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RIP

MAY 1996

PANTERA BUCKIN' THE TRENDS

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there's more...*

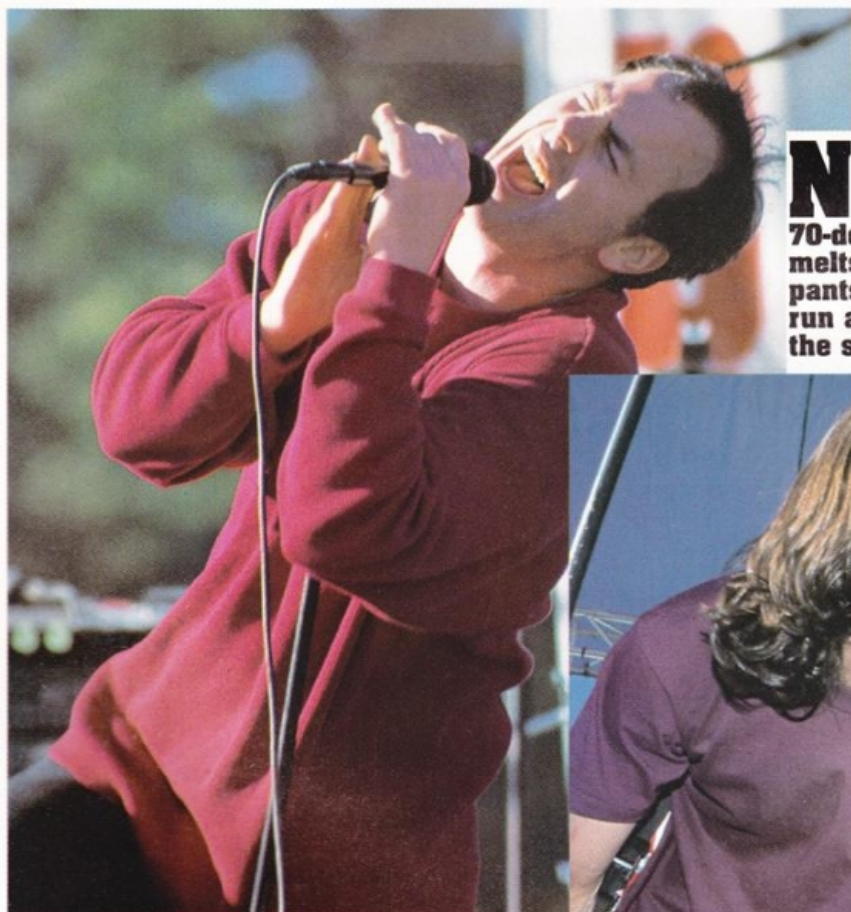
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Bad Religion's Intelligent



Above: Grappling Graffin



Right: Bad-ass bassist and boarder Bentley

Nothing in sunny Southern California is typical—including a mid-Winter day in the mountains. As the temperatures hover around the 70-degree mark and the mostly man-made snow melts, several hundred snowboarders in baggy pants and T-shirts make way for the punkers to run around in a music-inspired circular frenzy in the snow. They, and many others, made the trek

to Bear Mountain Ski Resort for the third annual BoardAID, an AIDS awareness charity event that was originally started after Transworld Publications' marketing director, Fran Richards, read an article in RIP about how Dave Mustaine overcame drugs and looked to snowboarding as his new "high."

Most of the boarders probably don't care about any of that. They're here to board and see the main event: **Bad Religion**.

"Why are we doing BoardAID? Well, I'll tell ya..." screamed Bad Religion vocalist Greg Graffin as he paced across the stage. "That actually makes a lot of sense, because Bad Religion is about waking people up—LIFEbeat does the same thing."

Religion

Provocative Parents

BY SCOTT RUSSO of Unwritten Law

Photos by
Kevin Estrada

I want to thank them, and thank everybody who put this huge thing on, and thank the skaters, too. And of course, the snowboarders. Thanks of course to all you guys for coming out. We'll see ya next time, bye-bye!"

Graffin turned as if to leave the stage, but stopped and faced the crowd.

"Just kiddin'! This is a new tune called 'I'm Goin' For A Walk' (actually 'A Walk')." And once again, Bad Religion fired off another song from their latest release, *The Gray Race* (Atlantic Records).

As a teenager, what attracted me to Bad Religion was their call to wake people up, and to do so with intellect. They made ya think—and they still do. They're one of the few bands that have remained true to their sound through all the passing trends. While guitarist Greg Hetson, bassist Jay Bentley and drummer Bobby Schayer hung around the lodge, I talked with Greg and guitarist Brian Baker about their new record, charities, and more.



Above: Incognito
Hetson

Left: Baker baking
in the sun

RIP: So you guys are playing BoardAID. Does Bad Religion do a lot of charities and benefits?

BRIAN BAKER: No, we don't play a lot, but when we play them, they have a sentimental appeal. So this one, LIFEbeat in general, I think, is a lot...

