



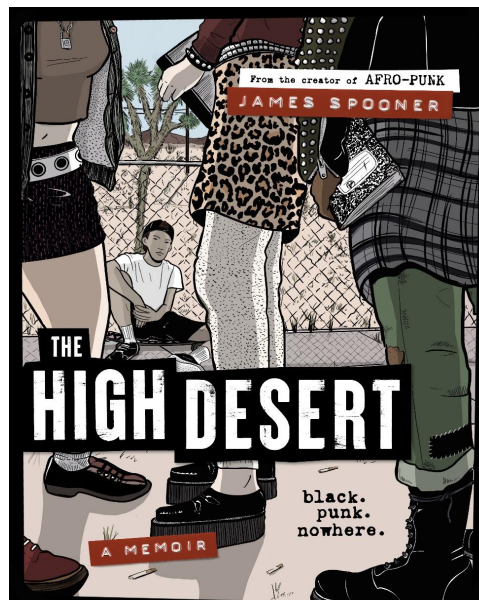
Publication Date:  
May 17, 2022

WASHINGTON POST - Top 10 Graphic Novels of 2022!  
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY - Top 10 Comics of 2022!  
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - 2022 Top 10 Books for Adults

“Revelatory. . . Much like *Ghost World*, this grabbing, angsty coming-of-age tale offers a sidewalk view of a creative subculture. It’s also a poignant ode to the power of music to fill voids left by family and circumstance, with provocations thrumming on race and identity that sound out like a smashed guitar.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“[D]eftly chronicles the complexities of life for Black teens growing up in mixed neighborhoods. . . Like most coming-of-age books, “The High Desert” is the saga of a square peg. What differentiates Spooner’s memoir is its bold confrontation of race.”  
—Bruce Britt, *Los Angeles Times*

“Punk is James Spooner’s salvation as he comes of age in a racist world, but punk culture is also a microcosm of that world. The path to reconciliation—with himself, his parents, his peers—is navigated with exquisite nuance and compassion. A beautifully drawn story.” —Alison Bechdel, author of *Fun Home*



# THE HIGH DESERT

## A Memoir by James Spooner

From James Spooner, the creator of Afro-Punk, comes a stunning graphic memoir of his coming-of-age in a miserable desert town in California in the early 1990s: **THE HIGH DESERT** (Harper; on sale May 17, 2022; \$26.00, 368 pages; ISBN 978-0-358-65911-2). **THE HIGH DESERT** is the story of a young man's immersive reckoning with identity, racism, clumsy teen love, and belonging—and the story of a search for salvation and community through punk.

Teenage James Spooner hates that he and his mom are back in the Apple Valley, California town after years away. The one silver lining—new school, new you, right? But the few Black kids at school seem to be gangbanging, and the other kids fall on a spectrum of microaggressors to future Neo-Nazis. Mixed race, acutely aware of his Blackness, James doesn't know where he fits until he meets Ty, a young Black punk who introduces him to the school outsiders—skaters, unhappy young rebels, caught up in the punk groundswell sweeping the country.

A haircut, a few Sex Pistols, Misfits, and Black Flag records later: Suddenly, James has friends, romantic prospects, and knows the difference between a bass and a guitar. But this desolate landscape hides brutal, building undercurrents: a classmate overdoses, a friend must prove himself to his white supremacist brother and the local Aryan brotherhood through a show of violence. Everything and everyone are set to collide at one of the year's biggest shows in town.

Weaving in the Black roots of punk rock and a vivid interlude in the thriving eighties DIY and punk scene in New York's East Village, **THE HIGH DESERT** is an engaging and moving graphic memoir of a budding punk, artist, and activist.

### About the Author

**JAMES SPOONER** is an accomplished tattoo artist, illustrator, and filmmaker. He directed the seminal documentary *Afro-Punk*. Spooner is also the co-founder of the Afro-punk Festival. Spooner's work has appeared in *NPR*, *Vice*, *The Village Voice*, *The New Yorker*, *Vibe*, *Fader*, *MTV*, *NBC News*, and *Variety*. He is an ongoing guest curator for the Broad Museum in Los Angeles, and previously programmed for the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

**THE HIGH DESERT: A Memoir**  
**Black. Punk. Nowhere.**  
Harper \* On-Sale May 17, 2022 \*  
ISBN: 9780358659112\* \$26.00 \* 368 pages



**More Praise for James Spooner and *The High Desert*:**

“[An] eloquent latter-day rejoinder to Chuck Klosterman’s *Fargo Rock City*. A lively, inspirational tale that will point readers toward art, music, and resistance of their own.” –  
***Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)**

“Deeply relatable...it is genuinely therapeutic to read about James Spooner’s experiences: being in proximity to white supremacy, the exceptions that are made in small town, USA, and how quickly violence can escalate. Man oh man. *The High Desert* hits so deep.” –**Kimya Dawson, *Moldy Peaches***

“James Spooner’s documentary AFRO-PUNK not only exposed racism in the punk scene, it inspired a movement that centered Black and Brown punks everywhere. In his new memoir, we learn about the major pitfalls and minor triumphs that put Spooner on the path to realize his dream of an all Black mosh pit. Beautifully written and illustrated *The High Desert* is a must-have for every music fan. After I finished reading it I kept wishing a second, third and fourth volume would magically appear so it didn’t have to end.” –**Kathleen Hanna, *Bikini Kill & Le Tigre***

“James Spooner captures an often overlooked, West Coast slice of modern American culture and subculture. Misfits, nerds, social outcasts and rebels: Mr. Spooner has delivered a well needed roadmap for future generations of kids that don’t quite fit in, especially kids of color.” –**Norwood, *Fishbone***

“This beautifully paced graphic memoir illustrates the struggle and joy of finding self-acceptance and community on the fringes. It perfectly captures the innocence, camaraderie, and trauma of being a punk of color in the late eighties and early nineties. I couldn’t look away.” –**MariNaomi, author and illustrator of *Losing the Girl***

“Washington DC is a long way from Apple Valley and the circumstances of James’ introduction to the punk underground are vastly different than mine, but there’s something so recognizable in *The High Desert* that I felt like I was there. I suspect in a way we were all there at one time in our lives, navigating and negotiating as we figured out just who the fuck we were and who was with us. I loved this book.” –**Ian MacKaye, *Minor Threat & Fugazi***

“In each panel of *The High Desert*, James Spooner delivers magic between his art and his words, mixing the intense passions of youth with the hindsight of the wise. Gorgeously drawn, brutally honest, and as emotionally raw as your favorite punk song.” –**Dawnie Walton, author of *The Final Revival of Opal & Nev***

“A coming of age tale of the very precarious faultlines of growing up an outsider amongst outsiders: *The High Desert* is an American tale of race, politics, counter-culture, and the tender and personal story of Black adolescence rarely told.”  
–**Brontez Purnell, author of *100 Boyfriends***

“A masterful debut that’s just as captivating as it is inspiring. Spooner paints a world that’s irresistible and harrowing, and fills it with the kind of honesty that defines every great graphic memoir.”  
–**Ezra Clayton Daniels, author of *BTTM FDRS***

“This reminds me of how punk can pull us out of a pit, give us legs to dance on, and words to scream with our dumb drunk beautiful friends. This already feels like a classic.”  
– **Ben Passmore, author of *BTTM FDRS* and *Your Black Friend***