

Mack Evasion's Heartattack column

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Someone told me all I wrote about was wanderlust and “Getting away with stuff.” I’d never really thought about it. Another said I wrote like I never had a negative opinion of anyone. Yet another said every time she came home to her collective house to an uninvited traveling anarchist drinking on her couch, she blamed my writing. God. Three comments and we are halfway down the list of things I hated most. Ungrateful visitors. Alcohol. Most anarchists. “Positivity” as a substitute for opinions. People who only told other people what they wanted to hear. Or wrote what they wanted to read...

If that was me, I wanted no part. A good time, I thought, to burn some bridges. I’ve said it before: I’m not here to make friends.

VEGAN STRAIGHT EDGE — THE RESURRECTION

Karl Buechner (Earth Crisis) and Aaron Cometbus. In the punk scene, my two biggest influences And inside of 2 hours, I’d just met both. Someone said that was a strange top two. Maybe it was, I’d never thought about that either.

The whole thing was a long story, or maybe a short one that seemed long. A story of one road trip, four friends, 2000 miles, and almost getting arrested in Baltimore for cutting my hair in a Starbucks restroom. Not knowing what to charge me with, the cop just laughed. We all did. We’d been laughing the whole trip. Attempting LA to dallas in 20 hours. Celebrating our nations independence in a hot tub, taking a course in hip hop slang from a girl I barely knew. Eighteen hours at a computer on July 5th, hours late on HeartattaCK deadline, pounding the keyboard towards something to be proud of, against the deadly obstacles of my poor writing and my tourmates yelling at me. “Hurry up. Let’s go. No one reads those things anyway.”

Total Liberation Tour 2004. Vegan Straight edge — The Resurrection. The real reason for this trip. A handful of speakers and bands, assembling the early traces of what boasted itself as a vegan sxe revival. Revival of a scene nearly dead for seven years. Ten cities, three weeks. The bands: Purified in Blood, Purification, Undying, Tears of Gaia, and more. At first word, I raised an eyebrow, uncertain if the urgency and fertility of the mid-90s scene could ever be recreated, and I wanted to cross the country to gauge for myself. But an offer came, from one of the touring bands, an offer for a seat in their van. NYC “be there.” I folded my xCulturex shirt and organized a ride east.

Arriving in NYC, turns out the van I was to be in wasn’t really there. Still another seat was offered, in another car, and for the next 2 weeks I rode the vegan straight edge train cross country, going to shows and taking notes. My role was an observational one, strictly non-participatory. For two weeks I stood to the side watching, critiquing,

looking left and right wondering if the “scene” facet of vegan straight edge could still count me in.

The x’d fists flailed, the “declaration of war” sing-alongs roared. It was 1994 all over again. Then my stint with the tour closed. After thinking about my assessment I halted down a ruling: inconclusive. Like anything, the closer you get, the more obvious the blemishes. The first time around my window to vegan straight edge came through zines and lyric sheets. This time, tainted by personal contact with some in the bands, my respect comes a little more guarded. Yet, for all but a few, I have to believe them when they say they believe their own words, believe in the end of man’s hierarchy over this earth, in Vegan Revolution. I have to, even if sellout statistics show otherwise. I believe because I want to. I believe because of people like Andreas san Diego.

AUGUST 2003

August 28th; a bomb explodes at the headquarters of the Chiron Corp in Emeryville, CA. September 26th: another explosion tears through the headquarters of Shaklee Inc. Both companies participating in or with ties to animal research. A communiqué is issued stating the explosives will double in size until all companies sever ties to Huntington Life Sciences (contract vivisection lab), and declaring “now this war truly has two sides.” October 5th: The FBI holds a press conference issuing a warrant for the arrest of Andreas San Diego. A profile on Americas Most wanted follows. San Diego becomes a federal fugitive facing over 50 years in prison. Andreas — veteran of the mid 90s vegan sxe scene — is on the run for his life.

