARTY: I just go back to the core principles of ARA education and direct action. And in the large sense, a lot of us as Americans, Black and white, we all need political education. [inaudible] still stuck in the opulence of the 80s, in this Cosby era's mentality of prosperity and projecting ourselves into some middle class lifestyle that basically ain't based on reality, how we really living out here. So, I think it just goes back to education. A lot of us need political education. Who are you? Who are your ancestors? What did they contribute the the building of this country. I'm not looking at Africa. I'm not looking back to the motherland in terms of redress and reparations, that sort of thing. I'm looking to this country. The shit that my ancestors built. And to defend my sense of ownership here, we helped build the first world, first world economy, and we need to be compensated with that. It goes back to education, solid political foundation, intellectual framework where you can articulate yourself and who you are and the role your ancestors laid in building this bitch, right? And also, direct action. I don't think nazis and fascists and right-wingers need to be coddled, debated with, reasoned with. When you get to that point, I think individuals like that only respond to violence. I don't think that they have the right to speak. Giving them the right to speak, basically denies you the right to exist.

MALACHI: At the end of the day I mean, I want everyone to have what they need in order to enjoy their life on this planet, brah. Period. Nobody should infringe on anybody else's right to life. If you're doing that, you need to stop, or get the fuck out the way.

MIC: And again, when the bullies like in the room, fucking up all the kids, at some point, the people in the room have to check the bully. Period. Because the bully, if unchecked, the bully isn't gonna stop themselves. That's the scary part because you're like, you know that they have the self-destructive tendency to be like, "well, I'm in charge, so I'm taking everybody with me," and that's what the arms race and all that, that's not a solution.

message I found in all my studies, and I'm not a degree holder, I didn't finish much college, but you know, it's that, the only thing that can change this hatred is love. That was a hard lesson for me to learn because I've also learned there's a time and place for everything. If I were confronted, let's say, in a similar situation with White Knights or nazis, I'm pretty sure, it would have to get violent, probably, but everything I've studied so far. And by my experience, too, is that you get a lot more change through loving someone's shit. Personally, I haven't had to love a nazi out of [inaudible] racist, so I don't know how it works to that degree. I have a lot more hope for our kids if we can raise them better. I like to say, change, cashed in my I for an M. Instead of oi, it's OM. For me, [laughs], seriously. But, I have a temper and I get mad and I do sometimes, I think people still need their ass kicked. I don't think that's gonna solve it.

MIC: Were we born for this moment, so like, let's be present and work with what we have. You don't know these other motherfuckers, they're fucking cavemen. [laughs] Like, all the shit they say about us to justify the dehumanization that leads to the extermination of people, which is like, what their whole project about, that's actually the mirror they're holding up to themselves, you know?

JASON: What I notice more than anything is the middle class white kids are finally waking up and understanding what white privilege actually means. You say it up and down and they don't get it, but now they're actually seeing it first hand with Trump.

I mean the stuff with antifa I think is really interesting where they're like, "ARA was the first antifa," and I was like, "well, there's been a lot of people fighting racism and fascism for a long time, even before us." We, I mean, we knew back then, it's the only way you can deal with these clowns, man. Or they'll just try to get over on you.

MIC: The things that it takes to create community defense should be ongoing processes anyway. And it's only through committing to long-term work, that we start to get used to what we're up to and it's not such a shock anymore. And I think it's, it's then when our imaginations can visualize, "ok, well what other, what other ways can we apply the relationships and the skills that we're not even considering right now because we're just always responding to something?" I don't have the answers, but what I do know is that the answers are going to come from me working with people. The clarity that I'm getting is that when I'm in rooms with people who are all thinking critically. And I love being part of that work. Because it's bigger than me as an individual and I feel that there's a truth and an authenticity to the clarity that's coming out of those moments that's not really available when I'm just thinking about me. People are developing clarity together that wouldn't be available if we weren't going through this.

MIC: None. The violence that emerged between us and our rivals began to draw others into our anti-racist organizing. Various radical leftists formations and individuals showed up to organize and fight with the Baldies. Members of various Black and Latinx gangs, revolutionary anarchists, punk rockers, radical feminist youth, skaters, and other anti racist skinheads from other cities in the Midwest formed a regional network and fighting force.

