

# **Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk Study Guide**

**Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk  
by Gillian McCain and Legs McNeil**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

# Contents

<a href="#">Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Epilogue and Part One.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Part Two.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Part Three.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Part Four.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Part Five.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Epilogue.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>

# Plot Summary

"Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain is a collection of firsthand accounts of the history of the punk music scene.

The book begins by focusing on the two front running bands in the punk music scene: New York City's Velvet Underground and Detroit, Michigan's Motor City Five. The book goes on to include early associations with Andy Warhol and poet Patti Smith, as well as the rise of bands like the New York Dolls and The Stooges. The book also goes into detail about the deviant lifestyle of all the band members and affiliates of the punk music scene, ranging from sexual promiscuity to binge drinking to heavy drug use.

The book chronicles the rise of other bands, such as the Ramones and England's Sex Pistols, as well as the conservative cultural backlash against the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s-punk music culture. In fact, many of the band members and people associated with the punk music scene succumb to their own vices by way of drug overdoses and health issues resulting from drug use and drinking. Through the 1990s, the punk music scene peters out, while many believe that the death knell for punk music sounded in the 1980s.

# Epilogue and Part One

## Epilogue and Part One Summary and Analysis

The epilogue serves as a brief survey of the punk scene. Focusing around the efforts of Lou Reed and John Cale to forge their band The Velvet Underground, those interviewed relate the experiences of moving from small shows to larger venues, and the heavy use of drugs among many punk rockers. The Velvet Underground also moves in and out of cultural circles, including that of Andy Warhol. Warhol's friend and fellow filmmaker, Paul Morrissey, becomes the manager of the Velvet Underground, along with Warhol. Morrissey oversees the introduction of Nico to the group, a female singer. The Velvet Underground records their first album, but Verve/MGM doesn't release it right away. Lou Reed decides he wants a better manager, and internal rivalries and pettiness shatter the band.

Danny Fields recounts meeting Jim Morrison in Los Angeles at Elektra Records, as well as his frequent use of pills. Danny recalls Jim Morrison as being mean and self-centered. Jim Morrison begins his career as fit, slim, and attractive, then becomes fat, burned out, and sloppy.

Ron Asheton and Iggy Pop recount their band The Stooges. Iggy Pop remembers his band mates as being babied by their mothers, without the guiding convictions of fathers, and without discipline. When Ron meets Iggy, Iggy is straight-edge. Iggy, after failing to get through college, decides to try taking drugs, and he and Ron later becomes a fan of the Doors. Ron and Iggy begin making music and playing small shows.

The Motor City Five (MC5) becomes famous for being the only band to play during the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. MC5 was hoping to help demonstrate a show of solidarity against the government, but they were the only band to show up to play. Wayne Kramer, guitarist for MC5, also recounts having contracted sexual diseases several times from having so much sex. Kramer also recounts how revolutionary his band was, hoping to politicize the youth of the country, but the youth only wanted drugs. Danny Fields recognizes the talent of MC5 and The Stooges, and gets them onto Elektra Records.

Part One, Chapter 4 - Kathy Asheton recalls that the day Iggy Pop gets married is the day that she and Iggy begin their own romantic relationship. Scott and Ron Asheton recount how Iggy always had girls with him. Iggy's marriage lasts a month, because he remembers not being able to balance a career and a wife at the same time. The Stooges go to New York to record their first album, to be produced by John Cale. Cale also introduces them to Andy Warhol, and gets them to go to the Factory to play.

Part One, Chapter 5 - Wayne Kramer recounts the MC5 arriving for a show in the Fillmore East in a limousine, and the people waiting for the show becoming angry, believing the MC5 to have sold out. The angry mob attacks the MC5, smashes their

equipment, shatters their records, and goes after them. MC5 continues to struggle, never really getting out to the public, and are dropped by Elektra.

Part One, Chapter 6 - The Stooges begin playing larger and larger shows. Iggy Pop, especially, catches the attention of the audience. He performs half-naked, gets sick on stage, and puts his genitalia on a speaker.

Part One, Chapter 7 - The Detroit-based MC5, for all of their violent political stances, begin attracting attention. The government cracks down on marijuana as heroin becomes the drug of choice for musicians. Undercover policemen begin arresting musicians for drug use. John Sinclair of MC5 is among those arrested. Danny Fields arranges to have MC5 signed with Atlantic Records.