XTWO SIDES AND A LINE THAT DIVIDESX

These are the stories written from the history books. Vegan Straight Edge as a force. The years from 1990 to 1997 saw vegan sxe kids — or a few of them — make hardcore a threat, maybe for the first time. Vegan Reich set it off in 1990; accurately capturing the urgency of the struggle for all life. Vegan straight edge had arrived. And with the intrusion into the comfort zone of armchair radicals everywhere came a correlating backlash. They called them privileged white kids, when the visionary and lyricist of Vegan Reich wasn’t even white. They said they’d sell out in a couple years, when 14 years later the man behind it all is still vegan and standing by every word. Vegan Reich upset all the right people and inspired a few others to action. Militant animal liberation and radical ecology moved into an apolitical youth crew scene. “Taking a stand” shifted from a posi-sing-along to a necessary move for all life on earth. The call was urgent, and a lot of kids took it and ran...

Again, the pary history ignores. The torched egg farm trucks and closed fur stores. Protests and outreach. Vegan straight edge meccas like Memphis, Salt Lake City, and

Syracuse becoming hotbeds of both direct action and above ground activism. The mark of hardcore kids on the latter was clear. And while few were ever caught for the former set, we can only guess whether the surge of clandestine actions tied into the rise of vegan sxe. A butcher shop is sabotaged in Syracuse in 1995. Graffiti left at the scene reads: “liberation’s crusade has begun.” Now check your Earth Crisis lyric sheet and decide for yourself...

The parts left from the books, from discussions of punk as a political force. Vegan Straight Edge kids stepping to the frontlines. Like the SHAC 7 –activists indicted this year on “animal enterprise terrorism” — 5/7 of whom are vegan sxe, or came from that scene. The group Compassion Over Killing began small as the first animal rights group started by hardcore kids, now a national group with clout and reach beyond measure. Countless activists were forged by the vegan sxe scene. Numerous vegan sxe kids saw prison time, including Benjamin Persky, Peter Schnell, Jacob Kennison, Alex Smolak, and more. Hardcore kids making a difference. Even Karl Crisis adopted and rehabilitated animals from a wildlife shelter.

But you take the good with the bad. With former vegan sxe-ers like Kevin Tucker, now actualizing his most macho fantasies bowhunting for deer in Pennsylvania. David Agranoff of Voicebox zine is turncoat, giving sanctuary to a known ALF informant in San Diego. Josh Ellerman and Geoff Kearns cooperated with the FBI in testimony against other activists, both sitting in Leavenworth prison and a mansion in Venice, respectively. And given their crimes, neither dwelling is quite as appropriate as that which they deserve: a coffin.

The Firestorm would serve the world well to start with a few in our ranks. But with thousands who can credit vsxe for the evolution of their political consciousness, for a springboard towards doing something for the world, the imposters won’t negate its worth. Not those mentioned above, or below...

Let’s burn some bridges.

TO HELL AND BACK

Vegan Straight Edge since 1994, feels good to finally say it. Finally, after years of my written output cornering me into scenes I was never a part of, kids I would never hang out with. Yes, if anyone ever needed to get out of a scene, it was me.

Let me explain. Three years ago, I saw a humble piece of my writing published by an anarchist collective and appropriated by the scene that surrounded it. I dotted the last “i” and was thrust into a bizarre and foreign crowd, one I didn’t endorse nor understand. Just short of “crust” in one direction and “hippie” in another. Some called themselves “primitivists,” some “CrimethInc-ers,” others just “soldiers in the struggle.” The only consistent thread running through them: Anarchist.

My friends and I had long considered ourselves anarchists, if you forced us to put a name on it and temporarily concern ourselves with the narrow issue of the political

arrangement of one species on earth. The Vegan Straight Edge scene and animal rights struggle had already imparted an anti-capitalist ethic. The supremacy of Nature's Law was my understanding since birth, never something I had to label, be it "primitivist" or anything else. By most measures, myself and this new crowd was a union meant to be. Or so it seemed from a distance.