Eventually, we reached out to people in other cities who were having the same problem. So there was like Madison, Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chicago, Illinois - strong allies in Chicago. Lawrence, Kansas, lot of cities in the Midwest and I think it was in about 87 or 88, we had our first meeting that was multiple cities that like over a hundred anti-racist skinheads and anti-fascist activists from different cities came to Minneapolis, and we had a meeting at the library.

The uptown library in South Minneapolis was in the center of uptown, which was the neighborhood that all the punks and alternative kids hung out in, the skinheads as well. You know, to think about it to this day, it does sound weird to talk about how central the library was for us as a hangout. And I don't know who the adults were that worked there. But they must have been supportive and sympathetic to our cause, because they would let us use the conference rooms for free. And so when we had our first syndicate meeting, over 100 skinheads came from all these different cities across the Midwest, and they let us use their biggest conference room for that meeting. And they didn't interfere. You know, I don't think I saw one adult. It was like, there must have been a point of contact in our crew, I think it was Kieran. And they just would let us do what we want. So we were always respectful. We never put graffiti on the library. Matter of fact, when people when other people would, we would get upset because we felt like they were gonna damage our relationship. And that was one of the, one of the first times that as a young adult, I got up. People were like, you should get up and say a speech and then I got up to say the speech, and I looked at the room, and it's, I was like, "aw, shit." I felt the tear coming. It was a very powerful, humbling thing to know that us as children had been able to pull that off. Yeah.

At the library, we formed The Syndicate. The Syndicate was basically this network of anti-racist skinhead crews and anti-fascist crews that were ready to hunt down Nazis in their cities because we understood that in order to confront violent racists, we couldn't just do it ideologically and we couldn't do it with words and language. We could do all those things and we were doing all those things, but we had to be willing to find them where they were and fight them. That was the beginning of that culture. Little did I know at that time, that simultaneously, there was an anti-facist movement that mirrored what we up to that was happening in Europe. I didn't find that out til later.

Jabari, AKA Corky, is another Black skinhead from SHOC--Skinheads of Chicago--who also lives in Atlanta. Corky was integral to the political development of the Skinheads of Chicago as a crew, along with Marty, and he later moved to the west coast and was active in the anti racist skinhead scenes in the Bay Area.

JABARI (CORKY): There are people who brought ideology to the clique and who brought muscle to the clique and who really brought useful points of view. So, thought and muscle. But it wasn't until summer of 88 when y'all came down that we got the vocabulary that was missing--the idea of direct action. Up to that point, we just liked to brawl, we liked to fight in the streets, that was it. While we believed it had some philosophical underpinnings, when it comes down to it, we were just fighting and drinking. But then when y'all gave us the language of anti-racist action, direct action, and confrontation and principled anti-fascism, it's like, ahh... here we go. That's what we were missing. That was the missing component. For all the, the lofty phrases that I might want to use about working-class solidarity, whatever, did not connect like direct action did. Now people're like, "oh shit, yeah, direct action, yeah. Let's go deliver some direct action!"

MIC: As the Badies influence began to expand it became clear that we were no longer just a crew of a few dozen hardcore skinheads on a local mission. The emerging network of anti fascist fighters needed a name. The Baldies decided to call this broader network Anti Racist Action or ARA. We believed that we had to confront organized racial hate with direct action, not just words and ideas.

There was a punk zine called Maximum Rock 'n' Roll, there was another one called Your Flesh, and in these zines, these like black and white paper rags, there would be scene reports from different cities. And so you could go down, I think it was Schindler's Bookstore, they had these zines and you buy them and there will be reports from the West coast, the Southwest, the East coast and you started to see like, all these people are fuckin having nazi problems everywhere right now. You reach out to people in those scenes. There was some of us in the punk scene who traveled a lot, or people who were in bands that were on tour and they would meet people from different scenes and they would hear about what was happening in those cities and they'd get peoples' contact. You go in your kitchen and you pick up your clunky telephone, dial the number and you call somebody. Or you'd go to a phone booth. There were even chain letters. We built the network that way and that network came all the way out to Portland.