Part One, Chapter 8 - By 1970, MC5 begin using harder drugs, including heroin and cocaine. In 1971, the Stooges are preparing to record their third album. Drugs and waste have eaten away finances. Finally, Danny Fields can't handle the wildness of MC5, and leaves to move on to work at 16 Magazine.

Prologue and Part One Analysis:

What ultimately becomes known as punk music has its beginnings with the band Velvet Underground, who in turn have association with Andy Warhol. Warhol, known for his countercultural and avant-garde art, videography, theater, and association with other similar countercultural icons, helps to foment punk music. From the beginnings, punk is deluged with artists, authors, and musicians who indulge in hedonistic lifestyles, full of sex and drugs. Despite the known dangers of such lifestyles -Jim Morrison serves as a prime example in the late 1960s -punk rock musicians nevertheless delve into drugs.

Originally, punk music is about rejecting mass movements and the status quo. This can be seen in the leftist political ideologies of bands like Motor City Five, who try to help begin a revolution at the Democratic National Convention in 1968 -an effort that fails miserably. MC5 also presents a trend that will continue, beyond drug use and sexual promiscuity: As punk bands make it big, they are accused of selling out. This is clearly evidenced by the fan onslaught during MC5's Fillmore East show. They also exhibit shocking behavior on stage, from vomiting to showing off genitalia. Punk rock musicians, all too happy and all too eager to condemn the rich, nevertheless aspire to a place where money will make their own lives easier, and where they in turn can use that money to get away with things they would not ordinarily get away with (see Part 4, Chapter 27), such as drug use.

To counter the trends of drug use, the government cracks down on particular drugs, making them harder to come by. When one drug is illegalized or cracked down on, other drugs become the substance of choice until they, too, are cracked down upon.

## Part Two

### Part Two Summary and Analysis

Penny Arcade recounts running away from home to the East Village in New York, and there meeting people who associated with Andy Warhol. Some of these friends of Warhol's create the Playhouse of the Ridiculous Theater. Speed is the drug of choice for Penny, John Vaccaro, Lee Childers, and other performance artists. There, Penny meets punk poet Patti Smith. Penny also acts and stars in a number of plays and films.

Max's Kansas City, a nightclub and restaurant in New York City, plays host to a number of punk bands and poets like Patti Smith. At Max's, Patti Smith and Penny Arcade decide to form a band.

Jim Carroll, a writer and musician, briefly dates Patti Smith. Among the readings that Patti Smith performs, one is seen and heard by Joey Ramone.

Lee Childers, working for 16 Magazine, went to see the New York Dolls or straight men who dressed up as women for performances. Lee recalls the Dolls were being outrageous to get signed. One of the appeals of the music of the Dolls was the sounds of the 1950s they were bringing back, according to Jerry Nolan, who would later become drummer for the Dolls. The Dolls' style in both costume and music influenced David Bowie, who would go to see their shows frequently.

RCA is promoting and paying a lot for David Bowie's American tour, and RCA wants Andy Warhol to tour with them. David Bowie and Iggy Pop become friends. They go to London to watch David Bowie perform, and Ron Asheton recounts sleeping with David Bowie's wife, and that David Bowie didn't care.

Just after being signed, the New York Dolls go to England to open for Rod Stewart. While there, Billy Murcia, one of the Dolls, takes alcohol and drugs, overdoses, and in the attempt to revive him in a bathtub full of icy water, dies from drowning. The Dolls, on the verge of breaking up, are saved when Jerry Nolan signs on to complete the band. Fueled by news of Billy's wrongful death, the Dolls grow famous.

David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust tour proved to be a large part of rock star culture: bands getting whatever they wanted, so that management wouldn't have to deal with having to tell them "no." Lee Childers is given the assignment of watching over Iggy Pop, who was then at the height of his drug use. Ron Asheton recalls that those days were wonderful for him - plenty of drugs, naked girls, nice cars, and money. Sable Starr and Laurie Maddox became the groupies of choice for the music scene after Sable sleeps with David Bowie. At fifteen, Sable Starr moves in to live with Iggy Pop. In 1973, the Stooges release their third album, *Raw Power*.

When Sable Starr turns sixteen, she tries running away with Johnny Thunder of the New York Dolls, but her mother finds out, and refuses to let her go. Yet Sable runs away

regardless. She and Johnny get into many fights, and Johnny turns out to be physically abusive toward her. Sable then leaves to go home.