GREG GRAFFIN: Their purpose is a lot like what Bad Religion's purpose is, and that is to provoke people and make them aware of something that is urgent. Bad Religion does it in our songs, and usually it pertains in the human race in some way, but LIFEbeat is more specific.

RIP: Did you guys intend to play LIFEbeat and BoardAID to educate the masses?

GG: No. We'd actually been asked a number of years in a row, and we wanted to, but we never had the opportunity, because we were always on tour.



Bad boys on the mountain: (L-R) Brian, Greg G., Greg H., Bobby & Jay.

BB: This time it was perfect, it's three weeks before our tour, and it's something we've always wanted to do, because of the parallels I was telling you of in the first question.

RIP: When you write lyrics, do you write specifically to educate your listeners?

GG: No. Not specifically. I write specifically to continue the tradition of Bad Religion.

BB: If we had a purpose, I guess it would be...

GG: I mean, education is important to me, but education is not about telling people the right answer.

BB: To us, education is making them think.

GG: Posing a tough question is a great way of educating someone.

RIP: Speaking of education... Greg, you studied extensively at several universities.

GG: Actually, the first year was the University of Wisconsin, a little-known fact! And then I transferred because I couldn't get in-state tuition in Wisconsin. Then I transferred to UCLA. I stayed there for eight years and got an Undergraduate and a Master's in Anthropology, and a Masters in Geology. Then I transferred to Cornell to try to get a PhD. I fell just shy and realized that Bad Religion had a lot more potential than I gave it credit for.

RIP: Were you a professor at Cornell?

GG: No. A common misconception, because people don't really understand that you can teach at a university and not be a professor. When you're working on your PhD, you get paid to teach the laboratory courses, because the professors don't like to get their hands wet. It's called a "teaching associate," some of you know it as a T.A. "My T.A. is really cool. He's in a punk band."

RIP: I understand that Bad Religion was a hobby for the band members for a little while. Which record and what year were the turning points that make the band your career?

BB: Hey, I went to college too, man!

RIP: What college did you go to, Brian?

BB: I went to G.W. (George Washington). And I also went to Georgetown,

and both of them I kind of went to for really no reason at all, and after two years of flopping back and forth, I just stopped, because I had to go on tour with Dag Nasty. I'm still on leave.

GG: I think it was *Stranger Than Fiction*. When we were recording it.

RIP: That's when you fully got into it?

BB: That was definitely the turning point for me, in Bad Religion.

GG: Because Brian realized there was a space opening up shortly after the recording for the tour.

BB: And I decided it would be *no hobby*.

RIP: Brian, you were offered spots in R.E.M. and Bad Religion in the same week. What happened?

BB: I was working at a rehearsal studio and R.E.M.'s producer, Scott Litt, is

a friend of mine. He came in the studio, and he was like "Hey, you wanna go try out for R.E.M.?" I go, "Cool. Beats six bucks an hour." So I went and tried out, and didn't hear anything for a while, and then they called me and said I got it. There were all these people who tried out. I just kinda went in, like, "Okay..." I mean, it sounded fun. And I was like, "Cool! I can, like, quit my job and go on tour," and then Bad Religion called a couple days later and so, I had to call R.E.M. back that day. Because there was just no question. It was, "Do you want to be *in* Bad Religion or do you want to play *with* R.E.M.?" I mean, I like both bands, but I've never not been *in* a band.

GG: "I like both bands"? Thanks, bro! (laughs)

BB: You know what I mean!

GG: "I mean they're both room-temperature bands"!

BB: What I'm saying is, is that it wasn't like...

GG: I understand your position. He doesn't want to say he doesn't have respect for R.E.M....

BB: Of course.

GG: ...but by the same token, he wants to show how great Bad Religion is.

BB: Yeah. I mean it was an easy choice to make.

RIP: The new record's called *The Gray Race*. What does that refer to?

BB: (In a T.A.-like voice) Well, the "gray race" is a metaphor for the human race. Consider this: Humans, uniquely bestowed with the ability to reason, to see things in shades of gray, uncannily choose to build themselves an increasingly black-and-white world. And *this* is our dilemma.

GG: That was excellent, Brian. A very excellent summary.

RIP: What are your favorite songs on the record? Do you have any personal favorites?

GG: This whole album. I listen to it over and over and I don't get tired of it, which is very rare for me. I'm usually tired of our stuff.

BB: They haven't really reared their heads yet. I still like all of them.

RIP: I particularly liked the song "Ten in 2010." How do you feel about overpopulation, and what is the song saying?

GG: I think I kind of look at it like AIDS, because it's kind of a secret unseen

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◀ **Bad Religion** continued from page 58
malady waiting to happen. None of us suffer the consequences of it...

RIP: But we're just living with it now and waiting for it to happen.

GG: No, but we're buffered from it because we have such unbelievable privilege, living in a Westernized, rich civilization. But you go to... I mean, there's a population time-bomb waiting to happen in Southeast Asia, Africa...

BB: You see it in Singapore...

RIP: So is the song less about the United States and more of a global thing?