In that year, 1989 and 1990, a number of Minneapolis Baldies became aware of the white power skinhead problem that was happening in Portland. And they travelled to Portland as a group and provided material support for Portland Anti Racist skinheads. That was such an integral part of the relationship between anti racist and anti fascist in Minneapolis and anti racists and anti fascists in Portland. There is a connection that still exists to this day.

sentenced as adults and going to jail for five to ten years for life sentences, for something that really could be a teachable opportunity in the sense of like, restorative justice. There's a lot of complexity that we all have to be looking at. It's a pivotal moment.

MOBINIX: One of the things I always struggled with when I was a kid, some of my Black elders would be like, "you know, you can have white friends, but one day, they're gonna be white on you." And I would be like, "don't say that! That's mean!" [laughter] "That's mean, don't say that shit!" [laughter] But then as you get older into adulthood, you start to understand the fantasy that we were living doesn't really sustain in the reality we're living, you know?

Out of all the people that I know, I have yet to know a white kid that gets shot down the back running from the police. And, unfortunately, we've known countless, you know, either one degree of separation or no degree of separation result in death or, or anything less than that, even. You know, more often, more often so, it's just brutality.

MIC: Real talk. It's a trip reflecting on George Floyd. You know, that's your old neighborhood. And remember the streets, watching the tape and remembering, you know, just knowing how the air feels in May in Minneapolis.

MOBONIX: It's an energy from all that time and the winter and shit, it makes me so proud because that's like the natural progression after the years of the struggle that we laid down the foundation for. So maybe the best thing's not to burn down your local grocery store, but at the same time it's like, did they get the fucking point afterward, though.

MIC: Right. [inaudible] and I been talking a lot lately about people trying to say, "well, it was either these alt-right dudes or the undercover police as far as some of the looting and the vandalism and the arson and stuff. I think it's important to hold space for the Black and brown and native youth. They were out there setting it off. Not just, making it about what some white people were being opportunistic about. And like, "nah, we have that rage. Don't forget it's coming from the fact that y'all were killing us."

LORRAINE: As far as ARA being part of that creation, I distinctly remember us being in the Walker library. Do you remember? [Inaudible] in this big circle and we're thinking of names and thinking of things. Personally, I've tried to live ARA like, through different mediums. Like, instead of me telling going out and addressing groups, or strangers, or people or checking people, really using it in my daily interactions with humans. But in different formats in like, 2004 I got actually saved and baptized in Walker Chapel First AME Church. In all my studies, and I studied other stuff actually, after leaving Minneapolis. I studied stuff in South Dakota and different cultures and religions and the one common

MOBONIX: Back in the day, man, they were always just cowards. They didn't always just take a ass whoopin', you know. They were sort of the first ones who would pull out a gun or something. They were the first ones who had, like the crossbows and some shit that would kill you. They were the ones that introduced that, shooting our windows and shooting at people and shit like that. And it wasn't us doing that, we didn't have no fucking guns! You know what I mean? [laughs] I don't think none of us got, yeah, we didn't use guns. That was even what we was, we weren't even on that.

MIC: Here I talk about the messy, dysfunctional, and self-destructive strains of the radical left whilst acknowledging the need to be self-critical and embrace accountability:

MIC: At the start of Occupy I started to see this thing happen that I also saw in the 80s, where the radical left was more eager to call each other out [inaudible] than to produce any type of meaningful base of activity for the working class to seek liberation and their communities. You know, it, there became this kind of insular infighting culture that I didn't wanna have anything to do with specifically because in a lot of those spaces, I was one of the only people of color. I was one of the only Black people. And I'd be like, "I'll be Goddamned if I'm gonna spend my time around a bunch of fucking white people who wanna tear each other up." I got more important shit to do! So, I stopped fucking with that scene for those reasons and I see that, that same thing happening now and you, you've heard all the cliches and adages of "with friends like that, you don't need enemies." It's like we do the work of the state for the state by tearing each other up and rendering ourselves ineffective and what I'm looking at right now is, how do I organize, how do I take the, the skills that I've developed from years of organizing in left circles, in left movements, how do I take those to the broader working class communities that I'm actually from? What do I have to contribute to my Black community, my working class Black folks, my poor striving and struggling, my [inaudible] Black Proletariat, my cats that are, in their own ways, already organized coming from gang culture. I really need to be part of building movement from that base. These racist attacks from all these different elements on the right are actually servicing to pull some of us out of the woodwork that have been comfortable doing our own thing in our own way for a while and bring us together and create this sense of unity around these questions, like, how do we not only defend our communities, how do we protect ourselves, and how do we let it be known that that shit is not gonna fly over here? If you come over here with that shit, you're not gonna fucking leave in one piece. How do we protect ourselves in an environment where we're, we're already hyper-criminalized as Black folks in relation to the prison industrial complex. There are so many divisive means and ways that are ingrained in the system to get us off the street, out of our communities, and incarcerated or in the fucking grave. From police violence where one of us gets killed every twenty-eight hours, to this fucking mandatory minimum sentencing where you got young people being

