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The Herald

Recalling Rock Against Racism

New book on the 1970s and 80s phenomenon launches in Glasgow and Edinburgh this weekend

7 Feb 2019 NEIL COOPER

WHEN 8,000 music fans turned up at Craigmillar Park in Edinburgh in August 1978 for Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League's Edinburgh Carnival, many were expecting to see The Clash. The name of Joe Strummer and Mick Jones' iconic first wave punk band had been added to posters and flyers for the show, saying they had been "invited" to play, despite possibly never having been approached.

the anti-racist movement of the time and its geographical reach. The publication of *Never Again! Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982* comes at a time when the extreme right wing that Rock Against Racism (RAR) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) were set up to oppose are on the march again.

In this sense, *Never Again!*, which is launched this weekend at events in Edinburgh and Glasgow, is an important means of taking stock, and follows barrister and activist Renton's 2007 book, *When We Touched the*

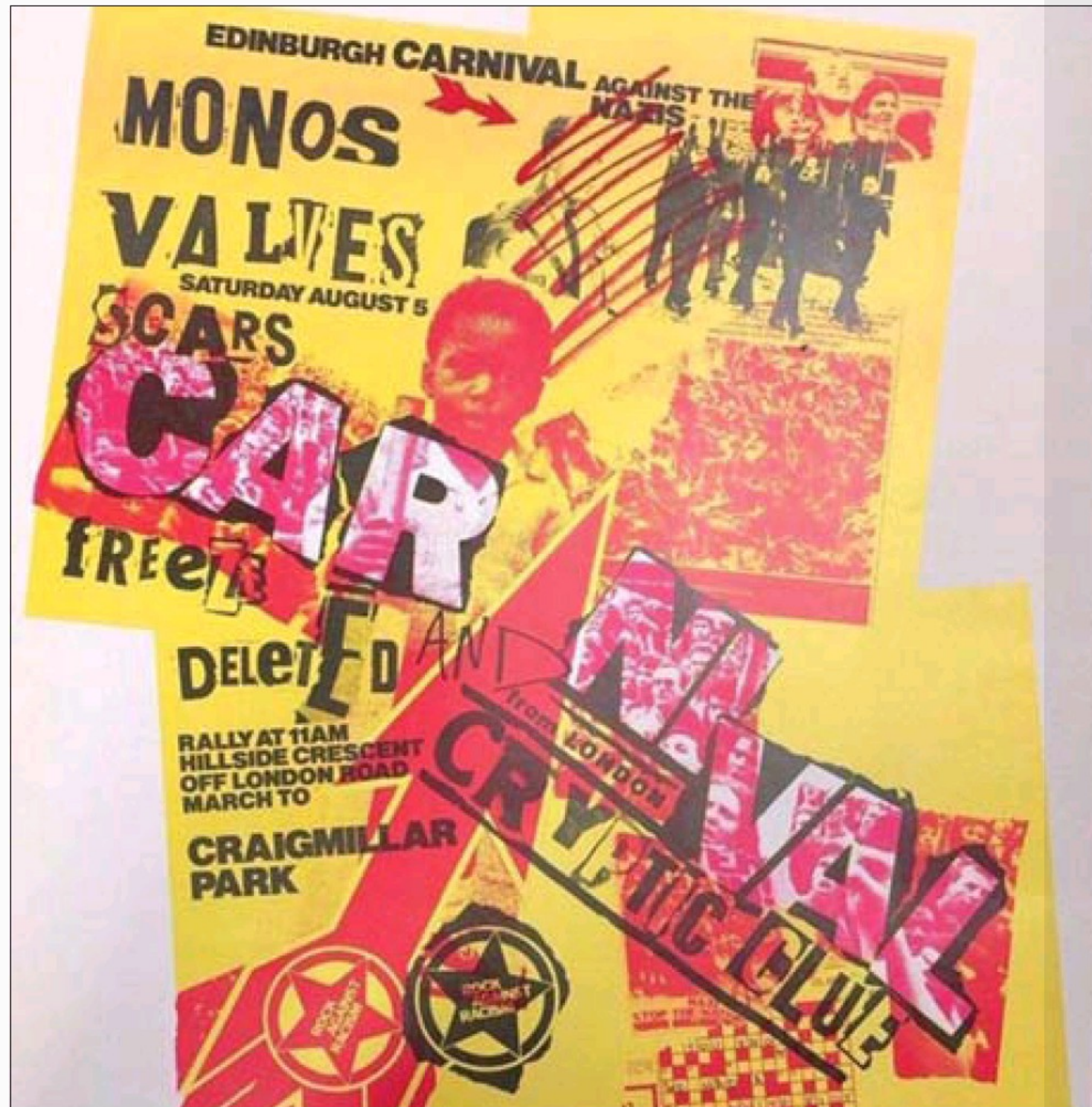
Sky: The Anti-Nazi League 1977-1981. While both cover similar ground, a decade on, even Renton seems surprised by the differences in his new book. "When We Touched the

Sky was put out by an independent publisher who very sadly went bust," he says, "and because it hadn't had much publicity, I wanted to do something with it. For a while I thought I was going to be writing a second edition, but more and more stuff kept coming

out, and going through it, it's not until page 50 that there's anything from the old book in the new one."

RAR was founded in August 1976 following a drunken outburst by Eric Clapton during a concert in Birmingham, when he declared support for Conservative MP Enoch Powell, whose "rivers of blood" speech in 1968 had seen Powell rail against mass immigration. After making several disparaging remarks about people of colour, Clapton repeatedly shouted the NF slogan of "Keep

Britain White". In the audience of the Clapton gig were Red Saunders and other members of radical theatre troupe *Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (Cast)*, who wrote a letter to the then hugely influential music paper, *NME*. As well as berating Clapton, who apologised for his outburst last year, Saunders proposed forming RAR. After receiving hundreds of letters of support, numerous RAR groups sprang up. Arriving in the ferment of punk, youth culture was craving some kind of mass movement, and soon the familiar RAR star became ubiquitous accessories on the



A poster for the Edinburgh Carnival Against the Nazis that took place in Craigmillar Park in August 1978.

lapels of charity shop jackets and customised T-shirts. Despite this, Renton is critical of some of the initial burst of activity.

"There were two sides to punk," he says. "On the one hand, there

were lovely things like black and white musicians playing together, but there was also a depoliticising of things. There were people who said a lot of punks were fascists, and there was a flirtation with images of fascism that you can't ignore, and that helped shape the mood of nihilism and despair of the time."

An RAR fanzine, *Temporary Hoarding*, ran for 15 issues, and featured era-defining work by *Never Again! Rock Against Racism & the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982* by David Renton is published by Routledge Books, £16.99, and is