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## Guilty of a fly-by shooting

Edmonton-based Murder City Sparrows travel south to film their latest video

### Murder City Sparrows

With Drive By Punch and O Four  
 What  
 Thursday, 23 November at 8pm  
 The Powerplant

JOHN KMECH  
 Arts & Entertainment Staff

As the centre for the United States government, Washington, DC is a pivotal point for both the hatred of the state and for the sonic influences of a multitude of punk rock bands over the last 30 years. Several seminal, politically inclined punk bands have emerged straight out of DC, such as Minor Threat and Bad Brains.

But another prominent societal facet of Washington, DC is often lost in the mix: the fact that it has one of the highest murder rates in the country. Known as the murder capital of the US for several years in the 1990s, the city surrounding the White House has half the population of Edmonton, yet regularly sees more than four times the number of murders, a phenomenon that amazes and motivates Jay Sparrow, singer and guitarist for the Murder City Sparrows here in Edmonton, now known as the murder capital of Canada.

"It's impossible not to be fascinated by it," Sparrow exclaims. "It's what is driving me artistically, at this point.

My social consciousness comes from Washington, DC."

Despite only releasing a six track self-titled EP thus far, the Sparrows have received extensive radio play on Sonic and other hard rock radio. The album, recorded in Texas at Willie Nelson's ranch, displays the band's dark and heavy Texas punk blast in a tight, 25-minute record.

As well, their schizophrenic, nightmarish video for their first single "Burn in Water" has been on rotation on MuchMusic. For their latest video, the Sparrows got the chance to travel to Washington, becoming the first musicians to film directly on Pennsylvania Avenue, an educational experience that was both eye-opening and difficult to organize.

"To get permits to film in front of the FBI headquarters, that was a long process," Sparrow says. "Once they knew we were there to inform Canada on some of the social problems, they were more open.

"But imagine if in Edmonton you crossed the High Level Bridge and went from the richest neighbourhood in the country to the poorest," Sparrow continues enthusiastically. "[In Washington], you can see the Capitol building from the ghetto. The video goes back and forth between us playing in the really ritzy neighbourhoods to the ghettos, which is like three blocks. Someone

our age dies in that community every single night. [Murder] is such a part of their regular life there, it doesn't even make the paper. Someone got killed the night before we shot. There was a picture of a dog who just had twelve puppies on page one."

Although the homicides are a serious source of writing material, Sparrow insists that they aren't a political band and that they have a lighter side—somewhat. Any fan of Jack Kerouac and the Marquis de Sade can't be too soft, but Sparrow noted that he's lightened up since his solo career, thanks to his bandmates.

"Being the primary songwriter, [Washington] is just something I think about. I also think about girls, so I'll sing about girls. I like macabre things, so you see that element too. My solo stuff was really dark and sad. What the boys in Murder City did for me was provide me a different perspective so I could be a little more accessible."

Clearly though, Sparrow saw no end to his interest in Washington. Even though it was an ordeal to plan the new video, Sparrow saw those hard times as an essential part of his career and his dedication to the US capital.

"It was just another life experience you can't turn down," Sparrow says. "I don't think my life with Washington, DC is over yet. It was a hassle, but shit, it was worth it."



Wow.

These people went out and got the Dark Mark tattooed to their arms.

Weird.

It's like they're a part of a cult or something.

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## A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME SO

Jay Sparrow has flown around the world. Indeed, he's seen his fair share of poverty-stricken cities, and as a result, has a few things on his mind that he'd like to get out.

"I don't think my life is done with Washington, DC. I'll probably be involved with that community forever, unless somehow they really figure out their basic problems, which they won't, because it's just so ingrained in their culture. It's impossible not to be

fascinated by it. I think everyone should go there, they should have community tours of the ghetto alongside the tours of the rich places. It's amazing the dichotomy in one city, there's so many different opposing forces in one city. There's just no Canadian city that has anything like that."

"I've been to Europe and other Third World countries, and I've even been to Cuba. Not ten blocks in, literally, you can look across the river [in

Washington] and see it: rundown houses, ghettos, guns, murder and across the street is tourism and candy floss and war memorials. Why don't they look across the river? They're looking to fix something on the other side of the world and they're bumming it. Why not start with your own community and work out from there? If they could understand how to fix their own twelve-block radius, maybe they'll do a better job of fixing something in the Middle East."