I was not on the first trip that the Minneapolis Baldies took to Portland, but I remember hearing the stories about how active that trip was in terms of what happened on the streets. The people in Portland felt that it was very helpful, very supportive the way we came out.

During my years in the Minneapolis Baldies and in the founding era of Anti Racist Action, it was very clear who the enemies were and where we could find them. Those enemies, that element wanted to be part of the scene that we were in. And so, they would come to the same shows and they would show up in the same neighborhoods, and sometimes they would come to the same parties. And so that was the arena in which we interacted. Later, the evolution of the movement began to be not just focused on local activity of white supremacists, but national activity, and so, different ARA chapters would communicate to each other and share intelligence because doxxing emerged as a practice in which you could investigate and find out where your enemy worked, where they lived, and expose that information in the hopes to put social pressure on them. A lot of time these people that were in hate groups operated in secrecy. To expose what they were up to with their racist activity was a weapon. Something that also developed along with doxxing was not just street fighting but finding out where their organized events were going to be and then showing up and engaging in direct action to get the events shut down. Some of these events would be at churches, or different buildings in the community. We didn't know if some of the people who ran these organizations even understood that by allowing those events to happen that they were sponsoring white supremacy. That emerged and transitioned into counter demonstrations and counter protests, in which members of Anti Racist Action and different anti fascist organizations would show up in unison to make a public presence whenever the white power people wanted to have a demonstration. You know, this is a long tradition, but it's a lot of what we still see today in the streets with the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer and the black bloc showing up.

So, the ways in which we organized evolved over time. I do think it's important to note that, between the time ARA started, coming out of the anti-racist skinhead scene started by the Minneapolis Baldies and emerging into different chapters of ARA around the world, and then ultimately into ANTIFA. There were also people who were closer to the original culture of what developed ARA, which was groups of friends who were skinheads who were anti-racists, who believed in fighting nazis. And that, there is actually sometimes a lot of difference between that culture that's based more on friendship and the more sophisticated organizing that emerged later and, in fact, there's sometimes tension between different approaches. There's people who feel like the doxxing and the more research-based approach is too intellectual, and doesn't really accomplish as much as street violence will. There's a lot of us who were part of the street violence that are grown and don't engage in that kind of activity because, you know, a lot of us are in our 50s now. You know, we've got houses

and careers and kids and families, and the way that we were able to do that because, you know, we were passionate, also had a lot to do with how young we were. We had a lot less to lose and for where our consciousness was and our commitment was, it made more sense at the time because it felt like a more effective approach.

Matter of fact, back then, if you would've told us, you know, there are other ways to approach the problem, we would've disagreed with you passionately. I think the reason we were committed to violence was because it felt like we were the only people who were gonna do something about it and that that was the most profound way to engage the issue. People wanna hear you say you're either for it or you're against it in terms of violence and what I'll say is that right now, it's not in my interests to go out and commit acts of violence. If my life is threatened, I'm gonna respond accordingly. I'm happy that I spent so much time being engaged in the kind of violence that was common, that I know what that feels like, but it's not something that I want to participate in unless those that I love are actually threatened. Will I tell people that it's wrong? I feel like, violence is dangerous. You can get hurt and you can die, and you might end up killing somebody. But I want us to remember that white supremacy and hate is a form of violence and terror. At the core of the set of beliefs of white supremacists, is they believe that it's not only their right to kill you, but to get away with murder because of who you are. So, what is the appropriate response to that? I can't tell you that it's, it's right to go out and hurt somebody for what they think, but at a certain point, it is a form of defense, it is a form of community defense, and it is a form of you asserting your right to be human in the face of somebody that's trying to strip you of those rights.

