

America's Only Rock 'n' Roll Magazine

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Last month's Motley Crue CREEM DREAM  
should have been credited to Ross Marino.  
We apologize for this omission.

Cover photo of Michael Jackson by  
Gora/California Features; David Lee Roth  
by Neil Zlozower

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"We're the Ding-Dong Daddies from Dumas—you oughta see us strut our stuff!"



Bob Alford

"Holy smoke! Where did all this hair come from?"



Robert Mathieu



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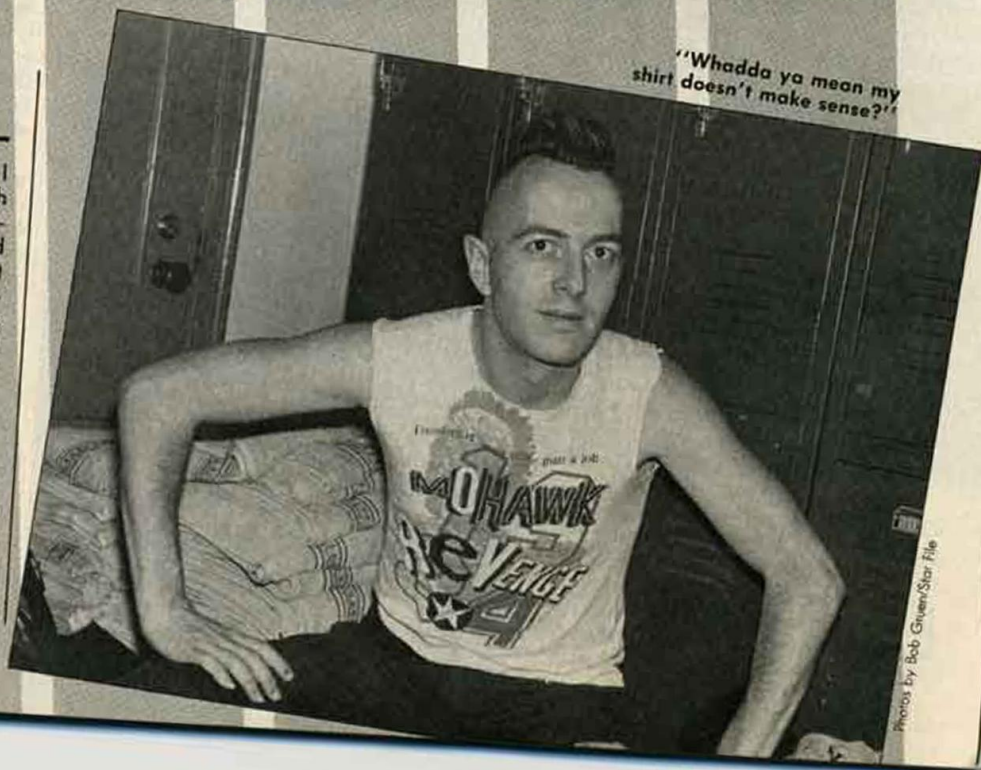
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by Bill Holdship

CREEM contributor Mark Norton and I were talking several days before the Clash "invaded" Detroit, and we began discussing the concept of "armchair activism" and how the Clash probably fit into that category. Mark pointed out that there's currently a voguish literary movement of poets and writers speaking out against the turmoil in Central America, and (using Joan Didion's recent book on Salvador—which he says is "terrible"—as an example) he added that, for the most part, it's a pretty limpwristed political mechanism. "War is bad," they say, "but evil dictatorships should be stopped." To which the only sane reply might be: "How perceptive!" (Or an alternative reply, courtesy of Lenny Bruce, might be: "What 'should be' is a lie.")

It seems if these artists were really serious,



"Whadda ya mean my shirt doesn't make sense?"

Photos by Bob Gruen/Star File

OCTOBER 1984





they'd follow the lead of Ernest Hemingway and other writers during the Spanish Civil War, and put some action where their words are. These earlier writers not only spoke out in favor of the anti-Fascist Spanish loyalists, but they raised money and actually went to the center of the conflict to help out. Artists literally became soldiers, donning military fatigues for more than fashion's sake; and while they lost their cause, no one could ever accuse them of being limp-wristed.

