



# Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991

By Michael Azerrad

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This is the never-before-told story of the musical revolution that happened right under the nose of the Reagan Eighties--when a small but sprawling network of bands, labels, fanzines, radio stations, and other subversives reenergized American rock with punk rock's do-it-yourself credo and created music that was deeply personal, often brilliant, always challenging, and immensely influential. This sweeping chronicle of music, politics, drugs, fear, loathing, and faith has been recognized as an indie rock classic in its own right.

Among the bands profiled: Mission of Burma, Butthole Surfers, The Minutemen, Sonic Youth, Black Flag, Big Black, Hüsker Dü, Fugazi, Minor Threat, Mudhoney, The Replacements, Beat Happening, and Dinosaur Jr.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **From Publishers Weekly**

Nirvana's mega-bestselling *Nevermind* was credited with dramatically altering the American pop-musical landscape. Azerrad ably demonstrates that the "new" sound actually sprang from almost 15 years of innovation by hundreds of bands who remained "[b]elow the radar of the corporate behemoths." Linked under the loose rubric "indie rock," bands like Black Flag, Sonic Youth, Minor Threat and the Replacements languished in the musical minor leagues because they were too experimental for commercial radio, made unfortunate career decisions or eschewed mainstream success. Yet these bands formed the nucleus of a new youth movement. Youths who defined themselves in opposition to middle-American values found an aesthetic and a community through the music. Given the fervor for indie progeny like Nirvana and Pearl Jam, the indie scene's impact was not insignificant and rock journalist Azerrad (*Come as You Are*) partly aims to trace that larger cultural legacy. But this thick slice of nostalgia, replete with colorful anecdotes that demystify even deliberately mystifying artists, primarily targets die-hard supporters of seminal 1980s indie bands, underground-club scenesters and 1980s college radio buffs. Though day-in-the-life bios predominate over extensive musical or cultural analysis, this is an astute insider's account of the collective accomplishment of these various bands: strong musical and political statements by people with little clout and even less financial support that reverberated throughout youth culture. A devotee himself, Azerrad is occasionally belligerent in his support of his subjects' art and attitudes, but he also deftly captures the thrill of being young, antiestablishment and impassioned the inspiring ingredients of all these bands. Photos. (July 31) Forecast: Indie culture has lost little mystique for insiders or outsiders, and with national TV and radio interviews, this tribute may draw the MTV crowd.

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### **From Library Journal**

Music journalist Azerrad (*Come As You Are: The Story of Nirvana*) makes it clear through his tales of 13 highly influential punk and indie rock bands from Black Flag to Beat Happening that his subjects could have easily been any misshapen, angst-filled, morbidly creative teens on the planet. In painting the portrait of the volatile 1980s underground music scene, he reveals the importance of subversive-minded musicians in an industry controlled by hit-hungry executives. Azerrad, however, is careful not to glorify this era: sprinkled throughout his inspiring pictures of musical revolt are details of the poverty and drug-induced dilemmas each band faced on its path to cult icon status. Featuring original interviews with the scene's leading lights (e.g., Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth), this collective biography is written in a cultured voice that even low-brow, in-the-know fanzine readers will appreciate. For all public libraries. Robert Morast, "Argus Leader Daily," Sioux Falls, SD

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### **From *The New Yorker***

Azerrad crisscrosses the American landscape of nineteen-eighties "underground" rock music, from Washington, D.C. (which spawned such bands as Fugazi and Minor Threat), to Washington state (Mudhoney, Beat Happening). He profiles thirteen bands that came of age before Nirvana closed the gap between alternative rock and the mainstream market, and the best stories here are the most marginal, such as the chapter on the explosive Boston band Mission of Burma. Even in his treatment of better-known bands, though, Azerrad does a fine job of demonstrating how the post-punk prime movers of the eighties echoed the original rock-and-rollers of the fifties—springing from a complacent political climate to reject the sentimental excesses of the music that preceded them.

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