Malachi, aka Mickey as well as Marty, are both black skinheads from Skinheads of Chicago, or SHOC. SHOC was a multiracial skinhead anti-racist crew that was close to the Minneapolis Baldies. The Baldies founded Anti-Racist Action and SHOC were crucial early allies in battles against nazi boneheads in the midwest, and the friendships between SHOC and the Baldies were like family.

Gator, along with Mic, was one of the founders of both the Baldies and ARA. Mobonix, aka Mo, is another Baldie and Black Skinhead.

CELINA: The contradictions that non-white members of this movement faced were deep and were also a microcosm of larger issues that play out in the identity struggles and battles for self-determination and political orientation in this racist society.

MALACHI: When I was a shorty, I was the choir director of the church that I was in. And they used to always say, "he gon' be a preacher, he gon' be a preacher." "Touched," they used to call it, touched.

three different cities [laughs], I'd be gone for, like, twenty-five years. It's an interesting time and these guys have really been the racists, the right wing, the religious right, the Proud Boys, all the different toxic conservative elements, have all been emboldened by the atmosphere created by this administration.

Mobonix is a Black skinhead and a Baldie.

MIC: You put me up on game when we were kids. We were getting recruited into the Communist Labor Party. We were going to a lot of meetings. We were the only two that were really committed to some of these study groups and, and things that was really attractive to me because it was like a higher level of organization. And to this day, some of the political consciousness that that helped me develop has been central to the analysis that's helped me to have a sharper understanding. But at the same time, there were contradictions that you put me up on, you were like, "Mic, man we were going to all these meetings with all these old revolutionaries, but have you noticed that they all own houses? They all have..." [laughter]

MOBONIX: No doubt, no doubt! You know I peeped game on that one quick. "you're driving a Benzes and shit, though." Yeah, this is different. Doing good works, though, and a lot of thinking. But the shit that was happening, I can't say that overall, did that make a bigger impact than just putting a couple knuckles down, though? You know? What made the bigger impact? Running them outta town? Or is it being like, "well, we know you guys are here, but if we just figure it out and then we get a little bit equity and pay, you know, little bit equity and ownership or maybe the SBA get a little bit loans here...the bank gave one Black guy a loan. So, you see, the bank's not all bad." I was talking to my brother last week in Minneapolis and he was talking about the neo-nazis and the Klan or whatever you wanna call 'em, the Boogaloos or whoever the fuck they are. You know, they're pulling up at night, if you're Black out there kind of by yourself [inaudible] two groups, they'll just open fire on you to the point where, even 'til last night the brothers that have their concealed carry permits out patrolling the neighborhood to make sure that elements can't circulate and do that no more.

MOBONIX: There'll be a couple groups of brothers in a couple different cars, circling on the northside [inaudible] on Broadway, that area, [inaudible], you all the little, you know, the areas on the northside. It was white dudes in pickup trucks who take the plates off, and they'll just open up on anybody Black walking, walking around. Like, to the point where women and children are afraid to go out the, out of the house.

MIC: That's really fucked up because I think a lot of us have felt like those guys are cowards in the sense that they wanna go and catch you slippin' over in their areas, like what happened with Ahmaud Arbery. They're not really bringing it to our area because they'll get handled. That's been the narrative.

my uncle had a kegger and everyone ended up fighting my uncle and his friends and I was like, “fuck!” Pretty much after that and I was really trying to get to, “who is Lorraine?” And then I had started hanging out tight with Leon, and I’m like, “well, Leon’s studying dance, well, what was I studying before all this madness?” I was studying theater, so then I started to, I think, 15, grow my hair back. So it was a really short jaunt as far as being on their boots and braces, like, bald headed.

MIC: Thirty years later, we’re all grappling with the differences between what we faced in the Regan era, and what we’re looking at right now. Those of us who were involved on a personal level and an individual level, we’ve all grown older. Those of us who didn’t commit suicide or get killed, or, you know, succumb to some disease, those of us who are still around who are healthy and relatively active, we have more to lose. And the willingness to go out into the street and engage and even actively hunt down violent racists is something that is different when you’re middle aged. There’s also the, the [inaudible] reality that the state has escalated the way that it criminalizes and persecutes and convicts people for political organizing and political violence. We’ve seen historically that the state has not only protected white supremacists, but it seems as if they allow white supremacists to operate under these bullshit Constitutional protections of freedom of speech. Knowing that they’re going to provoke and incite violence and then they use that opportunity to then go after the anti-fascists and the anti-racists and criminalize them for responding the the white supremacist threat. We know that there’s a lot more at stake in the way that the state responds to our activity, especially if it’s gonna have person to person violence or organized violence.