My writing had put me in this circuit, and I saw no reason not to embrace it. But right away, something was off. That summer I went house to house, scene to scene. First it was an anarchist house in Greensboro, then another in Lake Worth FL, Pensacola...The kids talked revolution, but talk was all it was. This post-WTO anarchist movement was almost entirely critique based. Words mistaken for actions. A uniform fashion of torn t-shirts and beards. Everyone messed up on drugs and alcohol. An unseen level of self-importance without a resume of accomplishments to back it up. Loud and constant talk of police and surveillance, boosting themselves up as being a part of something important enough for the police to surveil. Flowery talk of "smashing hierarchy," yet I hadn't met another vegan in a month. Every cause was a "single issue" except the one that was fashionable that week — transgender, white privilege...Critique, critique, critique, critique. I thought of the truest of lines: Those that can, do. Those that can't, talk about it.

In the three years since, I've met some good people from these circles, some that have went on to become good friends. Sweeping generalizations serve no one. Yet a crowd from which I've met over a thousand kids, I'd put less than 30 as something I'd call tolerable. Or honest. Or level-headed. Or into it for anything more than because it makes casting stones at everyone else a righteous act. And these are the foot soldiers of the new punk based political movement. Green Rage for This Bike is a Pipe Bomb. Shame, shame. The more I acquainted myself with these kids, the more of my vomit that had to be cleaned from the hemp carpet of their "collective house."

I guess I stopped caring for "unity". It's time to say that with these people, I have no allegiance. What they call "liberating their desires" I call hedonism. What they call "releasing their natural scent" I call being filthy. What they call "the actualization of revolutionary thought" I call throwing up stencils in an alley now and then.

While most such "anarcho anti-capitalists" are posing revolutionary, trading in their birth names for cool anarchist ones like Squirrel Leaf Woodhuck Nut Bunny, the real revolutionaries are elsewhere. Like Andreas San Diego, not changing their name but having them taken, traded for Federal Fugitive 13445892. While your poseur "affinity gourg" is discussing the white privilege implications of jaywalking, people are out there quietly laying down critique for action, across the tactical spectrum: from filing Freedom of Information Act requests to arson.

So goodbye, bozos. I guess there comes a time to start drawing lines. Stop forcing what will never be. Cease diplomacy with that which cannot be reasoned with. I tried. Tried to bring compassion to your "movement." Tried to drill into your head that you cannot "smash capitalism" while emboodying its cruelest forms of indifference and sadism, but I guess the dread locks got in the way. Ideologically, I may agree with every

one of you, almost to the letter — but your applications are a joke. Your prioritized scale a mess. The house next door is burning down as you stand to the side, looking away as burning bodies go flailing past, having an anarchist discussion circle on fire as a symptom of white privilege. Disgraceful.

VEGAN SXE IS WATCHING, AND THERES NOWHERE TO HIDE...

What I learned from Vegan Straight Edge is hate and love. Compassion and Justice. Ten years in the ring, my every step challenged by this culture of escapism and blood. Every step a challenge, and every challenge accepted. And each time, it was I who got the last laugh. From coronary heart disease to another wasted night of booze and regret. Ten years of resistance, of confrontation by detractors who have yet to offer a single argument to defeat it.

Veganism: Because 10 billion creatures are killed each year in the US alone. Because it's not merely "another issue," but the source of most of the suffering on earth. Because the greatest consumer of the earth's resources — water, food, and energy — isn't "the rich," it's animals. Because injustice doesn't end with non-human animals, but that's the bulk of it. Because there is nothing just or righteous about a political framework that ignores 99% of life on earth.

Straight Edge: Because alcohol and drugs are pacifying tools of government and industry. Because they make one submissive and unquestioning. Because as a substitute for all creativity, drugs make one a boring person. Because they are powerful tools to neutralize opposition. Because pulling the plug from your brain for a while ignores the issue of what it is about your life that would bring you to wish this in the first place. Because drinking culture — the vomit, the liquid band aids for insecurity, the empty "s/he's fun to drink with" friendships — will never be any less degenerate. Because if you're a "punk" or "radical," going to parties and getting drunk with the boys, I wonder how you convince yourself you're any different than the frat boy up the street. Or for that matter — your parents.