Patti Smith becomes a major figure in the punk rock movement, though her beginnings are that of a humble poet. She is originally associated with Andy Warhol and his Factory, but her future will become much greater than the playhouse. Andy Warhol himself becomes ingratiated in the punk rock movement especially through his friendship with David Bowie. David Bowie exhibits another marked trend in the punk rock music scene, that of uninhibited sexual promiscuity. This too will later have severe consequences for all those who participate in such promiscuity.

Bowie's Ziggy Stardust tour also proves to be a watermark in terms of management-band relations philosophy. In order to placate musicians and make money, management and record labels begin giving the musicians anything they want. Record companies become complicit and enablers of the attitudes and degenerate lifestyles of those signed onto their labels. This is a dangerous precedent that will have serious ramifications in the short years to come.

Interestingly enough, despite the clearly shocking and unprecedented lifestyles of the punk rock musicians, precious little is actually said about the music created, or punk music theory by the musicians. They seem to focus on recalling their glory days of parties, sex with underage girls, lavish use of drugs, alcoholic binges, and digging up dirt on one another instead. This attitude also will prove disastrous to the punk music scene itself in the long run.

# Part Three

## Part Three Summary and Analysis

Patti Smith recalls seeing a Rolling Stones concert where she could feel and see the poet in Mick Jagger. Patti Smith's writing begins taking off, and what catches the attention of people are her lyrical poems that sound like song lyrics. Patti then begins working on forming her band.

The New York Dolls inspire Richard Hell and Tom Verlaine to want to do a band. Terry Ork, who was working for Andy Warhol, agreed to financially support the Hell-Verlaine band, which would become Television. All of the band members begin using heroin. Tom Verlaine, however, refrains from using any drugs, and never drinks much either, wanting to keep control of his senses. Patti Smith later begins dating Tom. Television and Patti Smith's new band begin playing shows together.

Joey Ramone spends his teenage years doing drugs and living from place to place. At the request of Johnny Ramone and Dee Dee Ramone, Joey joins their band, and later, Johnny.

Penny Arcade, living in Maine, goes back to New York to see Patti Smith. Patti Smith has just released her album *Horses*, and it is already very popular. Penny is absolutely bewildered by Patti's popularity.

Malcolm McLaren's store Sex sells rock & roll clothing and items, and is visited by the Dolls, who are amazed with the shop. McLaren recalls the Dolls as being part of the Sixties generation: vain, self-centered, and never wanting to grow up. McLaren becomes manager for the Dolls, and has a profound influence on them: he is credited with saving some of their lives by getting them into rehab. Meanwhile, Tom Verlaine, who is becoming more and more egotistical, causes Richard Hell to leave Television, to be replaced by Fred Smith, of Blondie.

Legs McNeil and his friends John Holmstrom and Ged Dunn begin a magazine called Punk, featuring music and cultural things. They write articles about the Ramones and interview Lou Reed for their first issue. Legs and his friends plaster Punk posters all over the city, and many believe that a new, bad band is coming -not a magazine.

The Ramones reject a song called "Chinese Rocks" because they don't want Ramones songs to be about drugs. The Heartbreakers end up doing the song instead.

MC5 breaks up in 1972, and the members all go their own ways. Wayne Kramer becomes a criminal, and Jim Marshall gets further into drugs by doing angel dust. Iggy Pop and the Stooges break up soon after.

Patti Smith's fame as a poet begins taking off and it is her poetry that is lyrical that catches the most attention. Patti Smith forms a band and produces an album called



"Horses", which is well-received. At the same time, the Ramones come together as a band, and begin organizing music. Malcolm McLaren, English punk rock store owner and manager, relates something to the reader that is by now readily apparent: the punk rock musicians and their fans are overgrown children who don't want to grow up at all.

Another seminal event occurs in the history of punk rock music in 1976 with the publishing of the first issue of Punk Magazine by Legs McNeil and friends. The word "punk" becomes synonymous with the style of music Legs and his friends report on and write about. The entire movement now has a name that continues to the present day.

By the mid-1970s, cracks are beginning to appear in the surface of punk music. MC5 and the Stooges, giants in the punk rock world, both break up. As if anticipating mainstream opposition to the lifestyle associated with punk rock music, the Ramones reject a drug-related song called "Chinese Rocks," arguing that they don't want their music to be about drugs.

# Part Four

## Part Four Summary and Analysis

At a time when some albums took years to record, and half-a-million dollars to make, the Ramones record the album in a week for a few thousand dollars. DeeDee Ramone remembers growing up in Germany, where trading World War II relics as a child was a pastime. To many of the Ramones, Nazi memorabilia became symbolic of sexual activity, and not racism.