Third, there’s the surveillance aspect. There are fucking cameras everywhere. People aren’t always aware of the fact that what they do is being recorded by cameras that might not even intentionally be trained on the activity, but just because security and paranoia and the prevalence of the technology that’s affordable to business owners and whatever, there’s cameras everywhere. And then lastly the device culture that we live in, in which, everybody’s got a telephone and everybody’s recording shit. If they see something interesting, if they see violence, they wanna take out their telephone and record it. All these things come into play when we think about what’s at stake when you decide that you have to take a stand and confront somebody. The consequences of that have to actually be part of our consciousness and have to be part of our organizing strategy when we’re trying to figure out how to engage these people. So, to summarize it, back in the day, you find out where they were, and you go fuck ‘em up. Now, there’s a lot more to it. And I think a lot of these rallies and these demonstrations, we’ve been taking loses. Getting stabbed, and there’s a couple of these fascist fuckers that have been going around, beating people on camera. They get canonized as heroes in the media and they’re allowed to walk around freely and do this where I know if I was on camera kicking someone’s ass, in

MIC: You got the touch?

MALACHI: Touched by, or ordained, if you will. You were touched. Course, that never happened, but I think ultimately, the concept was, you’re a person who will create; you’re a person who will lead, you’re a person who will do something, you know, in the world.

Malachi, AKA Mickey, was a Black skinhead, a member of SHOC, skinheads of Chicago.

MALACHI: And so, when I was in the skinhead movement, I’m quiet at first, right? I can watch, I can observe. I like to observe, I don’t like to just jump in. But eventually it became, “what are we gonna do?” Jabari, we used to work together at a bookstore called Rizzoli in Watertown, down on Michigan Avenue.

Jabari was a former member of SHOC and a Black skinhead from Chicago.

MALACHI: He helped me get the job there. I was in school at Columbia College. And we would be back there reading, bro. And sparring and conversing and we started talking about what we gonna do. So that’s when ARA came up, that’s when Syndicate came up. Really, what kind of jumped it off bro, was one night we got into a fight with the Bomber Boys. Chris, white guy, and he used to rock a swastika and Dwayne used to stick up for him, “oh, he cool,” whatever, whatever.

Bomber Boys were an early skinhead crew from Chicago that was dominant before the days of SHOC. The Bomber Boys had Black members like Dwayne, but were not anti-racist. Some of their members were white power.

MALACHI: Like, “no, you’re not cool.” He got in my face. Older than me, and he was one of the toughest skins in Chicago. And we got into it, man, and it was a all out brawl. And I whooped his ass in front of everybody. And after that, we were like, “this shit is over. We takin’ over the scene. Y’all done.”

LORRAINE: It was really after he ran away, so to speak, to uptown, that’s 11th... I was bouncing around for a couple years, in and out of the Bridge.

MIC: Wow, yeah, the homeless, was it like a homeless or runaway youth service program?

LORRAINE: It was a youth, yeah. And then trying to behave, I got out of junior high. It was really after junior high, before ninth grade. Going to school with some of the faces I had seen uptown.

MIC: [inaudible] Mills, Jay Nevilles, Maggie Malloy, myself, I think Pat, was

Patrick there?

LORRAINE: Patrick was still there.

MIC: At what point did you decide, “I’m going to be a skinhead?”

LORRAINE: When I shaved my head it was really more about being accepted by this group, I wanted acceptance and to be part of something. But what definitely helped was this guy that I liked...

MIC: And who was Spencer?

LORRAINE: Yeah. At the time, he was like, “let’s do that.” I’m like, “ok, yeah!” But I didn’t like that it was this like, relationship connotation, like I was doing it was this boyfriend. And that bugs me in hindsight.

