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"When we talk about cloning in modern genetics, it is merely another way of describing the ability to reproduce a sequence of amino acids. To create a viable organism, you have to have a proper developmental environment, and there simply isn't such a thing in a petri dish."

Let's stop right here for a moment. I know what you're thinking: No, I didn't accidentally hand in my biology term paper in place of a Bad Religion piece. The previous quote came from the mouth of Greg Graffin, lead singer of the seminal punk combo.

Now, let's continue.

"I myself have discovered some localities in Wyoming and Colorado that have remains of the oldest known vertebrates," Graffin claims. "I've found the remains of little fishes that lived about 480 million years ago. As a matter of fact, the bone fragments that I'm working on are the earliest fragments of bone recorded on the planet. These little fragments still have protein in them, believe it or not. It's possible to get DNA sequences that way, but it's still a long way from having a sequence to being able to create a viable organism."

How often do you read an interview where a punk-rock guy—or any kind of musician, for that matter—discusses the possibility of whether or not it's feasible to extract dinosaur DNA like they did in Jurassic Park? Not too often! What qualifies the 28-year-old Graffin to lecture us on this topic? Well, by night he may be Bad Religion's preachy, sociopolitical ranter, but by day he holds a doctorate in zoology and is a professor at Cornell University, where he teaches a course in paleontology.

To end this seminar, what did Professor Graffin think of the film?

"It was really entertaining, but I was disappointed that



Kristin Callahan

B A

# PUNK AND DISORDER

by Michael Moses

the paleontologists weren't there to solve any kind of problem other than just trying to save their asses. They might as well have been investment bankers."

Well, at least we know he's no film critic.

Bad Religion's unique combination of folksy melodies and vicious slam beats (coupled with Graffin's controversial lyrics) have made them arguably the most relevant punk band on the scene today. Their newest album, *Recipe for Hate*, is a loose-limbed fusion of pop's ear

friendliness and hardcore's combustible riffage. With guest appearances by Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder and Concrete Blonde's Johnette Napolitano, *Recipe* may be the album that lifts Bad Religion out of the underground and deposits them into the mainstream. For the past 13 years, Bad Religion (Graffin, along with bassist Jay Bentley, guitarists Brett Gurewitz and Greg Hetson, and drummer Bobby Schayer) have been in the unenviable position of being known as the most popular unknown

band in the world. This despite the fact that, year after year, they've consistently managed to sell out 1,000-seat venues on tour after tour, and, year after year, all of their albums get rave reviews and sell well into the six-digit range.

"It's been a thorn in our ass," says Graffin, "but we keep our edge because of that lack of recognition."

They may soon have to find another way to keep themselves sharp, because hot on the heels of the release of

# D R E L I G I O N



Lisa Johnson

## ERLY

*Recipe for Hate* comes a five-album deal with Atlantic, a move that marks the end of the band's 13-year independence (all their albums have been put out on their own label, Epitaph). With the big time for Bad Religion just around the corner, RIP recently spoke to Graffin about art, acceptance and academia.

**RIP:** Explain to me how a band that's put out seven records that have all sold in the six-digit range, a band

RIP • FEBRUARY

sells out 1,000-seat venues consistently, manages to stay unknown.

**GREG GRAFFIN:** Amazing isn't it? A few months ago in L.A., Bad Religion, Faith No More and Keith Richards were all playing right down the road from one another on the same night, in the same-size venues. Our show was sold out, but there wasn't one mention of it in the local press or any of the local rock magazines. That says it all to me. The press wasn't motivated to cover it,

and if the press isn't motivated to cover something—regardless of what they think of you—you stay unknown.

**RIP:** Do you think it's possible to keep the punk edge and antiestablishment vibe while accepting checks from a major corporation?

**GREG:** Don't let it fool you: Epitaph is a pretty major corporation in itself. A lot of independent labels see a lot of turnover of money. When you talk about major, you're just talking about how much money's going in and out. I think the main difference is that the independent labels aren't as profit-oriented; they're more interested in promoting the art itself. Major labels are more interested in keeping a line as a corporation, and that means making a profit. So, no, I don't think that now that we receive a portion of our check from a major corporation it detracts from what we're saying. You're basically asking if it's hypocritical, and I don't think it is.

**RIP:** But you yourself said that Bad Religion have always managed to keep their edge because of their lack of recognition.

