

And to top it off, the older D.C. hipsters dismissed them as “teeny-punks.” “No one took us seriously,” says MacKaye, his frustration still evident. “And it drove us *crazy*—how much more real could we be? We were kids! We picked up guitars! We taught ourselves how to play! We wrote our own songs!”

Garfield got MacKaye a job taking tickets at the Georgetown Theatre, right on the neighborhood’s main drag, Wisconsin Avenue. The street was a promenade for yuppies, preppies, college kids, and other straitlaced, affluent young Washingtonians—in other words, a place MacKaye and his punk friends loved to hate. MacKaye worked there three nights a week for five years, sitting behind the glass and glaring out at the straights. “Every Friday night,” says MacKaye, “I just sat there and I just watched a parade of fucking idiots going by. It was party night, it was Georgetown, and it just turned my stomach.” It’s no coincidence that most Minor Threat songs were written in that window.

By now the punk rock movement had been well tamed by the major labels and willing accomplices like Ultravox, Joe Jackson, and Spandau Ballet. A pioneering few began devising an ultra-punk—undiluted, unglamorous, and uncompromising—that no corporation would ever touch. “We were a new kind of punk rock,” says MacKaye. “We were *hardcore* punk rockers.”

Hardcore was the latest volley in a transatlantic tennis game, with punk rock as the ball. The British had received the first wave of American punk bands—Richard Hell and the Voidoids, Television, Talking Heads, Blondie, the Ramones, et al.—and fired back with the Sex Pistols, the Damned, Buzzcocks, and countless others.

“When the ball came back this way, there was an intense spin that Americans put on it when they sent it back over,” MacKaye says. “That’s why it became so amped—it was just so much more intense, it was a lot less of a fashion thing. The kids were younger and they just went to town with it.” So while the first wave of punks abandoned the music and moved into post-punk, a younger crowd took their place and developed hardcore, a combustible mixture of white teenage male angst and friskated energy.

There was a quantum difference between early punk and hardcore—it was something like the difference between bebop and hard bop in jazz, or the leap from Chuck Berry’s affable rock & roll to Jimi Hendrix’s freaky electrocution of the blues. It was all about the intensity of your delivery.

Because many kids on the scene came from just two high schools (Wilson and Georgetown Day), the D.C. punk scene was very inbred, socially and aesthetically. They all listened to the same music, went to the same schools, played parties at each other’s houses. “In a sense, it was a small town scene even though it was a city,” says Mark Jenkins. “If virtually everyone had a Wire song in their repertoire, it was because they were kids, they didn’t have that many records, they all listened to each other’s records, they reinforced themselves.”

A case in point is the “Stepping Stone” phenomenon. MacKaye says Minor Threat didn’t even know “Stepping Stone” was originally a Monkees song and only knew the Sex Pistols’ version. A latter-day “Louie, Louie,” “Stepping Stone” enjoyed a tremendous renaissance in the early Eighties underground; Minor Threat was just one of many D.C. bands to cover the song (at Minor Threat’s second show, each of the seven bands on the bill covered the tune).

Their light-speed take on the song is indicative, the extreme velocity tracing directly to the Bad Brains. “They were so fast and so good,” MacKaye recalls. “And that was an aesthetic. And that’s what we danced to. So we started to play fast, too. We also knew that, as an aesthetic, it was our own—for a few moments there.”

Having one’s own aesthetic was a rarity for many Washingtonians. “If you grew up white in this city and you’re not part of the political establishment,” says MacKaye, “or you’re not part of the true culture, which is a black culture, then you have no culture. There is nothing here.” So they decided to make their own culture, and it couldn’t have been more different from black culture. “Hardcore in general seemed the least funky music ever played on guitar,” says Mark Jenkins. “To a certain extent I think it’s the effect of streamlining—just taking all the syncopation out of it, turning it into this blur.”

In their one-year existence, the Teen Idles had amassed \$900, all of which went into a band kitty kept in a cigar box. When the band dissolved, they had to decide whether to split the money four ways or press up the recordings they’d done with Don Zientara. The choice was obvious. “We just said, ‘Let’s document ourselves,’” says MacKaye. “We figured that having a record would be pretty cool!”

“I don’t remember thinking it was going to be anything more than just one record,” adds Nelson. “We didn’t have any grandiose plans.”

With Groff's help, MacKaye and Nelson, still in their late teens, commenced work on their debut release, the Teen Idles' eight-song *Minor Disturbance* seven-inch EP, released in January '81. MacKaye dubbed their new label Dischord Records.