Bob Gruen, rock photographer, remembers going to England when the Sex Pistols formed. The American punk movement -something bohemian and intellectual -catches on in England, and grows into something different -teenage sensation. The Sex Pistols represent the English transition. Malcolm McLaren recalls that on the surface, everything seemed straightforward, but behind the scenes, drugs and sex are rampant.

Iggy Pop's life in Hollywood continues -from being arrested for drunkenness, to showing up naked for band rehearsal, to continuing his friendship with David Bowie. Slowly, Iggy comes to realize however that he has to get in shape and clean up his act, because he is not just a singer, but also a product. As the punk rock scene grows, many rockers continue going to extremes, such as David Bowie, who flashes his money and gives the Hitler salute. A culture of decadence in the 1970s transcends the rock scene. Sex and drugs are everywhere in the 1970s. Ed Sanders recalls that in the 1970s, people could do anything they wanted if they had money -and the bands had money.

The drug culture entrenches itself in the rock scene to such a degree that the Heartbreakers won't even rehearse without getting high first. The Heartbreakers go on tour with the Sex Pistols, but because the tabloids and the papers carry stories of their vulgarity and deviant behavior, many towns refuse to even let the tours pass through, forcing them to go around towns. Only six of eighteen gigs are played because of this. The Heartbreakers also turn the Sex Pistols onto heavier drugs, such as heroin.

The Dictators arrive comparably late on the punk rock scene with their album "Go Girl Crazy!" But they ascend to the rock culture of drugs, parties, and sex quickly. Legs McNeil recalls how the 1970s were an era of mass movements, such as gay liberation, and how the punk rock scene rejected these movements. By the mid-1970s, the punk rock movement shifts away from Detroit to New York, and the bands begin rebelling against mass movements by promoting white pride in nonracial ways, for example.

Richard Hell, among others, also have suicidal tendencies. Bob Quine recalls how nasty and bitter English audiences are, spitting on the bands. Richard Hell recounts how when his band formed years before, the goal was to be obnoxious and shocking, but that it was played out by the time the Sex Pistols came around.

Patti Smith's second album "Radio Ethiopia" comes out, and it is more mainstream. They play alongside Bob Seger and others. During one show, Patti trips over an amp, falls offstage, and she and her band are sidelined for a year. After the incident, Patti Smith and the band seek answers in their Christian faith.

The outrageous nature of punk rock musicians continues to evolve and expand. Some bands, like the Heartbreakers, won't even rehearse without getting high first. Other bands, like the Dictators and David Bowie, adopt Nazi symbols and paraphernalia to be shocking and to make countercultural statements. Yet this is a bridge too far for many people. The bands are labeled as sexist, homophobic, racist, and bigoted for their use of heinous imagery and symbols -even if they aren't sexist, homophobic, racist, and bigoted.

Yet the bands continue on living as they do. In the 1970s, as Ed Sanders notes in Chapter 27, anyone with money could do anything they wanted, and bands had lots of money. Despite this, audiences are slowly growing tired of punk rock culture. What was shocking and novel only a few years before is tired and overdone by the time bands like the Sex Pistols come around, and only serves to turn more people against the punk music scene.

Musicians, for all of their pomposity and hedonistic lifestyles, are themselves only human. Years of selling themselves to audiences and record labels have begun to take their toll. Depression is common among many of the musicians, including Richard Hell. These musicians have money, girls, and drugs, but they have little of genuine substance that can counteract their depression. Some, like Iggy Pop, recognize a need to clean themselves up, but fail to do so.

# Part Five

## Part Five Summary and Analysis

New York nights for writers, rockers, and artists, consisted of going back and forth between Max's Kansas City and Country, Bluegrass, and Blues (CBGB's). Drugs flow freely at CBGB's. Additionally, the films being made by some of the punk rockers, such as "Unmade Beds" gain enough attention to be nationally reviewed, such as in the New York Times.

With the release of their first album, the Dead Boys are slated to open for Iggy Pop on a handful of tour dates. By 1977, many rockers are beginning to realize their glory days are over. On the streets, notoriety and fame doesn't hold up against thugs, who attack Michael Sticca, Johnny Blitz, and their girls. Yet it was also the time that the band Blondie takes off. Debbie Harry reveals that the record companies were giving them thousands of dollars of drugs to keep them on the label.