On the other hand, as I grow older, I'm beginning to believe that there simply are no political solutions. It's just a fact of life. Sure, "war is bad," but we've always had it, always will. No one can possibly agree on everything (or sometimes it seems like anything), and the '60s "do your own thing" message proved to be bullshit because I'm sure Charlie Manson would argue that's exactly what he was doing. For socialism to come to America, nearly everyone would have to suffer first—and almost no one is willing to do that. (Former SDS president on why the activism ended: "Paranoia—and we liked air-conditioning too much.") America should have learned a lesson from Nixon, but it still elected Reagan, who actually makes (the) Dick look better in retrospect. Or going back to the Spanish Civil War for another example, Hemingway warned both America and Europe if they failed to support the fight against Franco's Fascists, Hitler and Mussolini would overrun Europe, creating the second world war. No one listened to him. Things rarely change. Everything remains the same. Fatalistic? Perhaps. Realistic? Definitely.

Which is why something like the Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again" or Elvis Costello's brilliant "Peace In Our Time" makes more "political" sense to me than most of the Clash's combined output. Don't get me wrong. I thought the band's debut LP was great, while *Give 'Em Enough Rope* had some great moments, particularly "Safe European Home." But even back

**"Hardcore has forgotten that it ain't studs, it's the thoughts."  
—Joe Strummer**

then, it was the energy and humanistic attitude that impressed me as opposed to what often sounded like empty political rhetoric. On top of that, I was still an idealistic college kid who believed that rock 'n' roll could "save" the world, and that everyone who listened to (and grew up

**"You're sure this is how you get a date with Olivia Newton-John?"**



with) a certain kind of music had to share a similar world view. (What a chump, eh?) *London Calling* was the Clash's masterpiece—but what made it great was (once again) the attitude and the traditional "roots rock" position, right down to its Elvis Presley cover art. (Who could resist Joe's growl right before Mick's solo on "Brand New Cadillac," one of the great vocal moments in rock, right up there with Otis's whistle on "Dock Of The Bay" and Elvis's "Yeah!" on "I Need Your Love Tonight"?) But the bubble burst with *Sandinista!* (or *Give 'Em Enough Vinyl*), an overblown, pretentious affair, while *Combat Rock* was the absolute pits. What were the Clash trying to say? Nothing, unless you wanna count doubletalk, and it seemed that the band was finally being consumed by its empty political stance. And, of course, there was the million dollar question: what does an orange Mohawk have to do with changing the political structure in the 1980s?

It was about this time that the Clash's off-stage actions started to reveal a bit of hypocrisy and inconsistency as well. Topper Headon's heroin addiction and Mick Jones's "rock star" posturings seemed to represent the very image the band had once denounced. Joe Strummer's rhetoric made him an almost comical character (an image CREAM has manipulated to the hilt). There were the hit singles, MTV videos ("rebel" rock or big business?), and, especially, the US Festival fiasco, where at least a few Clash fans sat in the dirt and heat while the band decided whether they'd take the stage or not. Even recently, Dave Marsh's *Rock & Roll Confidential* accused the "new" Clash of crossing a picket line of striking house technicians at a concert in Long Beach, CA.

For me, the final blow came when I heard Lisa Robinson interview Mick Jones on her radio show shortly after the release of *Combat Rock*. She said "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?" reminded her of classic Yardbirds and Who (?!?)—as Rick Johnson pointed out, the song sounded better when Mitch Ryder recorded it as "Little Latin Lupe Lu", and she asked if the Clash compared itself to these great '60s bands. Jones's reply? "We feel there has never been another band in the history of rock as great as the Clash!" To which my reply (as Lennon, Holly, Moon and assorted others probably rolled in their graves) was "You pompous ass!"

So this probably would have been an even more negative story if the Clash had refused to talk to us again, as they had the last three years in a row. The band was reportedly unhappy with the negative review R. Meltzer gave *Combat Rock* in CREAM, as well as the fact that we wouldn't guarantee them a cover story, which sounded like a "rock star" attitude to me. One of our correspondents at the World Music Festival in Jamaica two years ago reported that the Clash absolutely refused to talk to anyone from CREAM. I finally confronted Kosmo Vinyl, the band's press liaison ("whose speaking voice," John Mendelssohn wrote in another publication, "makes Joe Strummer's singing voice sound like Tony Bennett's") on this issue.

