



(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk>)

[Home \(http://dreamdeferred.org.uk\)](http://dreamdeferred.org.uk)

[About \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/about/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/about/)

[Notes \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/category/notes/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/category/notes/)

[In depth \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/category/indepth/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/category/indepth/)

[Favourites \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/favourites/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/favourites/)

[Contact us \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/contact-us/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/contact-us/)

## The Clash: a riot of our own

By Hassan Mahamdallie | 8 January 2018



The Clash. Pic credit: Sonic Collective)

Punk and New Wave exploded onto the musical stage in 1976-77. The new music brought the bloated rock scene that came before it crashing down – and punk has shaped much of the music that has come since. Two years ago **Hassan Mahamdallie** began his occasional series on this blog – a personal, musical and political journey. He ends the series looking at one of the most important – if not the most important – punk bands of all time, the Clash.

Next week we will posting Hassan's list of his 10 favourite punk debut singles. We also intend to publish a downloadable compilation of Hassan's music posts here, with an introduction by a very special guest.

### The Clash. Single No 1: *White Riot* (1977)

It's quite something, when you think about it, that the debut single of the most successful punk band of all, and my personal favourite, clocked in at just one minute fifty-eight seconds and was widely misinterpreted at the time as having racist overtones.

The Sex Pistols' *Anarchy in the UK* exploded in November 1976 like a random depth-charge, blowing all the accepted musical rules out of the water, but instant converts like myself had to wait another six months until we had something else to compare it to. So we could begin to join the dots: "That song is punk, and this one is also punk, so this must be what punk is. This is what it sounds like and this is what it is all about." All we could do in the intervening period was tune into the BBC Radio One John Peel show in the evenings to hear what new bands he was raving about.

### SEARCH THIS SITE

### TOP PICKS

**Fascism and the far right in Europe: country by country guide and analysis**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2018/01/update-fascism-and-the-far-right-in-europe-country-by-country-part-1/>)  
NEW AND UPDATED FOR 2019 – includes elections table

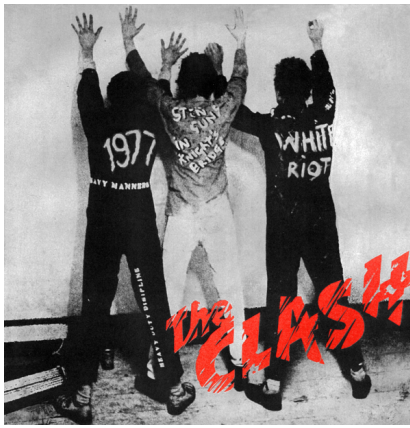
**All our stories on Tommy Robinson and the new far right in Britain**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/tag/tommy-robinson/>)  
Includes our reports on the Football Lads Alliance FLA / DFLA

### RECENT STORIES

**FRANCE – RN surges to huge new election records: Le Pen, fascism and the working class**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2018/01/le-pen-fascism-and-the-working-class-analysis-charts-photos/>)

**HUNGARY: Orban crushes opposition as nazi OHM wins first seats in parliament**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2018/01/at-a-crossroads-orban-fidesz-and-the-parliamentary-elections/>)

**Rockabilly, Teddy Boys, racism, antiracism and that bloody flag!**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2018/01/teddy-boys-racism-antiracism-and-that-bloody-flag/>)



If *Anarchy in the UK* had slashed a big X in the centre of a new soundscape, the Clash's debut single *White Riot*, released in March 1977, would be an arrow pointing us in a particular direction. Or at least that was the theory. But what direction? What exactly was a White Riot I asked myself? Wasn't that something that the razor-wielding Teddy Boys had been up to in Notting Hill in 1958 when they had attempted to pogrom the local West Indian population? Or what the Enoch brigade and the National Front (NF) would like to do us 'pakis' given half a chance?

It wasn't until the Clash included their interpretation of one of my all-time favourite songs, Junior Murvin's

masterpiece *Police and Thieves* on the first album, that I realised where the Clash stood.

Police and thieves in the streets (oh yeah)  
Fighting the nation with their guns and ammunition  
Police and thieves in the street (oh yeah)  
Scaring the nation with their guns and ammunition...

**Junior Murvin's *Police and Thieves*: 12" version. Produced by Lee 'Scratch' Perry (1976)**



Later I came to understand that *White Riot* was a song of praise for the Black youth who had bravely fought the Met police to a standstill during the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival, and an admonishment to white youth who had yet to find their own route to confrontation with the state. Indeed *White Riot* was composed out of the first-hand experience of Clash singer Joe Strummer, bass player Paul Simonon and manager Bernie Rhodes, who had been caught up in, and participated in the rebellion against state repression and racism that flared in Notting Hill in the August of that searing long hot summer of '76.