The Sex Pistols come to the United States for a tour. Chaos ranging from drugs to vomiting on stage to violence are the order of the day for the tour. The image of punk also takes flight, from spiky hair to safety-pin-riddled clothes. Credit for the movement begins going to England, thanks to the Sex Pistols. Media focus is on the outrageous actions of the Sex Pistols and the punk movement, not on the music itself. In San Francisco, the Sex Pistols break up. The record companies begin rethinking punk because of the break up. Legs McNeil grows tired of punk, because it has become a mass-movement of sorts, and because it has become everything that was once detested.

The punk movement wears out relatively quickly. Album sales drop and the punk rock star image grows old and reviled. The companies want the punk bands to change their images and clean up their acts, and go more mainstream. At the same time, health problems, especially from drug use, begin catching up with some of the bands. Richard Lloyd, for example, contracts endocarditis, from shooting drugs. Mainstream success for some means elitism and alienation. Patti Smith barely acknowledges Wayne Kramer, for example, after he is released from jail. Patti Smith, however, becomes more and more famous, and rejects the violent and degenerative style represented by Sid Vicious.

Following the break up of the Sex Pistols, Sid Vicious and Nancy were living in New York City. Both of them use drugs copiously. On October 13, 1978, Sid Vicious is accused of killing Nancy. Others believe Nancy is killed by a thief whom she catches stealing from her and Sid. While in jail, Sid's mother sneaks him dope and heroin. Out of jail, Sid overdoses and dies, perhaps overdosing intentionally. Sid's mother, according to Eileen Polk, spreads Sid's ashes on Nancy's grave so the two can rest together.

While some punk bands are failing because they are not consistent with the times, others are succeeding. Among them are the Ramones. DeeDee Ramone gets married to Vera, while his former love, Connie, becomes a prostitute.

The Sonic's Rendezvous Band forms out of members of MC5, the Stooges, and other bands. Fred Smith, of MC5, is among the members. Patti Smith wants to marry Fred Smith, and be a good mother and a good wife, and leave everything else behind.

Mainstream America, as well as politically correct people and organizations, are hard against the punk rock music scene. Album sales drop quickly, and record labels urge their punk bands to go more mainstream. Some, like Patti Smith, have already done so (see Part Four, Chapter 31). Some bands, like the Ramones, begin to adopt a more mainstream style, though their personal lives are still wracked by drugs, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity.

Yet the personal lifestyles of many of these rockers catch up to them. Sid Vicious and Nancy both die as a result of their lifestyle, while Richard Lloyd contracts a disease from shooting up drugs. Others, like Legs McNeil, give up on the punk movement because it has become the embodiment of everything it once detested and protested. As has been confirmed in previous analysis (see Part Two Analysis), more attention is paid to the lifestyles of the punk rock musicians, and not to the music they have created. Bad reputations far outdistance any music talent these bands have, and punk becomes its own mass movement, focused more on style and attitude than substance and music.

At the same time many punk musicians are dying or falling ill to their own vices, others are simply walking away from everything, like Patti Smith. Still others, like Fred Smith of MC5, fight on to keep making music, and form new bands. But most cannot escape their lifestyle, which will soon catch up to them.

# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Wayne Kramer and Johnny Thunder form the band Gang War. Through the 1980s, cocaine becomes the drug of choice. Widespread conservatism in the 1980s also provides a challenge to punk, one that Mick Farren, rock writer, says punk caves into. Additionally, there is a lot of wasted talent. In 1982, Lester Bangs, a music critic and major force in the punk music world, dies of a drug overdose.

As the 1980s wear on, many believe the days of punk have finished. Among them are James Chance and Sylvia Reed. Other punk rock stars and members of the movement begin facing their own demons. Anya Phillips, manager and girlfriend of James Chance and the Contortions, dies of cancer in 1981. Iggy Pop continues to suffer from depression, worsened by drug and alcohol abuse.

The Ramones have been touring for fifteen years, and it is wearing thin on the members, who don't even want to look at one another. Punk culture continues taking a toll on everyone. Cyrinda Foxe recalls bathing Johnny Thunders, and seeing needle marks all over his body, from his feet to his legs to his arms. Stiv Bators, of the Dead Boys and Lords of the New Church, is hit by a car in Paris, goes home, goes to sleep, and dies of a blood clot.

Johnny Thunders continues to deteriorate as the drugs eat away at him. In 1991, he heads to New Orleans to record an acoustic album. He has also realized it is time to clean up. While in New Orleans, Johnny Thunders is found dead -from murder or from drug overdose has never been fully determined.

