



Punks in Peoria: Making a Scene in the American Heartland

Jonathan Wright

Dawson Barrett

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Punks in Peoria pays unabashed, joyful homage to the punk rock scene in an average Rust Belt town.

Charting the rise of punk bands in the music market between Chicago and St. Louis, where many young people felt dissatisfied with their limited options, this book shows how generations of bands dominated local stages, drawing crowds of skaters, outcasts, and ne'er-do-wells. Peoria had a fading industrial base when it hosted the fledgling punk movement itself, years after it took off along the coasts and in nearby cultural hubs.

In contrast to those scenes, Peoria was nestled amid the cornfields; the question of “whether it will play in Peoria” seemed obsolescent. But Jonathan Wright and Dawson Barrett’s book documents and romanticizes the subversive musicians who came there nonetheless, and who lived life three chords at a time. Indeed, punk’s misfits and miscreants found community in the sweaty, underground shows they played in Peoria, and did so without regard to conventions or mainstream culture.

This is a passion project with both a strong command of local history and clear love for its subject material. Wright and Barrett outline Peoria concerts well—both their impacts and overarching significance, and their shocking particulars. Their enthusiasm is infectious. *Punks in Peoria* links local bands to national and international trends and captures the spirits of alienated, lonely young people, connecting their personal travails to larger cultural phenomena. Its rich details give life to local acts and dramatize visits from the likes of legends such as GG Allin.

Written with moshing, stage-diving energy, *Punks in Peoria* is the warts-and-all music history of a vibrant punk subculture that gave young people hope and life in the decaying American heartland of rural Illinois.

JOSEPH S. PETE (July / August 2021)

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