"I didn't want to talk to you because you wouldn't put us on the cover. I'll admit it.

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I don't mind. And if people say that's wrong, I'll say I don't go on about publisher's meetings and all the things that get spoked. I know about publisher's meetings! I understand the game, and I play it quite openly. I know for a fact that certain magazines don't get interviews with certain people unless they guarantee a cover. Your magazine chose not to put us on the cover. I chose not to do an interview. It's only mutual."

But isn't that a pop star attitude, the same thing Mick Jones got canned from the Clash for?"

"No, that wasn't a pop star attitude. That's a hustler's attitude! I know that even Time Magazine guarantees covers to the right people."

Weren't you angry about the negative review of *Combat Rock* in CREEM?"

"Nah! Not too much. I thought it was quite interesting. The worst review you gave us turned out to be our biggest selling record!"

Fair enough, I suppose.

I finally get to talk to Joe Strummer two days after the Clash's Detroit gig with new guitarists Vince White and Nick Sheppard. Admittedly, the "new" band sounds tighter and better than the old line-up (Joe attributes it to better amplification—"Before, we had a very loud stage sound, and Mick had the attitude of 'Stuff it, I'm having my guitar as loud as I want it.' So we lost control of the P.A. sound, and it was a mess"), although the new songs, possibly excepting "Are You Ready For War?," leave a lot to be desired.

Joe seems to have mellowed with age, although part of his new calm may have something to do with his recent repudiation of drugs.

"We're not born again or anything like that. All we want to do is think clearly, and you can't think clearly on any drug. And I've found that my life is much better. Too much marijuana is a bad thing. You can deal and cope with life. I don't think people on marijuana realize how much it affects them. It's like taking their legs away or something. It's such an insidious drug because it claims to be harmless, doesn't it? But it's a bad drug."

Whatever the case, he doesn't spout off in his previous "violent" manner. When he wants to make a crucial point, he relies on eye contact, and he'll touch your arm for emphasis. He seems much friendlier than he was in previous days (cf. Dave DiMartino's Clash story in CREEM, Dec. '79). He compliments me on my "Elvis/Sun Studios, Memphis" T-shirt (I mean, how can I dislike this guy?). He worries there's too much noise in the bar for my recorder to tape our conversation. (In seven years of interviews, I've never had a subject in the least concerned about that.) And wonder of wonders, when some spittle escapes Joe's mouth and lands on my recorder, he graciously wipes it off.

He talks about everything from Jesse Jackson being the best candidate ("the only real opposite to Reagan") to the Russians ("They can't even build a color TV that doesn't break down. How are they going to conquer the Western World?"). Granted, the leader of the "anti-violent" Clash still

often contradicts himself ("I've seen people come to blows over the Clash, and that made me feel great. What else can we really argue about that would inflame our passions to the point of physical violence? And more power to it!"), while a lot of what he says still sounds banal. Cases in point:

**ON WHY THE "NEW" CLASH ARE TOURING WITHOUT A RECORD:** "In my mind, I liken us to a new platoon, and we're going to go out and crawl right in front of the enemy lines, get fired upon, and then look at each other to see how we're bearing up. Can I rely on this guy when my gun jams? We're under fire, and we're sharing that experience. And that's what is going to make our record great." Huh?

**ON WHY THE "ANTI-WAR" CLASH WEAR MILITARY FATIGUES ONSTAGE:**

"What is the opposite of a highly trained Green Beret? I'd say it was a shambling, wino-junkie hippie. So that's not good enough. We wear those clothes in a spirit of self-defense. The more organized they are, the more organized we will be. And that's the way it'll be in the future." Hmmmm.

**ON THE CLASH'S 1984 "POLITICAL PLATFORM":** "Get up off your chair, turn off the TV, go outside and deal with real life. What I'm talking about in 1984 is the 'on' and 'off' switch on all appliances, and I would urge all Americans to put it in the 'off' position for a change. I turn off everything when I come here—TV, air-conditioning. Dammit. I don't want that Top 40 radio, MTV in my mind. Turn off

TURN TO PAGE 64



# Suddenly, All Other Cymbals Become Obsolete.

*Jan Uvena* JAN UVENA of ALCATRAZZ

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will they hear the Clash's messages?

