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the album's second side.

A more pointed example comes from the lyrics of the album's opening song, "Don't Push Me Too Far."

"Pushing and shoving you want to fight/ But I'll turn around and I'll do what's right/ I'll walk away, I'll turn my back/ Hoping you'll end your useless attack/ Takes more of a man to turn the other cheek."

Nothing is too confusing there, but the song continues, "Don't push me too far/ I might give in, you might get hurt . . . /I might forget what I stand for."

What is the use of standing for a principle if it is to be tossed aside when circumstances get harsh?

Social Justice cannot be faulted for being apathetic, but the band needs to focus and direct its anger. The band's music is as good as that of any positive hardcore band, but it needs to push farther musically and lyrically to best make its ideas known.

The "Mashin' Up the Nation" album (Harvard Records under license from Razorbeat Records) is a collection of songs by 14 American ska bands. These bands capture the musical heritage but are more interested in having fun than their predecessors.

This compilation is part of an American ska revival that is reaching back to the Jamaican ska sound which later developed into reggae.

Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Bunny

Wailer, Toots Hibbert and Peter Tosh are among the many currently popular reggae performers with roots in the ska sound of the early 1960s (Maximum Rockroll, October 1989).

These early performers often sang about economic conditions and racial unity. These themes continued as ska migrated to England, where the Two-Tone record label was born.

That label helped spread the ska sound throughout Britain and America and continued to emphasize racial harmony. Two-Tone was the home of the Specials AKA, who also did much to popularize the ska sound.

Interestingly, the skinhead movement began in Britain as the Rude Boy (Rudie blues being the roots of ska) and Mod styles fused (ibid).

The skinheads initially thrived on working class sentiments, mixed freely with Blacks and encouraged racial unity. It was only later that skins were recruited by neo-Nazi organizations like the National Front and some of them became violently white supremacist.

Ska now is reappearing throughout the world. "Mashin' Up the Nation" chronicles the resurgence of ska in America.

If the bands on this album are representative, American ska is largely confined to the New Eng-

land area. Four of the bands are from Massachusetts, and only one (Let's Go Bowling) is from west of the Mississippi.

These new skasters are more interested in having fun than in the social messages of their predecessors, with a few exceptions.

Bop Harvey's "Bread and Circuses" is one of these exceptions. A lengthy song with a lively beat, the song lies in the political ska tradition with its questioning of the Oliver North affair.

The chorus reads: "It's bread and circuses time/ Who's going to pay for all these crimes?"

Note Bob Marley's "No Respect" captures the plight of the poor in this nation with a song recalling the Specials AKA in its subject matter and male-female harmonies.

Oddly Enough also evoke comparisons to the Specials AKA with "Direction of a Faceless Expression," a song about an encounter with a homeless man.

All of these songs contrast sharply with the personal harshness of "Get Out" by The Now, who sing, "Leave girl or I'll throw you out/ One of us has to go and I've decided it's you."

Nowhere on the album can the earlier ska concern for racial harmony be found. Public Service's note on the album cover that they work "to transcend the barriers inherent in popular music" is the only hint at such sentiments.

The album contains songs dedicated to ska revival (New York Citizens' "Rude Girls") and having fun ("Let's Go Bowling").

Some of the album's best songs are instrumentals like the tuba-charged "Phoenix City" of Les Misérables or Roland Alphonso's "Groucho Dub."


Also notable are a live song by Bim Skala Bim recorded at CBGB's and "Drums and Chickens" by the now-defunct Bosstones.

A second volume of this compilation is planned. It should continue to capture ska's musical heritage while portraying more of the lyrical heritage.

Social Justice's "Unity is Strength" and "Mashin' Up the Nation" albums both provided by Project Import.


the fifth column

album review



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