Nico, riding a bike to get drugs, and wearing heavy clothes to hide her emaciated figure, suffers sunstroke and dies. After her death, Ari Delon, Nico's son, goes on a drug binge and almost dies, and determines to get clean. A Velvet Underground reunion show materializes as well, but the band members all go their separate ways once more.

Jerry Nolan's body is battered from drug and alcohol use. He succumbs to bacterial meningitis and pneumonia, and dies in the hospital after suffering a stroke.

The 1980s prove to be a death knell for punk music as it had been. The election of Ronald Reagan, and the emergence of mainstream American conservatism mean that punk rock music has met its match and reached its zenith. And it is a match won by mainstream America. James Chance and others believe that punk is over.

Additionally, the punk lifestyle has worn out the Ramones, who refuse to even look at one another on tour. Indeed, Johnny Ramone emerges as an avowed conservative Republican, defending President Reagan against his fellow band mates by wanting a song retitled so that it is not offensive to the president.

One by one, the punk musicians and affiliates who refuse to change their lifestyles succumb to them, from Johnny Thunders to Nico to Jerry Nolan. The fate of such a lifestyle -exemplified by Jim Morrison early on in the book - becomes the fate of many. In the end, as many of the punk musicians look back at their careers, what stands out in the interviews recorded in the book are their lifestyles, and not the music they created.

# Characters

## Iggy Pop

Iggy Pop, front man of the band The Stooges, was a major figure in the history of punk music. Born in Michigan, Iggy Pop is a talented musician, serves as inspiration for many other musicians, and lives a deviant lifestyle as well. He engages in heavy drug use, sexual promiscuity, and lives the quintessential, archetypal lifestyle of the rock star in Hollywood. Yet despite his fame and his fortune, Iggy suffers from depression and he ultimately realizes he needs to clean himself up.

## Legs McNeil

Legs McNeil is a journalist, writer, author, and participant in "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk." He is one of three founders of the countercultural "Punk" magazine, which gives the punk music scene its name. Throughout the course of the 1970s, as punk music becomes the embodiment of everything it once stood against - namely rich elitists who can get away with anything they want, as well as punk being a mass movement - Legs grows disillusioned and disenchanted with punk and fades away from the scene.

## Johnny Ramone

Johnny Ramone is a member of the band The Ramones. While he participated in the deviant punk lifestyle in the 1970s, he nevertheless comes out as a conservative Republican in the 1980s, pressing to show more respect for President Reagan.

## Joey Ramone

Joey Ramone is one of the founders of the band The Ramones. Growing up on the streets and already a drug user by the time he becomes a musician, Joey spends fifteen years straight on tour with the Ramones. By the end of those fifteen years, he cannot even stand to look at his band mates, having been around them non-stop. The Ramones break up in 1996.

## Patti Smith

Patti Smith is a major force in the punk music scene, originally starting out as a poet at Andy Warhol's Factory Playhouse. Her lyrical poetry attracts the most attention and she begins a band that becomes known as the Patti Smith Band. She produces several albums, gains notoriety, and has an accident during a show where she trips over an





amp and falls offstage. She recovers and continues performing, but ultimately leaves the music scene to marry Fred Smith, and to become a wife and a mother.

## **Andy Warhol**

Andy Warhol was a countercultural and avant-garde artist who affiliated with many punk musicians, such as David Bowie. Andy Warhol also oversaw the Factory Playhouse, where Patti Smith and other bands performed.

## **Sid Vicious**

Sid Vicious was the bassist for the English punk group The Sex Pistols. He was a heavy drug user who was suspected of the murder of his girlfriend Nancy Spungen. He was ultimately found dead of a drug overdose in 1979, potentially intentional. His ashes were scattered on Nancy's grave by Sid's mother.

## **Jerry Nolan**

Jerry Nolan was the drummer for the New York Dolls, and later a member of Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers. He was a heavy drug user, and died in 1992 of a stroke following hospitalization for bacterial meningitis and pneumonia. Jerry Nolan was good friends with fellow musician Johnny Thunders.

## **Macolm McLaren**

Malcolm McLaren was an English store owner and manager of the New York Dolls and the Sex Pistols. He defended the punk movement, mistakenly saying that drugs and deviance were not part of the scene. He later managed to get several musicians into drug rehab to treat their addictions.

## **Lester Bangs**

Lester Bangs was a writer and music critic associated with the punk rock music scene. He wrote for both Creem and Rolling Stone magazines. He is emblematic of the punk rock music lifestyle, and died of a drug overdose in 1982.