But fair's fair, and I gotta admit that I kind of liked Joe Strummer. The man is definitely concerned and sincere, if a bit politically naive. I asked him what I considered some tough questions, and he answered them, without anger, the best he could. What follows are some excerpts from that conversation.

☆☆☆

*The Clash have always had a lot of political rhetoric, but I'm beginning to believe that there are no political solutions. Don't you ever feel it's a lost cause?*

Yeah, but I don't think we can know what will happen. The reason the political thing isn't going to be a solution is that we don't know what the truth is. Just suppose the right people, who aren't puppets, started running for office and were elected. The climate would change. And within that climate, you might even get truth in the papers, on TV and on radio. And when the new generation is subjected to a bit of truth, who knows what might happen? Compare the Black Panthers to Martin Luther King—who achieved more? It was really King's message in the long run. And a thing like that should be studied.

*Sure, King achieved more, and he got shot. Most of the Panthers later embraced the establishment. The '60s taught a lot of lessons, and we still have Ronald Reagan as President.*

Yeah, but Ronald Reagan is a product of the drug culture. The two are synonymous in my mind. Reagan is there because we didn't care. We kept goofing up, we copped out, and we let Reagan in. The same with Thatcher in England. Maybe we have to be burned to learn. Hopefully, people are going to be less apathetic about it now, or nothing will be left.

*I mentioned the poet-soldiers in the Spanish Civil War. Don't you think real activists should go to Nicaragua and help the people out?*

Yeah, I think it would do some good, really. But even so, I don't think anything can stop the U.S. Army from killing every man, woman and child in Nicaragua. And that's what they have to do because that's the only way the U.S. is going to stop them. America is following the wrong policy because Nicaragua would be friends with the U.S. It's the same as Southeast Asia. When you realize that Ho Chi Minh was in touch with the U.S. in 1949, you begin to see things differently. They drove Cuba into the arms of the Kremlin. It's all paranoia. I'm sure that Americans could get on well with Nicaragua and Cuba—even if they are socialist, Marxist states. So what? They want to trade. Why is it the Western policy to uphold the worst dictators—anything but letting socialism come into it? It's madness.

*But don't you think that activism goes beyond your song lyrics?*

Well, yeah, but it's first things first. We're musicians. I started by playing "Bony Maronie," and that was enough for me when I was learning it. We're musicians, but we know there is going to be a struggle between one economic order and another—the have and have-nots will come to a conflict, and the music is going to play a part in creating an atmosphere for that struggle. But first you have to have that cultural input. First, you have to have the spirit raised before any activism can begin. I mean, the Vietnam War was a target that everyone concentrated on, and I really believe the anti-war movement stopped the war. But that was because there was one clear issue to think upon. Without that clear issue, the left is in complete disarray. But again, I think the issues will eventually become clearer, and I believe that our music will play a part in that struggle. When you're talking about activism, I'm not pretending to be

an activist. That's going to be another thing completely.

*I heard Mick's out of the band because he developed a "pop star" attitude.*

I don't think he could help it. He was a bedroom kid—one of those kids in the bedroom dreaming that someday he'd be as big as the guys on the posters, learning his chops in the bedroom. That's something I never went through at all, but he did, and he just doesn't realize that the '80s are different. He still thinks the world's the same as it was when he was in his bedroom. He still believes in the hierarchy of rock 'n' roll. What it came down to was, in the end, we were going "Look, these heavy metal bands are turning people into oafs and idiots. We've got to get out there, and stick in another oar. We've got to work." And he'd say, "I think we should take six months off." And I couldn't convince Mick that it wasn't the '60s out there anymore.

And then there's the fact that I don't believe anyone is that great that they don't write crap sometimes. Mick wouldn't have that. In his mind, he was a great artist, and great artists don't write crap. It was dangerous. I think Mick's got a tendency to bring "yes" men close to him, and shut out people who will tell him the damn truth. Remember, I'm supposedly his buddy and partner, and I said to him, "Mick, I don't think you can produce." What I meant was that you just can't sit in the chair, move some faders, and claim to be a producer. And it was "You bastard! I thought you were my friend." I worry about him because I don't think he has anyone around him telling him the truth.

