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IT'S NOT ALL POLITICS

"OUR BAND NAME NEVER REALLY REPRESENTED ANY KIND OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS FEELINGS."

When Bad Religion released *The Empire Strikes First* in 2004, our country, along with the rest of the world, was full of tension. The war in Iraq commenced, with many people seeing it as unnecessary, if not illegal.

Songs on *Empire*, such as "Let Them Eat War" and "Social Suicide" echoed the times, dealing with issues like US hegemony and corporate interference in global politics.

"At that time," guitarist Brett Gurewitz says, "everyone was super pissed about the buildup and launching of the war."

Take a look at the world now and you'll see that...well, that things aren't very different. We're still in Iraq, George Bush is still in the White House and corporate America is business as usual.

But instead of being redundant, Bad Religion wanted to shift in a more personal direction.

"The new record isn't as political," Gurewitz says. "The lyrics are more a reflection of what we've been through as people and not nearly as political."

On June 26 of this year, Bad Religion will release *New Maps of Hell*, which Gurewitz hails as "a modern classic."

"We're drawing from our earliest roots, our edgiest stuff," he says. "We tried to push our song-craft and create more melodic hooks."

The change in direction is interesting for a band that has been known in the past for their politically inclined lyrics. Singer Greg Graffin earned a PhD in evolutionary paleontology from Cornell and has contributed essays to *Seed Magazine*, which focuses on science and culture. Bill Moyers articles are also posted on the band's website, showing

their tendency for progressive politics.

Gurewitz says that "I've always been a liberal, progressive thinker who is skeptical of the world around me." He adds that his worldview is "basically the antithesis of conservatism."

Bad Religion formed in 1980 at the start of Ronald Reagan's new conservatism. The band's lyrics reflected their distaste in not only the Reagan administration, but also the emergence of evangelical Christian leaders such as Jerry Falwell, who you'll remember as the man claiming Tinky-Winky of *Teletubbies* was a homosexual. But Gurewitz denies that the band name indicates a complete aversion to religion.

"Our band name never really represented any kind of anti-religious feelings," Gurewitz explains. "It was more a reaction to the climate of evangelism that was happening."

Gurewitz—who produced much of Bad Religion's output and owns Epitaph Records, the band's label—left the band in the mid 90s. At this time, Bad Religion was signed to Atlantic Records, where they used a variety of different producers. Ric Ocasek (formerly of The Cars) worked on *The Grey Race*, while 70s icon Todd Rundgren produced *The New America*, which was panned by critics and fans. Gurewitz claims that the album was "not our milestone."

With Gurewitz back on board and the band back on Epitaph, Bad Religion got back to releasing solid, thought provoking albums. But the punk scene had changed from the 1980s. Angry, Mohawk-clad punks have been replaced by a perpetually

nude Pete Wentz and cheering pre-teens. Is Bad Religion disappointed at the lack of substance in today's punk music?

"No, not disappointed," Gurewitz says. "I love music that doesn't say anything. Sometimes."

Gurewitz mentions that his favorite band growing up was The Dickies, who were "a perfect example of mindless music."


"Punk rock wasn't always synonymous with substantive lyrics," he adds.

These days, Gurewitz says that his tastes in music range "all over the map." He loves My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy as well as lesser known acts like The Sungirls and The Gallows, who he claims are "the best punk band to come around in the past ten years."

This variety is reflected in Epitaph's recent signings. Whereas Epitaph was originally a punk centered label, these days it's not uncommon to see an Atmosphere track pop on a *Punk O' Rama* disc.

Gurewitz says that Epitaph's decision to branch out was made in 2002 when "we decided we're not hearing any good punk bands."

Since then, Epitaph has signed everything from folk to hip-hop music. As a result, the label has caught some flack from the punk community.

"It's somewhat polarizing in the punk scene," Gurewitz says. "But who cares if people are pissed. They can vote with their paycheck." 

by Joel Foster

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