## **Nancy Spungen**

Nancy Spungen was the girlfriend and manager of Sid Vicious. She was heavily into drugs, lived with Sid Vicious, and was found dead by Sid one morning in their room. Sid is often believed to have committed the crime.

# Objects/Places

## Drugs

Drugs are present in every stage of Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk". Drugs perforate every part of the fabric of the punk music scene, especially among bands, their groupies, and their affiliates. Some bands, like the Heartbreakers, do not even rehearse without getting high. Some companies, like the one that has signed Debbie Harry, are giving their bands thousands of dollars of drugs to keep them signed and happy.

## Money

Money, like drugs, invades every level of the punk music scene. Money is used primarily in the book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain to buy drugs. Usually, bands have a superfluous amount of money, but are other times broke, and must steal and borrow to get by. Before Johnny Thunders goes to New Orleans, he carries around thousands of dollars in his coat pockets.

## Limousine

A limousine is what many rock stars, including MC5, use to get to their shows from the record labels and from airports.

## Recording Studios

Recording studios are where bands write and record their music to be pressed onto vinyl records.

## Detroit, Michigan

Detroit, Michigan, is arguably one of the two birthplaces of punk rock music with the band Motor City Five hailing from the city.

## New York, New York

New York, New York, is arguably one of the two birthplaces of punk rock music with the band The Velvet Underground hailing from the city. New York, through the 1970s, also becomes the locus of punk music, producing such bands as the Ramones.

## **England**

England is where punk music became more defined and more widespread among the youth. David Bowie, the Sex Pistols, and Malcolm McLaren hail from England.

## **The Factory**

The Factory is a playhouse and theater that was originally Andy Warhol's studio. It became a place for the avant-garde and punk music movements to coalesce and perform.

## **Max's Kansas City**

Max's Kansas City is a New York City nightclub where punk rock bands performed, socialized, drank, and got high.

# Themes

## Countercultural Irony

Countercultural irony is the predominant theme in Legs McNeil's and Gillian McCain's book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk." In fact, the entire punk music movement was a countercultural thrust and one aimed at detesting and protesting rich elitists, conservatism, and mass social movements such as women's liberation and gay liberation.

The punk rock musicians, affiliates, and fans who participated in the countercultural movement took copious amounts of drugs, engaged in promiscuous sex - including sex with underage girls- and were oftentimes combative and violent. They took pleasure in living deviant and hedonistic lifestyles that were considered not normal, but over the course of time, they became everything they hated.

As their successes grew, punk rock musicians took on all the trappings of fame, from limousines to a sense of elitism to rejecting people not like them (seen in the rejection of the 1970s liberation movements). Some commented that in the 1970s, if one had money, one could get away with anything, and the bands had lots of money and enablers in record companies. The punk rock musicians had become everything they hated, relying on fame and money to secure their lifestyles and their drugs. Many people, such as Legs McNeil, grew disillusioned with the punk movement, and ended up rejecting even that in the end.

## Common Sense Fate

Common sense fate is a major theme in the book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain. Fate means having an end that is inescapable; and common sense fate is seeing a fate that is clearly inescapable, but engaging in behavior that will bring about the fate.

An early minor occurrence in the book is a reference to Jim Morrison, countercultural icon and musician, who became fat, sloppy, and wasted his life because of drugs. Yet all of the punk rock musicians growing up listening to Jim Morrison, or who were around and active when he died, refused to heed the warning offered by Morrison's death and the idea that one who lives by drugs, dies by drugs.

Over the course of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, many punk rock musicians who used drugs and drank heavily were killed by such substances, or died as a result of such a lifestyle. Among them are Lester Bangs, Sid Vicious, Jerry Nolan, Johnny Thunders, Billy Murcia, Neco, and Nancy Spungen. These musicians and punk affiliates could have avoided their fates had they not opted for the path of drugs and deviancy. Yet despite the dangers inherent with such a lifestyle, they voluntarily immersed themselves in drugs and alcohol.

## Conservative Revolt

The theme of conservative revolt is prevalent through the end of the book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain. Conservative revolt is the cultural backlash against the countercultural movements and deviant excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, including against the punk music scene. Mainstream conservatism rejects drugs, promiscuous sex, wild drinking, and hedonist and combative lifestyles that populated the punk music world. The conservative revolt swept Ronald Reagan into the presidency.