**GREG:** Yeah, I said that.

**RIP:** So now that you're on a major label, with inevitable recognition on the way, what happens to the edge?

just because we're on a major label now doesn't mean we're going to stop.

**RIP:** What do you think about the fact that the mainstream is embracing a harder form of music now, and what does that say about society today?

**GREG:** I don't know what it says about society, but I

**GREG:** They're actually more similar than you might think. They're both based on sharing ideas with people. You get feedback on those ideas, and people ask you for your opinion, and that's very rewarding. In teaching you're able to do more deep analysis. Music is challenged because it's such a short format. Any one thought



Lisa Johnson

**GREG:** There goes the edge—we're a Top 40 band now. There's two ways to look at this. Number one: I'm not sure that it will actually bring us more recognition. I think it's very likely that we might continue with the gradual influx of new fans that we've gotten every year with the last four records. Each one has been a little more popular than the last, and then those fans go out and buy the whole catalog. Atlantic is hoping that it will do a lot more than just trickle in a few new fans. For us, if it doesn't happen, it's not the end of the world. Don't forget: That edge is what makes us marketable. We have no intention of softening our music, because that would be like suicide.

**RIP:** Did you have any reservations about signing with a major?

**GREG:** Yeah, and I'm still having them. But the majors are more sophisticated about this type of music than they used to be, so there's less chance of us destroying our career than there used to be. Using a massive distribution network is something that should be explored. If all goes well, everyone will think it was a great thing to do. If it doesn't, we can always go back to Epitaph, so it's not too big a risk.

**RIP:** What about your core fans? You know the underground scene is notorious for dumping on acts that try to expand their audiences. They get upset that the bands are no longer their personal inside secrets.

**GREG:** You're right. We've actually seen that happen to us over the last three records. I've noticed a trend where it seems that every year we lose a certain portion of our core following, but it's always made up for by our new fans, so that's something that isn't really foreign to us. We have a long history of writing relevant music, and

sure am glad they're doing it. I've always thought the punk movement was good for the common man, because if the "do it for yourself" ideals prevalent in punk spread through the populace, it would make society a better place. A lot of people differ with me on that. They'd rather keep it a small boys club that only elite members can be a part of. I've always been against that. I've always maintained that hardcore and punk are more like folk music, and that they're good for the common man. Maybe this is a sign that this music will spread and achieve its original goal or potential. You'd like to think that people are *thinking* more about the music nowadays, and that maybe they're more drawn to music that's lyrically meaningful.

**RIP:** It's nice to think that.

**GREG:** Yeah.

**RIP:** Even if it isn't true.

**GREG:** Yeah.

**RIP:** So what happens to the underground scene when the underground goes mainstream?

**GREG:** A new underground scene starts. Underground is just a reaction to what's popular, so this is interesting: Punk and hardcore were a reaction to arena rock and the big, overblown production of bands of the '70s. What happens when a club format goes to the forefront? You can't go back to arena rock, so maybe there'll be a new reaction, where it'll be really pompous music with elaborate production that'll be played in small venues made to look much more grandiose than they really are.

**RIP:** Headed up by Kansas and Styx.

**GREG:** Yeah, exactly.

**RIP:** Changing the subject, how does teaching fulfill you that singing in Bad Religion doesn't?

can only be explored for three minutes, because songs are short. But in teaching, one single thought or one single question can be explored for an entire semester. You can easily create volumes of work from a single question. I'm actually taking a year off from teaching this year.

**RIP:** To devote to the band?

**GREG:** To devote to the band and to devote to my research. My research has really been falling behind the goals I set, because I've been touring with the band and teaching, and that leaves very little time. With teaching out of the way for awhile, I can devote more time to research and still be with the band.

**RIP:** Have you ever had any students sign up for your class because they were Bad Religion fans?

**GREG:** No. Thank God that hasn't happened yet. I've tried to keep the two very separate. If someone's coming in to hear me talk about a laboratory, I want them to be there because they want to hear my ideas, not because they like one of the songs. I've gotten letters from some high-school students who said that they wanted to be biology majors so that they could explore some of the issues I've brought up in some of our songs.

**RIP:** Do you ever have difficulty keeping your two lives separate?

**GREG:** It's easy to keep them separate behavior-wise by just being professional. By that I mean I don't bring promotional materials to school to give away to my students or anything like that. I don't wear Bad Religion T-shirts when I'm lecturing.

**RIP:** And then, to keep that consistency, you don't wear a lab coat onstage.

**GREG:** Exactly. •