MIC: The skinhead culture is male dominated, everything centered around the tough guy. With the big ego. And so then, the skinhead girl, is seen more as a counterpart to the guy, as opposed to an independent, autonomous person.

LORRAINE: Right. So it was kind of a combination for me. But also, I’d seen, I’d also just met Becky Louis. I’m like, “Becky shaved her head.” But I’d been hanging around a little bit before cutting my hair. But then it’s like, I wanted to be more down and be part of the group. I wanted to prove my own toughness.

MIC: How long after you got involved with the Baldies was there violence?

LORRAINE: It was fast and furious for me, how I remember. I think I shaved my head in like ninth grade, and then, like, once I did cut my hair and then, not like you can not be seen by the racist crews or whatever.

MIC: You know, we get asked a lot, those of us who are veterans of this movement, what people who want to be active today and who can be active should take from us in terms of organizing or methods or strategies, or tactics, and um, I have to be really honest and clear about the fact that I think what made us strong during my time when I was the most active and engaged, is that we were friends and we loved each other, and we approached the struggle and the activity from that basis.

JASON: I think, with the Baldies, it was just, “man, we have nothing to lose.” It just took off. It was like a natural progression of kids being kids and us trying to figure out what we were as people anyway.

MIC: To me, the best part about it: when you take away the overt political ideologies and the violence, it was really about friendship. When I founded the

people, but being committed to the hardcore punk scene was alienating me from my people. That was an uncomfortable thing for me to have to face. At the same time we got to the party, people started making fun of my crew because of the way we dressed. We were wearing combat boots, Doc Martin’s, and skinny jeans, and flight jackets and we did not fit in, and everyone at the party was looking at us like, clowning us, making fun of us verbally and a couple people started, like, trying to pick fights with people in the crew, some of the white guys. And this is a position I’ve been in numerous times, where white kids in my crew were being targeted by people of color who were like, making fun of them, or whatever, thinking that they were weak. And so I would stand up and defend them and then, all the sudden, be faced with this conflict like, “what the fuck and I doing? I’m defending them against my own people? What does that say about me?” And so, it was in one of those moments that I chose to defend the honor of my crew. A lot of the white people in the crew got on a bus and left and myself, David Jeffries, and Chasu Lo--Chasu was Hmong--David and I are Black, we stayed behind while they all left. And I stood up to one of the brothers, one of the other Black people who were at the party, who was making fun of the white boys in my crew. Not only did I stand up to him, I forced him to get off of the bus that he had got on to leave the situation and come fight me one on one. And we fought one on one, for about twenty minutes, until the police came and broke it up. And on that walk home, I really had to look deep inside of myself and ask myself, what was I fighting for? What was I fighting for? That was a very hard night for me. Something shifted in me that night that was, was always there inside of me as far as struggles around identity that I faced as part of my life, but it became clear that my survival was separate from the survival of the crew. It’s one thing to fight against violent racists, but I can’t, I can’t fight against my people. In a white supremacist society, I cannot be physically fighting with my people unless I’m forced to do so. That fight brought to the surface all these unanswered questions that I was struggling to answer about who I was, who I needed to be, and what my priorities should be.

LORRAINE: I remember fighting the White Knights, and I’m like, “wow, that was a big deal.” And it still is. Like, it bugs me that that shit is still going on. That’s kind of how in Uptown at the time when there was swastikas being spray painted [inaudible], “fuck this! We gotta kick their ass and get ‘em outta here!”

MIC: What allowed you to move on?

LORRAINE: Probably, well, I really scared myself beating that girl up, but when it seemed to get just crazy, I remember we were at a party that someone named Rob--my friend, Robert from the art academy’s house. But it was...

MIC: I heard about the MCAT fight, but I wasn’t there...

LORRAINE: Yeah, they broke out like everything in his house and then, like,

Forman was like, “Linda joined the Army and she’s gonna kill your ass.” And then I would be scared, I’d be like, “shit! I’m gonna get killed by Linda!”

MALACHI: It became national when we connected with y’all. The cats up in Milwaukee and people in Portland, ‘Frisco, and we started travelling and then speaking in front audiences.

