MTO 21.1 Examples: David B. Easley, Riff Schemes, Form, and the Genre of Early American Hardcore Punk

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

Figure 1. Depiction of general two-part riff

Example 1. Verse riff (0:13ff.), “Don’t Need It” (Bad Brains)
Example 2. Verse riff (0:06ff.), “I Don’t Wanna Hear It” (Minor Threat)

Figure 2. Depiction of riff schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Repetition and Contrast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exact repetition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial gesture + exact repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrasting gesture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement and Terminal Repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exact repetition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrasting gesture + exact repetition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement and Terminal Alteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Altered repetition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminal alteration of initial gesture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model and Sequential Repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Altered repetition</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequential repetition of initial gesture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 3. Chorus riff (0:10ff.), “Nazi Punks Fuck Off” (Dead Kennedys)

Example 4. Verse riff (0:01ff.), “Out of Step (With the World)” (Minor Threat)
Example 5. Chorus riff (0:22ff.), “Forward to Death” (Dead Kennedys)

```
[Chord diagram]
```

```
Guitar
This world brings me down.
```

Drums

Example 6. Verse riff (1:14ff.), “No More” (Black Flag)

```
[Chord diagram]
```

```
Guitar
I won’t believe that this is all.
```

Drums
Example 7. Verse riff (0:03ff.), “Joshua’s Song” (Bad Brains)

Example 8. Verse riff (0:08ff.), “Think Again” (Minor Threat)
Example 9. Chorus riff (0:15ff.), “Screaming at a Wall” (Minor Threat)

It's like screaming at a wall.

Example 10. Verse riff (0:12ff.), “Nervous Breakdown” (Black Flag)

I'm about to have a nervous breakdown.
Example 11. Chorus riff (0:14ff.), “Small Man, Big Mouth” (Minor Threat)

Guitar

Drums

Double-time feel

What the fuck are you fighting for?
Example 12. Chorus riff (0:28ff.), “Pay to Cum” (Bad Brains)

Double-time feel

And all in time...

What's left behind.
Example 13. Verse riff (0:20ff.), “California Über Alles” (Dead Kennedys)

I am Governor Jerry Brown ... Soon I will be president.

Carter power will soon go away ... Your kids will meditate in school. Your kids will meditate in school.
Figure 3a. Incidence of riffs with and without at least one scheme (267 riffs)

Figure 3b. Incidence of riff schemes in the corpus, general (267 riffs)

Figure 3c. Incidence of riff schemes in the corpus, specific (267 riffs)
**Figure 4.** Incidence of riff schemes within each band’s total number of riffs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Total Riffs</th>
<th>Incidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad Brains</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Flag</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead Kennedys</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Threat</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5a.** Bad Brains, incidence of riff schemes (58 riffs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Riff Scheme</th>
<th>Overall % of Riffs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>initial repetition and contrast</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statement and terminal repetition</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statement and terminal alteration</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>model and sequential repetition</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general two-part</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5b. Black Flag, incidence of riff schemes (71 riffs)

- Initial repetition and contrast (10 riffs): 14%
- Statement and terminal repetition (6): 8%
- Statement and terminal alteration (16): 23%
- Model and sequential repetition (8): 11%
- General two-part (39): 55%
- Other (13): 18%

Figure 5c. Dead Kennedys, incidence of riff schemes (77 riffs)

- Initial repetition and contrast (30 riffs): 39%
- Statement and terminal repetition (6): 8%
- Statement and terminal alteration (26): 34%
- Model and sequential repetition (5): 6%
- General two-part (22): 29%
- Other (20): 25%
Figure 5d. Minor Threat, incidence of riff schemes (61 riffs)

- Initial repetition and contrast (9 riffs): 15%
- Statement and terminal repetition (2): 3%
- Statement and terminal alteration (12): 20%
- Model and sequential repetition (16): 26%
- General two-part (30): 49%
- Other (5): 8%

Figure 6a. Incidence of songs with and without at least one riff scheme (93 songs)

- No riff scheme (11 songs): 12%
- At least one riff scheme (82): 88%

Figure 6b. Incidence of songs with riff schemes, by type (93 songs)

- Initial repetition and contrast (41 songs): 44%
- Statement and terminal repetition (15): 16%
- Statement and terminal alteration (49): 53%
- Model and sequential repetition (30): 32%
**Figure 6c.** Incidence of riff schemes within each band's total number of songs

- Bad Brains (19 of 19 total songs): 100%
- Black Flag (25 of 29 total songs): 86%
- Dead Kennedys (21 of 23 total songs): 91%
- Minor Threat (17 of 22 total songs): 77%

**Figure 7.** Lyrics, “Straight Edge” (Minor Threat)

**Strophe 1**
I'm a person just like you.
But I've got better things to do.

Than sit around and fuck my head.
Hang out with the living dead.
Snort white shit up my nose.
Pass out at the shows.

