

ESSAY :

Both cities, London and Los Angeles, have been cultural dictators by global impressions for years, and the punk movement was no different. Hardcore punk dominated the L.A scene whilst London exploded in a grimy, punk rock frenzy in the late 1970s. This work explores two prominent photographers who documented the defining era of punk on both sides of the pond, Edward Colver in Los Angeles and Syd Shelton in London.

Syd Shelton's documentation of the "Rock Against Racism" movement in London in the late 1970s and early 80s is some of the most fundamental visual representations of the growth of British counterculture and its necessity in a time of potentially neo-Nazi power. As the National Front paraded through cities and streets, promoting extreme, right-wing neo-fascist ideology and gaining members daily, members of the Kartoon Klowns; Red Saunders, Rodger huddle, Jo Wredford and Peter Bruno initialised an anti-statement. Writing to the NME in 1976 in complaint against Eric Clapton's racist comments and open support of far-right politician Enoch Powell, and in response the Rock Against Racism movement was born.

Taken in Grove Passage, a pulsing hotspot of an often rebellious, counterculture scene defined by its association with punk and alternative music, community struggles, and the rise of a multicultural, working-class identity; we are forced straight into the action. This area is historically crucible for music, especially for the time Shelton was documenting the area. The "Rock against racism" movement was prominent in the Ladbroke Grove area. Hosting many gigs, bringing together diverse audiences including punk, new-wave fans, and activists against social and political issues in the country at the time it was more than a hotspot; it was the place to be. Contextually, Britain was in the "winter of discontent" as strikes and inflation weakened a labour government. PM at the time (James Callaghan) was unable to control inflation and wage demands, leading to major public sector strikes that caused significant disruption. Following this, Thatcher won the election in May of 79, which started a domino effect of strife and oppression for poor working-class members of society. Shelton seems to want to express this anger and resentment of the way the government have treated the poor, as the viewer we see this heavily in the weathered, dangerous, serious expressions from the boys in the image. The two boys make brilliant, stark subjects for the image to encapsulate the anti nazi movement, in their sense of fashion and their intimidating stares. Shelton captures a moment of hazy, angst-filled judgement from the boys, displayed most prominently in their threateningly casual nature and stare. The direct address from both subjects create an intimidating notion of power despite their obvious youth, however they appear much older and more weathered than they should be. This furthered, we see Shelton trying to depict the lack of nurture and care from this government toward their youth. Consequently, they find outlets in music, art, and differentiation from any form of societal standard. As an initial reaction to the image, I was struck with a powerful coolness from the subjects, they are raw and real and are seen as dangerous. intimidating and representative of a time more openly rebellious