White riot – I wanna riot

White riot – a riot of my own  
White riot – I wanna riot  
White riot – a riot of my own

Black people gotta lot a problems  
But they don't mind throwing a brick  
White people go to school  
Where they teach you how to be thick

...All the power's in the hands  
Of people rich enough to buy it  
While we walk the street  
Too chicken to even try it

Everybody's doing  
Just what they're told to  
Nobody wants  
To go to jail!

White riot – I wanna riot  
White riot – a riot of my own  
White riot – I wanna riot  
White riot – a riot of my own

Are you taking over  
or are you taking orders?

Are you going backwards, Or are you going forwards? the song concluded, echoing CLR James's eloquent insight:

**Antivaxxers use memory of anti-Nazi White Rose resistance to target school students**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2020/07/14/antivaxxers-use-memory-of-anti-nazi-white-rose-resistance-to-target-school-students/>)

**ANALYSIS: far right's new turn via pop culture figures and politically diverse antivaxx movement**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2020/07/14/the-far-right-and-the-international-anti-lockdown-anti-vaxx-mass-movement/>)

**UPDATE: Tbilisi united against homophobia of state, church and far right thugs**  
(<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2020/07/14/battle-for-tbilisi-pride-far-right-thugs-attack-lgbt-organisers/>)

**LIKE OUR FACEBOOK**

 **facebook**  
(<https://www.facebook.com/dreamdef1>)

**OUR TWITTER**

Posts from @dreamde1



**Nothing yet**

When they post, 1

[View on X](#)

**MORE WAYS TO FOLLOW**

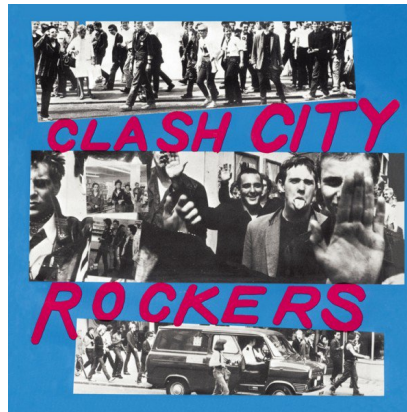
 (<https://twitter.com/dreamdef1>)  
 (<https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/feed/>)

Times would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place. The relations of countries and the relations of classes had to change before I discovered that it is not the quality of goods and utility which matters, but movement, not where you are, or what you have, but where you have come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there.

#### Single No 4: *Clash City Rockers* (1978)

The Clash were as much an expression of the UK reggae scene and Caribbean culture and rebel politics as they were of the pub rock and art-school scene. Joe Strummer had lived in a communal squat in Maida Vale, just north of Notting Hill. Mick Jones had been a south London schoolboy in Tulse Hill. Paul Simonon had been raised in Brixton and Ladbroke Grove, had grown up in and around London's Black community, and was a huge reggae fan – clearly manifested in his ska/reggae bass-playing style.

Before going on to manage the Clash, Bernie Rhodes had run a record shop in Kilburn specialising in reggae imports. Apart from using photo imagery from the '76 riot as backdrops to their gigs and on their record sleeves, the Clash were visually inspired by artwork they came across adorning Jamaican reggae album covers.



In 1977 the journalist, cultural activist and maybe best chronicler of punk Vivian Goldman wrote an insightful article in *Sounds* magazine that traced out the punky-reggae conversation that was going on at the time. Goldman wrote that, setting aside Don Letts' famed reggae DJ sets at punk gigs:

The main impetus for punk enthusiasm for reggae is down to the musicians. The Clash definitely lead the way – their cover of 'Police And Thieves' is the strongest vinyl evidence to date of new wave sympathy for their black peer group. Even down to the shot of the rioting under the Westway at the '76 Notting Hill Carnival on their album sleeve, the Clash have always laid their souls on the red, green and gold line. Bernie Rhodes was right when he described them as "a roots band."

#### Single No 3: *Complete Control* (1977)



Complete Control

In September 1977 the Clash released their third single *Complete Control*. I rate it as one of their best. The composition, the guitar wall-of-sound, Strummer's incomprehensible growl, Mick Jones plaintive backing vocals, Nicky 'Toppe'r Headon's energetic beat, all come together – perfectly formed from start to finish.

*Complete Control* was produced by unique and hallowed Jamaican musical innovator Lee 'Scratch' Perry, who had admired the band's version of Junior Murvin's hit (although its disputed how much of his studio mix made it to the final cut), and the front cover was a photo of a reggae sound system bass speaker set.