*There was a piece in Rolling Stone where Mick's lawyer said in time Clash fans will discover that they haven't been told the truth.*

Ah, fuck that. Rubbish. He ought to get something going. I mean, it's been six months. What's he doing? All I've heard is that he's fallen out with Topper. He's auditioning drummers, and they're calling it T.R.A.C.—Top Risk Action Company.

*Since the Clash promote harmony to a degree, isn't it a paradox when the band itself can't get along?*

Yeah, it does seem like a paradox. I just feel that's real life. The only way it went wrong was because we couldn't tell each other the truth. When any relationship gets to that point, you might as well forget it. We argue constantly here, but nobody takes it personally. Everyone realizes that we're trying to get the best out of it. That's why I think this is going to work.

*I liked everything up to London Calling, but thought Sandinista! and Combat Rock were terrible. What happened?*

What's wrong with Sandinista! was that there was too much to give every track a good mix. It was brave to try, but unsatisfying in the end. To understand *Combat Rock*, you have to realize it was a salvage operation. It was a home movie mix—which led me to tell Mick he couldn't produce—and I finally had to take it to Glyn Johns, an outsider, to save it. Mick's attitude was that I ruined his music. Fifty percent of *Combat Rock* was great rock, but the other fifty was what Phil Spector would call "wiggly."

*From what I see, hasn't punk—especially hardcore—evolved into just another cliché? It's like heavy metal with a different uniform.*

Well, I think we're too successful for a lot of those kids. They don't follow us anymore because they've forgotten that punk is an attitude—and not a uniform or even a form or style of music. Punk was never those things. They were by-products. But the hardcore scene ain't exactly a hotbed of creativity—the things I always check for.

## CONSUMER GUIDE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

### TINA TURNER "Private Dancer"

(Capitol)

Her second solo effort, Turner follows her 1984 hit "Private Dancer" with a more mature, sophisticated sound. The album is a collection of songs that range from soulful ballads to hard-driving rock. Turner's voice is in top form, and the production is excellent. This is a strong album that should be a major success.

Turner's "Private Dancer" is a collection of songs that range from soulful ballads to hard-driving rock. Turner's voice is in top form, and the production is excellent. This is a strong album that should be a major success.

## THE CLASH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

everything. Exercise your right upon the switch. That's our message in '84." Which does make sense, but if everyone turns everything off, how



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I'm only reading it from a distance, but I think they've forgotten that it ain't studs, it's the thoughts.

You were criticized after the US Festival. On one hand, it was admirable that money be donated to charity. On the other, a lot of people were there to see the Clash, and you made them wait hours in the heat.

Yeah. That was a screw-up. We knew that we had a two-fold purpose there. We're not a band that protects our ideals at home. We have to deal with the music industry, and that weekend, the whole industry was looking at the festival as the state of rock 'n' roll. So we had to go in there and show them that we wouldn't be pushed under the carpet. Our second purpose was to spoil the bloody party, because I'm not going to have some millionaire restaging Woodstock for his ego-gratification and tax loss in his backyard and get away with it. If Wozniak had said "I'm having a beer fair, a T-shirt fair and a computer merchandizing fair, and we're going to have some music on the side to draw crowds," that would've been honest. Instead, he said "Unison, Unity—US." Our first reaction was to go right in there and ask, "Does anyone know what we're unifying around? Does anyone know what the definition of US is?" Dead silence. People forgot to check that out, and rushed to get walkie-talkies. As we rode out of there, Kosmo was singing to the tune of "T For Texas": "It's Vietnam mixed up with Woodstock." Don't tell me that you can recreate Woodstock in the Me Generation of cocaine California in 1983. We had to go in there and spoil the party because nobody else was. Everyone else was sitting around going "Hey, man. It's cool, man." And on the Van Halen day, someone got clubbed to death over a drug deal. Anybody could've seen that was going to happen.

But there were fans there specifically to see the Clash...

Yeah, but you see we got caught. We were juggling with too many balls. We were having it out with the press before we went on, and I don't think we should have done that.

The press did criticize your attitude.