Vegan Straight Edge because while no one is saying it's an end, it's the best stepping stone I know of.

I look through those old zines from Holocaust to Anxiety Closet — reminded of what brought me here all those years ago. The sense of urgency. When you see injustice, do something. When your job is bleeding you of life, quit that job and live in a storage closet. It was about people making a difference — for the world and themselves. From education, to protest, to being criminals for their lives and others.

Such is my home. Standing here years later, in the ruins of what was, I can count my true vegan sxe friends on the fingers of one hand. The kids go, but the foundation remains timeless, more solid than the Nalgene bottle on your utility belt, drunkee.

Yet not only a stance in opposition to the greatest sickness and injustice of our culture. A challenge to the most degenerate elements of our subculture.

DAYS OF DREADLOCKS, NIGHTS OF ROADKILL

From vegan sxe's first wave, some of us are still here, and still trying to "bring it back." Not just "back to," but back from.

Straight Edge lost its politics, trading it for something a little easier on the brain if not the eyes: hair dye and makeup. And so opened a void in underground music, one quickly filled. Filled by what the political underground music scene has regressed to: critique-based, feel good anarchist politics. Chatter from deluded swarms of self-important pseudo-activists, Carharts flapping in the wind...all of it, the sound of one very bad joke that's just not funny. Bike for the revolution. Dismantling capitalism one homebrew at a time. Dress up your every selfish move as "revolutionary."

And the soundtrack to this parade of self-importance: bands like Rambo. Carharts, and bandanna comedy troupes whose politics and imagery were a slap in the face to those really fighting — not just with words, but actions. It is not that the actions of this crowd fall short of, say, those alleged to have been carried out by Andreas San Diego. For in that category, I'm no better. Its the exaggerated self-importance. The dressed up as "revolution." Critique as a substitute for actually doing something. And by "something," your incestuous anarchist discussion group falls a little short.

The real tragedy is not that a small handful of good kids get caught up in a bad scene. It's this new wave of post-WTO anarchism as a siphon. For so many kids without direction, wanting only to be better people and make the world a better place, this Hedonistic Anarchism of 2004 will be their Vegan Straight Edge of 1994. Flocks of kids who 10 years ago would have involved themselves with something as volatile, positive and political as vsxe, now find a Rambo record and copy of Species Traitor — and what happens then is rarely pretty. Those who would have found vsxe as a stepping ston now find New Wave Anarchism as an apex. Picture sitting on a boxcar, double fisting roadkill and a 40oz., and feeling really good about yourself. Yes, my vision of anarchy begins with the end of most anarchists.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

Abnegation, Gatekeeper. Framework. Canon. S.E.V.I.N. Morning Again. Chokehold. Raid. 108. Birthright. Falling Down. The Setup. Contempt. I spend a lot of time looking at these records, wondering where they all are now. With some, I don't have to wonder. Iggy Abnegation is boozing it up in the club scene. Damien of Morning again is playing bar rock over soft-core porn vidoes, taking long drags of Camel Lights

and eating yogurt. Or that's what my roommate said he ordered when they went out once. The Setup vocalist left nothing but Egg McMuffin wrappers behind when he moved from his house in San Diego: Or that's what his former roommate told me when we snuck into opening night of Petco Stadium last spring. Steve Lovett of Raid is married with kids, working as a forest ranger in California. Chris Logan of Chokehold sold out veganism and the animals, but still clings to sxe. Like not doing drugs goes anywhere in the integrity department when your every meal is a death sentence for another. A lot of sad stories, ones of apathy and weakness. Proving insincere hardcore vocalists are a dime a dozen, and with even less.

But their words remain. Contempt taught me compassion didn't equate to pacifism. 108, that my life was worth more than a 9 to 5 prison. Raid, that "scene unity" with those we despise is not only overrated, but dangerous. Vegan Reich imparted a sense of urgency. Culture, that vsxe was a multi-issue threat to the worst parts of this culture. Resurrection, that apathy was inexcusable. Earth Crisis, that vegan straight edge was merely a stepping stone. Rob R Rock, that while veganism might change the world, it won't make you a good MC.