I don't even think about speed.
That's something I just don't need.
I've got the straight edge.

**Strophe 2 + Outro**
I'm a person just like you.
But I've got better things to do.

Than sit around and smoke dope.
Cause I know that I can cope.
I laugh at the thought of eating ludes.
I laugh at the thought of sniffing glue.

I'm always gonna keep in touch.
Never want to use a crutch.
I've got the straight edge.

I've got the straight edge.
I've got the straight edge.
I've got the straight edge.
Example 14a. First gesture (0:05ff.)

Example 14b. Second and third gestures (0:08ff.), “Straight Edge” (Minor Threat)
Figure 8. Musematic and discursive elements in "Straight Edge"

- **G–B♭ musematic**
  - I'm a person just like you.
  - But I've got better things to do.

- **C–B♭–F musematic**
  - Than sit around and fuck my head.
  - Hang out with the living dead.
  - Snort white shit up my nose.
  - Pass out at the shows.

- **D–C–G musematic**
  - I don't even think about speed.
  - That's something I just don't need.
  - I've got the straight edge.
Figure 9. Lyrics, “Rise Above” (Black Flag)

Verse
Jealous cowards try to control.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
They distort what we say.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
Try and stop what we do.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
When they can't do it themselves.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*

Chorus
We are tired of your abuse.
Try to stop us, it's no use.

Verse
Society's arms of control.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
Think they're smart, can't think for themselves.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
Laugh at us behind our backs.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
I find satisfaction in what they lack.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*

Chorus
We are tired of your abuse.
Try to stop us, it's no use.

Instrumental Verse (guitar solo)
--

Chorus
We are born with a chance.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
I am gonna have my chance.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
We are born with a chance.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*
And I am gonna have my chance.
*Rise above, we're gonna rise above.*

Chorus + Outro
We are tired of your abuse.
Try to stop us, it's no use.

Rise above,
Rise above,
We're gonna rise above,
We're gonna rise above,
We're gonna rise above.
Example 16. Intro (0:05ff.), “Rise Above” (Black Flag)

Figure 10. Chart of musical oppositions, “Rise Above” (Black Flag)
Example 17. Verse riff (0:28ff.), “Rise Above” (Black Flag)

Figure 11. Musical oppositions and expressive correlations, verse 1, “Rise Above” (Black Flag)

### Call

**Lyrics**
Jealous cowards try to control.
They distort what we say.
Try and stop what we do.
When they can’t do it themselves.

**Riff gestures**
Register (High)
Texture (Sparse)
Rhythm (Passive)
Harmonically (Open)

### Antagonist (”them”)

### Correlations
Powerless
Nonassertive
Nonaggressive

### Response

**Lyrics**
Rise above, we’re gonna rise above.
Rise above, we’re gonna rise above.
Rise above, we’re gonna rise above.
Rise above, we’re gonna rise above.

**Riff gestures**
Register (Low)
Texture (Dense)
Rhythm (Active)
Harmonically (Closed)

### Protagonist (”us”)

### Correlations
Powerful
Assertive
Aggressive
Example 18. Chorus riff (0:46ff.), “Rise Above” (Black Flag)

We are tired of your abuse.

Try to stop us, it’s no use.
Figure 12. Figure of overall song narrative, “Rise Above” (Black Flag)