In June 1978 the Clash were to return to the inspiration of *Police and Thieves* with the distinctive single *(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais*:

White youth, black youth  
Better find another solution  
Why not phone up Robin Hood  
And ask him for some wealth distribution.

And then of course there were the covers – notably Frederick ‘Toots’ Hibbert’s (of Toots and the Maytals) Pressure Drop and Willi William’s Studio One anthem Armigideon Time, as well as their own songs – including Paul Simonon’s personal tribute to The Frontline – *The Guns of Brixton* – complete with reference to the anti-hero of the famous crossover 70s Jamaican rude boy movie:

You see, he feels like Ivan  
Born under the Brixton sun  
His game is called survivin’  
At the end of the harder they come

#### Single No 10: *Armigideon Time*. The flip side to *London Burning* (1979)

Single No 9: The Cost of Living EP included a version of 1960s Bobby Fuller standard *I Fought The Law*. The EP was released in May 1979 to coincide with the General Election which put Margaret Thatcher in power.

Between 1977 and 1979 the Clash never stopped evolving their sound and subject material, and widening their political reach into areas I could appreciate and agree with, the opposite of their early “rivals” the Sex Pistols, who, for whatever reason you like to give, never moved forward musically, rapidly descended into both tragedy and farce.



In the same month as *(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais* was released, what was left of the Pistols messily exited musical history with the 12” single *No One Is Innocent* – a seedy karaoke sing-a-long with sad-sack train-robber in exile Ronnie Biggs:

God save Martin Boorman and Nazis on the run  
God save Myra Hindley God save Ian Brady  
Even though he’s horrible and she ain’t what you call a lady

Charming.

The icing on the cake? The Clash were the most exciting live band I have ever experienced – even beating my old favourites The Damned. I saw the Clash perform at The Rainbow, Finsbury Park in December 1977, at the Victoria Park Rock Against Racism gig in April 1978, Harlesden Roxy in October 1978 and at the Lyceum Ballroom on the corner of The Strand, central London, in December 1978.

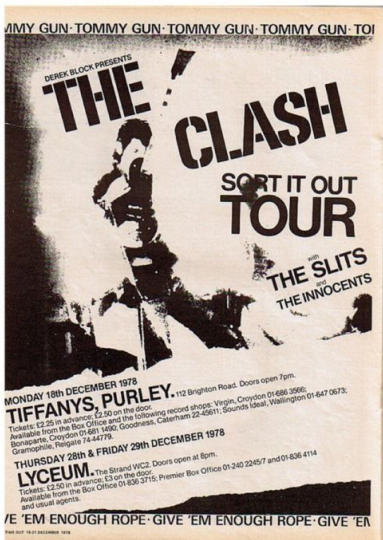
In those days you had to rush to the venue ticket office as soon as the weekly music press announced that tickets had been released, queue up for hours, put up with passers-by stopping to gawp at the assorted rabble slumped untidily in the road (me and my fellow Clash fans), and hopefully make it to the box-office grill before the gig sold out, passing over some greasy bank notes to the ticket lady who had drawn the short straw that day. I remember going up to The Strand and queuing up to buy two tickets for a fiver –and thinking at the time that was a bit steep and it had better be worth it.

#### December 1978: The Lyceum ballroom in The Strand

It was a phenomenal gig – Strummer spitting out lyrics through his crooked teeth, his left leg furiously pumping up and down to the beat, Mick Jones fronting up to his left, Paul Simonon, low slung bass across his hip to the right and Topper Headon hard at it on the drum kit at the back.

Tune after tune rocketed out from the stage into the auditorium one after the other in feverish bursts of hot energy – *White Riot*, *City of the Dead*, *Remote Control*, *Janie Jones*, *What’s My Name*, *Garageland*, *Tommy Gun*, *Drug-Stabbing Time*, *Capital Radio*, *Police and Thieves*, *I Fought The Law*, *Stay Free*...I staggered away at the end, drenched with sweat, my ears ringing (as they would continue to do so for days after), completely numbed, on autopilot I crossed The Strand and over the Thames towards Waterloo Station and home.





Whatever individual thoughts and emotions that had been with me that day had been burned clean out of my skull. Strummer later recalled that those were the nights “when it burns. When you cease to be even anybody at all. Your just part of something. You don’t know what your doing or saying. It burns and that is was the audience want to be part of, that burn”.

You can watch a very good 9-minute film of the Clash live, from October 1977 below.



Topics: [music \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/tag/music/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/tag/music/) • [Punk \(https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/tag/punk/\)](https://www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/tag/punk/)

## LEAVE A REPLY

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment \*

Name \*

Email \*

Website

☐ Please add me to your mailing list.

Post Comment