Record companies respond in kind. They seek punk bands as liabilities rather than financial investments. They urge their punk music bands to go more mainstream, or to tone things down. Many bands reject this call to tone down or go mainstream. Some bands, like the Ramones, tone down their public image while still retaining a private deviant lifestyle. Johnny Ramone, in particular, presses to reject a song that speaks about drugs, and to change the title of a song so as to be inoffensive to President Reagan. Johnny himself is a conservative Republican.

The bands that refuse to tone down their lifestyles, clean up, or go more mainstream, ultimately succumb to the conservatism of the 1980s. The bands fall apart, musicians die from drug overdoses or complications from drug use, and the music scene itself peters out. Mick Farren, an English writer, recalls in Chapter 39 that punk ended up caving in to conservatism, and that punk actually couldn't take any kind of a stiff challenge.

# Style

## Perspective

Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain present their text "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" in the first person, from interviews with punk music scene musicians and affiliates. This is done to allow a vast and comprehensive survey of the history of punk through the words of those who lived through the era. It therefore provides an unabashed and uncompromising account of the history of punk.

## Tone

The tone of the book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain is one of mild antagonism and wishful reminiscences. Each of the people interviewed use bad or crude language about themselves, each other, and the movement, illustrating clearly for the reader the way people spoke. This also allows the reader to sense the combativeness of some, the natural intelligence of others, and the across-the-board acknowledgment by those interviewed of the past as being the "glory days". It also allows the reader to see how so much talent was wasted in pursuit of drugs and a degenerative lifestyle, which may be the greatest crime of all of that era.

## Structure

Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain organize their book "Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk" into seven parts, including a prologue and an epilogue. Each part deals with a major episode in punk music history. Each part is also subdivided into chronological chapters telling the history of punk music. Each chapter is further subdivided into innumerable short sections, which contain extracts of interviews with punk musicians and affiliates. This is done not only to provide a comprehensive history of punk, but to allow those who lived through the era to tell their stories.

## Quotes

"The people just have to die for the music...Wouldn't you die for something pretty" (Epilogue, p. 24).

"There's no doubt about it, music is affected by the substances you abuse" (Part One, Chapter 7, p. 68).

"It was just so obvious what we were doing to rock & roll -we were bringing it back to the street" (Part Two, Chapter 12, p. 119).

"You know, I'm really cleaning up my act because I have finally come to realize that I am the product. Rock & roll is a business like any other and I am the product, so I'm working out and I'm gonna get in shape, and I'm gonna keep it together" (Part 4, Chapter 27, p. 253).

"Suddenly in New York, it was cool to be gay...Being gay doesn't make you cool. Being cool makes you cool, whether you're gay or straight" (Part 4, Chapter 29, p. 275).

"Mass movements are always so un-hip. That's what was great about punk. It was an antimovement...Hip can never be a mass movement...And culturally, the gay liberation movement and all the rest of the movements were the beginning of political correctness, which was just fascism to us. Real fascism. More rules" (Part 4, Chapter 29, p. 275).

"Just the night. Just the night. Just that it would be night again" (Part 5, Chapter 32, p. 299).

"I think once or twice in your life you have moments that are just totally magical and you really feel like God is at work" (Part 5, Chapter 32, p. 306).

"Rock & roll is not worth giving your life for" (Part 5, Chapter 35, p. 345).

"Patti actually managed a pretty canny thing. She managed to be a rock & roll death without having to die" (Part 5, Chapter 38, p. 372).

"I went over and looked at him, and his eyes looked at mine and he had consciousness, he had thoughts going in his head. He looked at me and said, 'I remember'" (Epilogue, Cyrinda Foxe, p. 406).

# Topics for Discussion

Throughout the book, the musicians, writers, and punk music affiliates interviewed, talk about their lives and their lifestyles, but say very little about their music. Why do you think this is? Did this have consequences for punk music itself?

Describe the counterculture/punk music scene. What did being a punk entail? Why? What did being a punk musician entail? Why? Why was this lifestyle appealing? What were the consequences of this lifestyle?

Jim Morrison is discussed early in the book by people who are interviewed as someone who succumbed to drugs and led a deviant lifestyle, yet his fate is something largely ignored or proved to be inconsequential to punk musicians. Why do you believe this happens? Why did punk musicians engage in the same lifestyle despite the dangers associated with it?

How did the punk music movement turn on and betray itself? Why did this occur? What were the consequences of this?

Discuss the conservative backlash against the counterculture and the punk music scene. What were its consequences for the punk musicians? Which musicians tried to adapt to the changing times? Which musicians did not? What were their fates?