Nelson designed the sleeve, which featured a punk rocker's hands with the telltale underage Xs drawn on them. They arranged the pressing and printing, ordering an initial run of a thousand copies. Everything had to be cut, folded, and glued by hand; MacKaye, Nelson, Strejcek, and their friends spent much of their waking hours assembling the covers.

Drawn by the cover shot of punk heartthrob Penelope Houston of the Avengers, they discovered an obscure fanzine called *Touch & Go*, published out of the unlikely punk outpost of Lansing, Michigan, and edited by Dave Stinson and one Tesco Vee. Impressed, they sent *Touch & Go* a Teen Idles single. Although the record got broken in the mail, the *Touch & Go* folks liked the cover art so much that they taped the record together just to see what it sounded like. They managed to hear a few seconds at a time, enough that they immediately wrote back and asked for another copy.

Touch & Go wrote up a glowing review and soon orders began trickling in from readers. Dischord sent copies to other fanzines, as well as radio stations like KPFA and KUSF in San Francisco. Reviews and some airplay followed — the Bay Area's *Maximumrockroll* radio show had "Get Up and Go" at number one for weeks — and more orders rolled in. "We couldn't believe it," says MacKaye. "First of all, it was an eight-song single. Nobody had ever heard of an eight-song single. They were freaked out. But nobody could tell us why we shouldn't do it. No one could explain why a punk would ever follow any mainstream rule about how many songs you could put on a single."

They had decided that if *Minor Disturbance* sold, they'd simply put all the money into releasing another record. Dischord was short on cash, so Henry Garfield put up money he'd earned from managing an ice-cream store to record his band, S.O.A., and their ten-song seven-inch became Dischord's second release. When the money came back from those first two seven-inches, they had the funds to make more records. In the four months after the Teen Idles record came out, key D.C. punk bands including Youth Brigade and Government Issue — friends of Nelson and MacKaye — formed, and Dischord released seven-inch records by both of them. "We were all working our asses off," says MacKaye. "I was working all the time trying to pay for everything. But it was all about documentation."

In March '81 Black Flag came to the East Coast for the first time, playing the Peppermint Lounge in New York. The whole D.C. crew drove up for the gig. "And we also raised hell," MacKaye says. "We got in a lot of fights. Everybody hated us."

The cool, older, more intoxicant-friendly New York crowd did not appreciate the rambunctious kids from D.C. who knocked into anyone with long hair ("hippies") or those who weren't slamming with them. Writing in his fanzine *The Big Takeover* (ironically, the title of a Bad Brains song), Jack Rabid assailed the D.C. punks' behavior as "a stupid, macho, phoney trip," adding, "If you insist on this bullshit attitude than [sic] we may as well forget all the positive aspects of our scene and chuck the whole thing out the window. And may a hippie beat the living shit out of you."

Two weeks later the D.C. crew headed up to the Dead Kennedy's show at Irving Plaza and even more fighting broke out. "It was the most crazy brawl," MacKaye says. "I can remember one fight at that show that started in front of the stage and rolled — it was four or five of us fighting — across the floor to the top of the stairs and then rolled down the stairs fighting. It was incredible! It was like a Western or something."

Critic Lester Bangs, in a review of the Black Flag show, called MacKaye and his cohorts "muscleheads from Washington," which irritated the D.C. crew even more than being called "teeny-punks." "When he called us muscleheads, we were like, 'Fuck you!'" says MacKaye. "We were so mad." Not long afterward a review of a Dead Kennedy's show also called the boisterous D.C. crew "muscleheads," so in typical punk fashion they turned insult into asset: a musclehead, they reasoned, must be someone with a very strong brain. Not long afterward Dischord issued the landmark D.C. hardcore compilation *Flex Your Head*. It sold a remarkable four thousand copies in the first week of its release.

Minor Threat debuted with Dischord's third release, an untitled seven-inch EP recorded in early May '81. In a mere eleven minutes, the eight songs inveigh against blowhards ("I Don't Wanna Hear It"), stubborn friends ("Screaming at a Wall"), Bible freaks ("Filler"). The songs were all about very specific aspects of their lives: "Bottled Violence" rails at those who got drunk at shows and beat up people; "Minor Threat" warns of growing up too soon; "Seeing Red" is about getting taunted for looking like a punk. All of it packed a powerful