

I was close enough to see his **teeth**, those stumpy, rotten, yellow-and-brown tombstones that signified he'd lived a **HARD** life. That jagged mouth spat thunderous fury against the rich and powerful. A rabid Clash fanatic, I had muscled my way up to front-and-center stage and stood the entire concert about three feet away from **Joe Strummer**, that honest outlaw, that wrathful prophet of the dispossessed, that man whose bad teeth sought to leave deep fang marks in the ass of global injustice.

I'd never seen anyone sweat so much. The sweat poured from his face down his neck, down his guitar strap, and onto the stage. After a few songs, he stood on a sweat puddle three feet in diameter. I feared he might even electrocute himself.

It was like being attacked by an army, mercilessly pummeled by massive sonic steel artillery. I wondered how sounds of such magnitude could come from mere guitars. It was the most powerful musical performance I've ever witnessed. No one else ever came remotely close. The Clash had stolen Thor's hammer and beat me up with it.

This was back in 1980 at the Tower Theater right outside of Philly. The Clash were on tour to promote *London Calling*, an album that didn't have nearly the force of their live show. The next night, me and some friends drove over to Jersey to see The Ramones, who had visited Britain in 1976 and were subsequently plagiarized by every British punk band that followed, including The Clash.

But there was no comparison. The Clash blew them away. The Ramones were a good rock 'n' roll band. The Clash were something blinding, something frightening, a primordial fist knocking out all your teeth.

At the time, rock critics led me to understand that the reason for this was because The Clash's music was **POLITICAL**, whereas The Ramones sang about sniffin' shoe polish with girls. Joe Strummer was described as "a highly articulate rabble-rouser for the dispossessed," a man who was "working-class," even "proletarian." Every Clash song was an anti-rich, pro-poor rave-up about how fucked-up the wealthy are, and isn't it great we're a little garage band from garageland, and the truth is only known by guttersnipes, and wouldn't it be cool if one day pasty-white Joe Strummer woke up as a dreadlocked Jamaican musician, *à la Watermelon Man*?

The problem, for me at least, is that Joe Strummer was born to wealth. His father was a British diplomat...a representative of the nation which colonized Africa and Asia and caused many of the Third World problems that fashionably leftist Joey-come-latelys could come along and decry...all while making millions and doing little to solve the problems. Joe spent his youth not in the Cockney London which he would later ape as part of his stage persona, but as a diplomat's son in Turkey, Egypt, Germany, and Mexico. When he returned to England, he enrolled in a private boarding school.

He learned the gentle art of slumming very well, though. He even dropped out of art school! As a London subway busker in the early 70s, he fused his birth name (John Graham Mellor) with that of American folk singer Woody Guthrie and called himself "Woody Mellor." He also spent some time squatting in flats, presumably to see how "real people" lived. In 1982, at the height of The Clash's popularity, millionaire Joe disappeared for three weeks to try "living like a bum." How *cute!* The pro-Marxist Clash even once tried to arrange a concert in communist East Germany, but German authorities were frightened of their "inflammatory" lyrics and denied them.

## remembering **joe strummer**, wealthy spokesman of the oppressed

Wonderful! That stands right up there with psycho feminist author Andrea Dworkin helping to write such strict anti-pornography laws in Canada, her OWN BOOKS were seized by Canadian Customs as being obscene. The Clash, who waved a Red flag wherever they went, would have been silenced and probably jailed...or even lobotomized...in the sort of Red People's Utopia they championed from afar. Communism proposed to uplift common people but wound up killing and torturing those commoners in numbers that would have made the Nazis jealous.

# SILVER SPOONS

# &

# ROTTEN TEETH



Over the years following that transcendent live show in 1980, I watched The Clash devolve from an unstoppable force of nature to a cheesy arena-rock band whose horrible doo-dlings in 3rd World riddim were not only insulting to everyone in the 3rd World, but to anyone who was forced to endure their sloppy, embarrassingly self-indulgent three-album sets. When me and my droogies were tooling around Philly in our car and heard the insipid "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" for the first time on the radio, we laughed at how low the band had fallen. Still, we went to see them again in 1982, only to witness a heartbreakingly hollow, mannered performance sucked clean of all The Clash's prior atom-splitting energy. To compensate, they now had a fucking **LIGHT SHOW** with scary **POLICE LIGHTS** and everything. The Clash, probably because they now sucked, went on to become MTV stars and were touring with The Who. These strident anti-capitalists eventually allowed "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" to be used in a Levi's commercial.

Worst of all, there were even rumors that Joe Strummer had used some of his lucre to buy himself a spankin'-white new set of teeth.

Wealth doesn't bother me. Neither does celebrity. And I don't think it's wrong for rich people to feel **BAD** about the poor. But it bothers the **FUCK** out of me when they **PRETEND** they're poor. And I'm irked that Joe Strummer, who **SEEMED** so authentic, was just another in a long tradition of rich white kids pretending they're oppressed...and getting away with it. In the end, he was just a studio gangsta. Fool wasn't even **FROM** Compton.

He died of a heart attack right before Christmas, and officials were summoned to remove him from his million-dollar home. I was saddened. I'm also confused. If he was a phony, why was that show back in 1980 so powerful? I can only conclude that Joe Strummer was angry he **WASN'T** poor. **REALLY**, **REALLY** angry about it. Not angry enough about it to sell off his belongings and go live with poor people, but angry nonetheless.

It still doesn't explain the bad teeth, though.