

Marty is a Black skinhead who's been in Chicago's skinhead scene around 12 years.

DS: First off, when most people think of skinheads, they think of white-supremacists, neo-nazis...

First of all, REAL skinheads aren't racist. Skinheads basically originated in late '60's Britain, between a marriage of working class British youth in the mod scene, who were heavily influenced by American soul and R&B, and recent West Indian immigrant youth, who brought with them the tough, sharp style of backstreet Kingston rude boys, or 'rudies,' as they were known, and ska, rocksteady and reggae music. Boneheads, or bald racists who we consider not worthy of the term 'skinhead,' first appeared in 1975 in England, when there was bitter economic competition, competing black and white workers for dead end jobs. Racist gangs like the National Front seized on that, luring numbers of disaffected, unemployed urban British youth, gave them easy solutions, using the old, tired stereotype of niggers taking their jobs. Hence, the indirect 'birth' of nazi 'skinheads' in England, biting off traditional skin style, but advocating some murderous master race shit.

DS: So what exactly does being a skinhead mean to you?

Well, without sounding like a typical skinhead spouting off some rehashed rhetoric about being patriotic and having pride in yourself, I think the essence of skinhead is a total passion for life, and a sense of loyalty, whether to one's crew or oneself. There's an old saying 'To thine own self be true.' I also think the skin scene is a lot more than paying lip service to how working class one really is, but actually being intimately involved in working class struggles, like anti-racism. I think in terms of an international working class, that we're all basically in the same class condition, that racism is an international phenomena that pits worker against worker, and only a united, multiracial working class will defeat it.

DS: Now, you were a skin during the 'skinhead wars.' can you talk about that?

In Chicago's south side, what was considered the earliest documented report of new-nazi 'skinhead' activity surfaced in 1984, with Romantic Violence (later known as C.A.S.H., or Chicago Area Skinheads). Boneheads attempted to organize on our scene, passing out flyers at punk shows. Not just here, but in most major cities, it was as if there was this huge resurgence of racism, with a slew of hate crimes everywhere. It was real nasty in Texas, California, Florida, and other southern states, with WAR (White Aryan Resistance), the American Front and the Northern Hammerskins chapters sprouting up like weeds. After a series of nasty streetfights with local boneheads attempting either organizing, or just hanging out, many of us decided to start some sort of crew, some organization to seriously challenge these bastards. So, in January '89, about 100 skinheads and their friends got together to create a network of totally anti-racist, anti-fascist skinheads, called ARA (Anti Racist Action), who embraced radical, working class politics, and felt, like Malcolm X, that racists should be physically fought by any means necessary, while identifying with other working class kids, hip-hop, hardcore, metal, punk, straight edge kids. It was all good, if it was some genuine, smash racists, freedom for the workers, stop police brutality type shit, no matter what a kid's style, it was all inner city, urban working class youth based, was the thinking. Conscious, positive hip-hop like Public Enemy, Paris, Poor Righteous Teachers,

and X-Clan, found a place next to crusty, smash-the-state spike and leathered Chaos UK and Exploited punk stuff in our music collections, and you'd see punk, hip-hop, skin kids kicking to each other's shows. Kinda like Afrika Bambaataa having to share space with skinhead/hardcore band Warzone at club CBGB's, developing a mutual respect and identification with each other's style and message. Lots of young black and Latino brothers [got] involved. So, it was like a virtual gang war on the streets in a lotta cities, battling the boneheads; shootouts in Denver, stabbings in Chicago and Minneapolis, critical beatdowns in New York. The skinhead shit was dangerous, political violence, and incarceration and police repression was routine, with cops having no clue to the distinctions of skinheads, and bald racist boneheads. The bonehead scene retreated, for the moment, as interracial crews of anti-racist skins fought back.

DS: Where did Black skins fit into this?

Brothers played a key role, and weren't running behind white boys, blindly following orders. But we differed as far as organizational tactics, and mostly over political leanings, with me supporting a class-based, international struggle, young Marxist type analysis, and their Afrocentric, black-only, cultural nationalist rhetoric, with I totally supported but didn't see as a means to organize kids against the racists. Talking about the glorious achievements of ancient Ethiopia wasn't gonna move kids to smash the racists off the streets.

DS: What kind of reaction do you feel you get from other brothers, being a skinhead?

This one's pretty deep too, since I love black culture and all that it represents, though I'm still involved in a predominately white scene. It's a total paradox, which sometimes leaves me bitter inside; having to remain true to my roots in the black community, while staying in a scene



l-r: Sonny (later surprised everyone when he got a swastika tattooed on his face), Marty (minus the tattoos), Quinn (who now lives in Texas), and Crunch (who grew dreads and started a reggae band when he left the skin scene.)

"BLACK SKINHEADS"

by Mofu

"First off, REAL Skinheads aren't racist..."

that's historically done nothing but appropriate black cultural forms (reggae, ska, rude boy style). I do get weird looks when I get on the train to visit my family in the black community, but since tattoos and shaved heads are so prevalent now among urban youth in general, I don't stick out as much, and even get occasional compliments on my tattoos. The politics for a while seemed totally contradictory: the 'hood representing black love, responsibility, and obligation to family, while the skin scene had a nihilistic, live-for-today, fuck the world flavor about it. Over the years I've developed my own little philosophy which embraces the best of both cultures; the international spirit or working class solidarity from the skin scene, and the earthy, nurturing and positive vibe of the black community. I never liked to feel as though I had to choose sides, but I would stay with the skin scene, who at least frowned down on the cross materialism and plastic R&B pop culture so common in the black community.