Yeah. Well, I'm glad. Let's stand up and be counted. But what I thought as we left was how none of the other bands on the "new music" day stepped forward and said, "Hey, I think this is a lot of jive, and I want to say something, too." In fact, the only guy with any guts the entire weekend was Eddie Van Halen. Because with all that stuff going down, he walked alone, unskated, right into the middle of our trailer, and stood there grinning, with his hands spread wide. And I thought—well, I drank to him over that. I take it you won't do another US Festival?

Well, I don't think an invitation will be offered. But, you know, I like a good argument, especially with Californians.

You were criticized in Dave Marsh's Rock & Roll Confidential for crossing a picket line of striking house technicians in Long Beach.

Well, if there was a picket line, it must have been manned by ants or something. (Reads RRC) Yeah! This is what we want. More of this kind of stuff... I didn't see any picket line. I mean, I've usually got an eye for those picket billboards.

Would you have crossed it if you'd have seen it?

No, I wouldn't have. Definitely not. But usually when we go into a town, I can spot a picket line 200 yards up the road. Even when it's only manned by two or three people, I can spot it. I think I'm going to investigate this a bit. We drove around the building several times. There wasn't a soul. Hell, it's not above their ability to come and talk to us, is it? Still, I guess if it's true, we have to take it on the chin.

You once sang "No Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977." The Clash have existed as a successful band almost eight years now, and by this time, in chronological terms, the Beatles had split, Elvis was in the army and the Stones were in decline. Aren't you afraid in 1984 the Clash may be peddling their own form of punk nostalgia and "phony Beatlemania"?

Not really, because those scenes were founded on the aura of mystique. "See the star, worship the star, don't touch the star." One of the facts that we've tried to bring out is anybody can do it. We've always tried to talk to anybody after a show who wants to talk to us because we're intent on showing them that we're just another bunch of idiots like anybody else. And the fact is we play three or four chords. On a good day, we might hit five. But dammit to hell, I challenge anyone not to be able to learn five chords in three weeks. God, I could get a penguin to do that. Or Flipper. Flipper on the fretboard. Twenty years ago, people swallowed the "star" thing, and you'd think we'd have progressed. But, oh, no. 1984. Duran Duran. Boy George. Still swallowing it. Phony Beatlemania definitely ain't bitten the dust, but I'll be damned if I'll support it. You know, I like to tell people to hate us. Get out from under our shadow, be your own person. I'm proud to inspire people, and from then on, they should take it from there.

Why call this band the Clash? It's weird. The Pretenders are continuing with brand new people. Johnny Lydon has a bunch of faceless sidemen doing "Anarchy In The U.K.," and they call themselves PIL. Wouldn't it be more honest to call this Joe Strummer's new band?

No. We are the Clash. I say in all my arrogance that we need the Clash, and we're it. Even if Vince and Nick weren't in the Clash before, they were buying the records and standing in the front row. The fact that they learned to play is great because we can use them now. But we are the Clash because it certainly ain't U2, and it certainly ain't the Alarm, and it certainly ain't the make-up brigade, and it certainly ain't the heavy metal thing, and it certainly ain't Mick Jones. We are the Clash and I'd hope that if I started to act funny that I would be fired, and the Clash would continue to roll on without me.

☆☆☆  
So there you have it—Joe Strummer in 1984. Still as arrogant as ever (he told me Mick Jones was right in calling the Clash the greatest band ever "because you got to believe that, whether it's true or not"), he remains steadfast in his beliefs, and you have to at least respect him for that. On one hand, the Clash haven't produced a really good record in nearly five years, and I'm afraid their time may have passed them by. On the other hand, I'd rather hear Joe Strummer telling a crowd of Detroit teenagers that "Sex Mad War" is dedicated to "a time when a woman can walk alone in the park at midnight without being afraid—which is her divine right" anytime over Motley Crue's "We love fucking the girls in Detroit because their pussies taste so good!" (Can someone get these morons to crawl back under their rock? Please?)

After I left the interview and was digesting some of the things Strummer had said, I drove past the American Legion hall in Royal Oak. I swear that two Army sergeants were out front leading a group of pre-teen kids in army uniforms through complete military drills. I couldn't help thinking of Hitler Youth (Reagan Youth?), and wondering if maybe Joe Strummer was right. Maybe we do need the Clash. After all, a little optimism ain't a bad thing.

But then, I guess that I just don't know. 