Appendix Example 1. Legend for the drum notation
### Appendix Example 2. Discography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Album</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Bad Brains*     | "Pay to Cum" single    | 1980 | 1. Pay to Cum  
2. "Stay Close to Me"                                                   |
| *Bad Brains*     |                        |      | 1. "Saltin On"  
2. "Don't Need It"  
3. "Attitude"  
4. "The Regulator"  
5. "Banned in D.C."  
6. " Jah Calling"  
7. "Supertouch's Shirt"  
8. "Leaving Babylon"  
9. "Fearless Vampire Killers"  
10. "Jah"  
11. "Big Take Over"  
12. "Pay to Cum"  
13. "Right Brigade"  
14. "I Love Jah"                                                   |
| *Rock for Light* |                        | 1983 | 1. "Coptic Times"  
2. "Attitude"  
3. "We Will Not"  
4. "Saltin On"  
5. "Rally Round Jah Throne"  
6. "Right Brigade"  
7. "F.V.K. (Fearless Vampire Killers)"  
8. "Riot Squad"  
9. "The Block"  
10. "Joshua's Song"  
11. "Banned in D.C."  
12. "How Low Can a Punk Get?"  
13. "Big Take Over"  
14. "I and I Survive"  
15. "Destroy Babylon"  
16. "Rock for Light"  
17. "At the Movies"                                                   |
| *Black Flag*     | *Nervous Breakdown*    | 1978 | 1. "Nervous Breakdown"  
2. "Fix Me"  
3. "I've Had It"  
4. "Wasted"                                                   |
| *Black Flag*     | *Jealous Again*        | 1980 | 1. "Jealous Again"  
2. "Revenge"  
3. "White Minority"  
4. "No Values"  
5. "You Bet We've Got Something Against You!"                       |
|                  | *Cracks in the Sidewalk* (compilation) | 1980 | 1. "Clocked In"                                                   |
2. "I've Heard It Before"  
3. "American Waste"                                                   |
| *Damaged*        |                        | 1981 | 1. "Rise Above"  
2. "Spray Paint"  
3. "Six Pack"  
4. "What I See"  
5. "TV Party"  
6. "Thirsty and Miserable"  
7. "Police Story"  
8. "Gimme Gimme Gimme"  
9. "Depression"  
10. "Room 13"  
11. "Damaged II"  
12. "No More"  
13. "Padded Cell"  
14. "Life of Pain"  
15. "Damaged II"                                                   |
| *TV Party*       |                        | 1982 | 1. "TV Party"  
2. "I've Got to Run"  
3. "My Rules"                                                   |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Album/Single</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tracks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dead Kennedys<sup>1</sup> | “California Über Alles” single | 1979 | 1. California Über Alles  
2. Man With the Dogs |
| | “Holiday in Cambodia” single | 1979 | 1. Holiday in Cambodia  
2. Police Truck |
| | Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables | 1980 | 1. Kill the Poor  
2. Forward to Death  
3. When Ya Get Drafted  
4. Let’s Lynch the Landlord  
5. Drug Me  
6. Your Emotions  
7. Chemical Warfare  
8. California Über Alles  
9. I Kill Children  
10. Stealing People’s Mail  
11. Funland at the Beach  
12. Ill in the Head  
13. Holiday in Cambodia  
14. Viva Las Vegas |
| In God We Trust, Inc. | “Too Drunk to Fuck” single | 1981 | 1. Too Drunk to Fuck  
2. The Prey |
| | In God We Trust, Inc. | 1981 | 1. Religious Vomit  
2. Mental Majority  
3. Hyperactive Child  
4. Kepone Factory  
5. Dog Bite  
6. Nazi Punks Fuck Off  
7. We’ve Got a Bigger Problem Now  
8. Rawhide |
| Minor Threat | Minor Threat | 1981 | 1.Filler  
2. I Don’t Wanna Hear It  
3. Seeing Red  
4. Straight Edge  
5. Small Man, Big Mouth  
6. Screaming at a Wall  
7. Bottled Violence  
8. Minor Threat |
| | In My Eyes | 1981 | 1. In My Eyes  
2. Out of Step (With the World)  
3. Guilty of Being White  
4. Steppin’ Stone |
| | Flex Your Head (compilation) | 1982 | 1. Stand Up  
2. 12XU  
3. 30oz.  
4. 45 RPM  
5. I’m Not a Boy  
6. I’m Not a Girl  
7. I’m Not a Man  
8. I’m a Rock  
9. 100 MPH  
10. Out of Step |
| | Out of Step | 1983 | 1. Betray  
2. It Follows  
3. Think Again  
4. Look Back and Laugh  
5. Sob Story  
6. No Reason  
7. Little Friend  
8. Out of Step  
9. Cashing in |
| | Salad Days | 1983 | 1. Salad Days  
2. Stamped  
3. Good Guys (Don’t Wear White) |

<sup>1</sup> Includes bonus track “California Uber Alles” on the US version of the album.