GG: No, what it's suggesting is that the global thing will start to encroach very quickly when the population starts doubling *every 15 years*.

RIP: Is that the rate it's at right now?

GG: Yeah! So you can only hold your privileged position for so long until there'll be great turmoil. I know it sounds biblical, but...

BB: ...but the effects could be in fact biblical in proportion.

GG: Yes. Worse than floods.

RIP: "Come Join Us" is another song that really caught my ear from the beginning. What is that song talking about?

GG: It's a cynical song, really. It's about cultism and groups who say, y'know, "Come join us." I think, in general, you should really be worried about people who say "Come join us." There's the hospitable way of inviting someone over to your house—those aren't the people who say "Come and join us." The ones who say it are like, independent record labels! Who refer to themselves as, "a family." "Come join the family."

RIP: Or "come join the 'major' family" too. It's the same thing.

GG: Yeah, "Welcome to our nice, happy, familial corporation!"

RIP: That wasn't exactly directed towards political matters, though?

GG: No, no. It's really kind of like a "general" tune. The last verse sums it up nicely. It's from the speaker's perspective, the guy who's singing the song is really the guy who's trying to amass the following, and he says, "*Independent, self-contented revolutionaries,*" he's calling out to people. "*Intellectuals, brave, strong and scholarly/ If you're not one of them, you're us already/ Join us.*"

BB: That was nicely put, Greg.

RIP: BB has accomplished a lot and I hear a lot of global views in Bad Religion's lyrics. How does *The Gray Race* differ? What do you want to accomplish with this record?

BB: I'd just like to continue along the lines of Bad Religion's slow, meandering domination of the world. To quietly, secretly...

GG: ...pervade listeners around the globe.

BB: Yes. Much like an underground "society," if you will

GG: Or a virus.

BB: Yes, we'd like to continue being a virus.

GG: Or a really bad rash! (laughs) A bad fungus.

RIP: On *The Gray Race*, I noticed a lot of octave riffs and leads on the record. Was that your influence or was that more [Greg] Hetson?

BB: I just play that way, so I think that's what it is. It probably *is* me, but that's just the style that I've always played with. I mean, it's like taking my style into Bad Religion—you get this kind of weird combination where you know it's different, but it's not too "out there."

RIP: It enhances how the song feels. I love octaves in punk music.

BB: Oh yeah, totally. I've been doing that since, you know, "the day." I dunno really, that's just the way I play.

RIP: Is it easy stepping into such a visible role in Bad Religion?

BB: It's not easy, but I'm cool with it now. I was never worried about the live performance aspects of it, y'know, because I'm really into playing guitar, and I wasn't worried about, like, "Can I play guitar as good as Brett [Gurewitz, ex-guitarist, ex-songwriter]?" or any of that. It was just the songwriting and bandmember parts that's tough, because I gotta replace somebody who was a big deal. But I'm just learning as I go, and I'm trying.

RIP: (To Brian) Did you write any specific songs on the record, like a whole song?

BB: No. I'd be... I'm worthless without Greg. I collaborated on music only on four songs on the record. I'm still learning how to do this, so...

GG: It's pretty tough for someone to walk in, you know, and just start writing songs. That's why even the other guys in the band don't contribute as much. Some people think, *Why don't they just write something?* And of course, they're welcome to write stuff, but it's tough, man, when you've got basically two songwriters for 15 years, to say "Hey, here's one" out of the blue. And it'd still be played and everything—we don't exclude people—but we all want to do what's best for the project. (Mock angry) "And I suppose you think that what you do is best for the project, huh?!" F?!k 'em!

RIP: I believe a lot of Bad Religion's

sound is attributed to the big chorus harmonies. Who sings all those oohs 'n' aahs on your record?

BB: Whoever Greg can grab out of the lounge in the studio. Anybody who wants to can sing.

GG: So, on "Empty Causes" it was Bobby. And I think Brian was on "Pity The Dead"

BB: I have the high voice, Jay has the middle, so whenever the song needs the higher voice, I'm the one who does it.

RIP: On previous records you've had guests, including Eddie Vedder. Are there any guest appearances on this record?

GG: Uh, Brian Baker!

BB: Yeah, I'm the guest. It's like Heather Locklear on *Melrose Place*! That "special guest"!

RIP: But you're in the band.

BB: Well, Heather Locklear's *on* the show, but it still says "Special Guest: Heather Locklear." I'm the Heather Locklear of Bad Religion.

RIP: So you're special to the show.

GG: We did that on purpose. We really liked the fact that we didn't pull in a bunch of people on this one. It was more private.

RIP: I heard that you try to answer all your fans via e-mail

GG: We try to. You can write us at "gregg@badreligion.com" or "brianb@badreligion.com" or "jayb@badreligion.com" or "gregh@badreligion.com" or "bobbys@badreligion.com" ...or "postmaster@badreligion.com"—if you want to reach just the band in general write to postmaster. •

(Scott Russo is the singer for Epic Recording artists Unwritten Law. This is his first story for RIP.)