And then it became a matter of me reconnecting because, you gotta understand there was a point where, there was a question mark about diversity for me. My parents were Panthers, they were..and then my dad, that’s when he became a nationalist. Out of the Panther movement, which was Proletariat and considered diverse to the extent that they were working with the Weathermen and whomever else, but my dad eventually became a nationalist, and so, it was all about pan-Africanism and pure Black nationalism. And so, he and I were at odds about my white girlfriend at the time, my white friends at the time, but I saw unity in the diversity. However, once I started reading Garvey, and started reading Malcolm, and started reading other things, I then found myself moving in the nationalist direction as well. But, during my time as a skinhead, it was just pure love for my brothers. But I began to see some things that I didn’t like in the white skinheads, who were anti-racist. They were not rejecting their white privilege. And I saw that through examples of us being arrested. Marty used to get arrested every weekend, bro. They would never take none of the white kids. And of course eventually, that shit started clicking for me, and I was like, “what’s going on?” And then I wou--me and Sonny, we all got arrested all the time! Yeah, Adam, Will, Quinn. Just for being there.

Will, Quinn, Sonny, and Adam were all Black skinheads in Chicago.

MALACHI: Those things started to stand out to me and I wasn’t remiss to that. And the white kids didn’t understand it. And so eventually that was what made me move away from the skinhead movement. And I was just like, “man, this ain’t right.” And so, with the music, with PE and X Clan and some other, BDP, it just started to speak to me differently. You know I had to take my leave from that and I grew dreads and started understanding that [inaudible] moving in a different direction.

MIC: A lot of us were out on the streets and, you know, we used to be together in groups, usually on the weekend, Friday or Saturday night, we were out looking for a party. We got word that there was a party in a hotel downtown. It became clear when we got to the party that it was mostly Black people from North and South Minneapolis neighborhoods that were culturally not mixed. They were the Black people that hung around Black people. We didn’t belong there because we were a mixed crew and there was a bunch of white kids with us and we were punk rock. And so, at that point, I had a very tense reckoning about my own internal identity struggle where I wanted to connect with my

Baldies, that was the first time I really felt at home. Nobody was telling me I wasn’t Black enough. Or nobody was telling me I was too Black. We all had that unconditional respect for each other.

JASON: All the best group of friends that I’ve ever had throughout my whole life have always been a mix of everybody. Black kids, white kids, native, Asian, all kicking it together. It’s always different if it’s like all Black kids, all white kids, all native, it’s a different kind of vibe.

LORRAINE: Do you remember driving Stacey, you, me, and Stacey in the car one day? I’m like, “where you going, Mic?” “I think I’ll throw a brick through Paul Hollis’s window,” and I was like, “well, why?”

Paul Hollis was a klan member and a leader of the White Knights, a neo-nazi skinhead crew in Minneapolis.

LORRAINE: And you’re like, “well, why not?” “YEAH! WHY NOT?!” So like, pretty much after that I kind of had this attitude like, “well, yeah, why not?” And then someone was tal-- we were talking about educate first and then ass kick second? So then I remember trying to do that after that summer and trying to talk to those guys and I was into direct action. After an ARA meeting, in the library, someone’s house had got firebombed through the window, someone’s parents. I think it was Brandon Sanford’s house. The hearsay was the girl that gave the list away was a blonde punk girl named Linda. And this is the hard part, for me, I haven’t even been able to talk about this, but I kicked her ass out in the parking lot and that was the first time I had ever hurt someone like that. I blacked out, though, while I was doing that...you said, “that is enough, Lorraine!” That haunted me ever since. I felt so bad the next day ‘cause I’m like, “oh, my God,” for one, that was hearsay, and there I am acting stupid, and blacking out, like, basically ever rage moment in my life came out on that poor girl.

MIC: You mentioned drinking heavy, was drinking heavy a reflection of dealing with the trauma of the violence and..

LORRAINE: No, that was my relief from my own personal life, and then it ended up being part of our thing we’d do together. Like, me and my girlfriends are doing, ‘cause I know most of the kids didn’t drink like that.

MIC: When the crew first started, it was mostly straight edge.

LORRAINE: No one, yeah, exactly! Me, I started drinking and then, Becky and [inaudible] and we started drinking, like drinking after school and stuff...which, a lot, was my idea. But, no, with Linda, I don’t know if I need go on Oprah and apologize to Linda. I’m like, “I don’t know if I’m gonna get killed.” [Inaudible]