Flash ahead to 2004. No longer a strong presence in the US, I watched vegan straight edge retreat to the sidelines. Silent, but like the dormant but still active volcano, a thing at times heard rumbling in the distance. Total Liberation Tour 2004. Bands like Cherem and Risen. While the current slight upswing of vsxe may yet again fall to the forces of black hair and eyeliner, Carharts and alcoholism, its message and merit as a springboard for change will never die. As I sit to pen these words, I'm reminded of this never so much as this night.

SUMMER 2004

May 17th, 2004 in Provo Utah: thirteen animals were removed from an Agricultural Research lab at Brigham Young University. Six weeks later, two fires were set, causing \$30,000 damage. Graffiti at the scene read: "This is war."

Flash ahead to four days ago. September 2004 in Provo UT. Last day of our book and film tour. Kelly shows her documentary film on an animal rights campaign, takes questions, and says goodnight. She is approached by a vegan sxe kid who introduces himself as Josh, and asks if she has a minute. Solemnly, he begins his story. Several weeks previous, his home was raided by the FBI. They arrested his roommate and best friend on suspicion of arson and burglary in the BYU raids. He immediately confessed and snitched out Josh as an accomplice. Friday Josh would enter court and — facing mounting circumstantial evidence, the testimony of his "friend", and the advice of his lawyer — plead guilty. The plea agreement called for Josh to serve a minimum of 5 years in federal prison.

We took Josh to the only thing open in Provo at that hour, Denny's, for the rest of his story, or as much as he could tell. From being introduced to the atrocity of

meat and dairy production by a table at a hardcore show, to where he is now. He'd made some mistakes, and he admitted as such, but sitting there I knew the power of a thousand Against me! fans — flopping around on the floor spewing some vague desire to “smash capitalism” with no plan for doing so — wouldn't touch the power of Josh's alleged actions. Of one kid who didn't tap his toe waiting for “the revolution, “ but rather asked himself what he was going to do for the world today, and — according to the FBI affidavit — made it happen.

Tomorrow Kelly and I walk into the Salt Lake City Federal Courthouse to support Josh in what may be his last moments of freedom. A man placed in prison for rescuing others from theirs.

XXX

I look back on it all, this scene that has given so much to the world — activists and teachers, books and bombs — and received little back but venom and scorn. Looking past the frauds and sellouts — the Aggranof's and Ellermans's — I see its graces and gifts at every turn. And I think of Josh and Andreas every time I step outside my house — or 4 feet in towns like Olympia or Portland — and meet another self-important anarcho bozo stroking his chest and talking about the revolution, turning into an image what some have given their lives for. For those people, time to step from the dumpstered scabies infested couch and decide what side you're on: comfortable, critique-based pseudo-activism or the fate of all life on earth.

To the rest: stay vegan, drug free, and forever above the law... — Mack Evasion

Endnotes

1) No one is proposing vegan sxe as a direct solution to the worlds problems. These opinions are written in context of hardcore.

2) State of vsxe, 2004: www.xcatalystx.com or www.xrebuildingx.com.

3) Veg Break List : a deliberately offensive registry of where the vsxe of yesteryear are today: www.xevasionx.com/vegbreaklist.

4) Thanks to Blake of Parallax for the 108 pin and unintentional fuel for this column.

5) Thanks to Kelly for pulling many of the facts you just read.

6) Vegan Straight Edge retrospective interview publication in progress. Soliciting contact with all heavily involved with vegan sxe in the 1990s.

7) No disrespect intended to Days of War, Nights of Love, by the way.

8) Still looking for a good analog copy of the earth crisis 1993 demo. Mine was stolen from a van outside the Fireside in Chicago with my whole foods juice punch card

9) Yes, I'm an anarchist, anti-capitalist, etc. and so on and so on.

I'll be the last man standing xxx

Mack/245-M Mt Herman rd PMB .124/Scotts Valley CA 95066; evasion@crimethinc.com
or www.xevasionx.com

The Ted K Archive

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