

The Sounds of Hate

The White Power Music Scene in the United States in 2012

The recent tragic shooting spree at the Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in which Wade Michael Page killed six people before killing himself after a shootout with police, has drawn attention to the shadowy world of white power music. Page, a committed white supremacist and member of the Hammerskins, a hardcore racist skinhead group, was heavily involved in the white power music scene in the United States. He played in a number of white power bands over the previous 12 years, most prominently the bands Definite Hate and End Apathy.

Page was just one of hundreds of white supremacist musicians listened to by thousands of white supremacists in the United States and beyond. Today, white power music permeates the subculture of the white supremacist movement. Not all white supremacists enjoy white power music, but many of them do, especially neo-Nazis and racist skinheads. For listeners, white power music is not simply entertainment. It is music with a message, a medium used to express an ideology suffused with anger, hatred and violence.

WHITE POWER MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES

Today, white power music is well established in the United States, where it has existed for three decades. Hate music arose originally in Great Britain in the 1970s as the skinhead subculture that originated there diverged into two different streams: a traditional skinhead stream and a racist skinhead stream. As racist skinheads emerged, they created a white supremacist variation of the skinhead-related music genre called Oi! (sometimes also known by the deliberate euphemism “Rock against Communism” or RAC). In the late 1970s, and more so in the early 1980s, both the racist skinhead subculture and its music crossed the Atlantic to the United States and Canada.



Attendees at Plunder and Pillage 2011

During the 1980s, the racist skinhead subculture grew and evolved, especially on the West Coast, where it also interacted with the punk music scene that was strong there at the time. As a result of this intermixture, another genre of white power music was born: hatecore punk, a racist version of hardcore punk. Hate music grew as the racist skinhead movement spread, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By this time, a number of American hate music bands had formed—some of which, such as Bully Boys, still exist today.

White power music grew fastest in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Several factors combined to cause this growth. First, there was a general resurgence of right-wing extremist activity in the mid-to-late 1990s. Second, several major—major by the standards of white power music—distributors of white power music emerged, most notably Resistance Records (eventually purchased by a neo-Nazi group, the National Alliance) and Panzerfaust Records, a Minnesota-based company. Lastly, it was during this time that the Internet really came to play a role in the propagation and spread of white power music, allowing purchasers of white power music to bypass traditional channels of music distribution—channels that had

effectively locked white power music out. It was also during this time period that a third major form of white power music became popular: National Socialist Black Metal music (often abbreviated as NSBM), a white supremacist form of death metal music.

This growth leveled off by the mid-2000s. By 2004, Panzerfaust Records had collapsed, following the arrest of one of its proprietors and a related scandal. Resistance Records still existed, but it was well on its way to decline following the death in 2002 of National Alliance leader William Pierce, which caused that group to fall apart. Other, previously smaller distributors replaced much of this business, but the white power music scene has been stable now in the United States for some years.



Summer of Hate, San Diego, 2012

Compared to any mainstream musical genre, of course, the white power music scene is small. After all, the white supremacist movement in the United States is an extreme, relatively small movement compared to other social or political movements, such as the environmental movement or the Tea Party movement. Few white supremacist concerts in the U.S. exceed 300 attendees, and the organizers of most such concerts would be happy to have 100 people show up. Although it seems odd, there are occasional non-racists who may listen to certain white power bands from time to time; these people seem to have the ability to enjoy the music while somehow ignoring its message. This is most common for NSBM, but it also occurs to some degree with some of the oldest racist Oi! bands, such as Skrewdriver.

WHITE POWER MUSIC BANDS IN THE UNITED STATES

At any given time, there are usually between 100 and 150 white power music bands operating in the United States. It is difficult to give an accurate number because bands form and fall apart fairly easily. Additionally, many white power music bands undergo periods of inactivity that may last for years, only to pop up later with some new music or to begin performing again. Bands that may seem defunct may only be in hibernation.

White power bands play a number of different types of music. Although, as noted, Oi!, hatecore punk and NSBM are most popular, almost any sort of music can be given a white supremacist twist, from country or rockabilly to thrash or even hip hop (though the latter is relatively uncommon, for obvious reasons).

Because the white power music scene is small and somewhat “incestuous,” there is considerable overlap between bands. Many white power musicians may be members of more than one band, or may sometimes play with another band. Sometimes this is because musicians from different bands may want to play together without leaving their original bands, so they form a new one. In other cases, it may be because they want to play a different style of music, so they play one style of music in one band, and another style in a second band. In places with a concentration of white power musicians, such as Orange County, California, this sort of shuffling may go on extensively. When Wade Page was in North Carolina, he was simultaneously involved with three bands in recent years—Definite Hate, End Apathy, and 13 Knots—that all had more or less the same band membership.



Summer of Hate Flyer

The bands typically choose names that reflect explicit themes of hatred, violence, or antagonism to authority (NSBM bands may have more esoteric names). Thus there have been bands with names such as Aggravated Assault, Aggressive Force, and Armed and Deadly, as well as bands with names like Definite Hate, Jew Slaughter, and Final Solution.

They are as often as straightforward in their songs. In 2010, the band Stormtroop 16 (the 16 is a reference to American Front, the racist skinhead group with which the band is associated) released an album titled Labeled Racially Deranged, with songs such as “Spirit of 88” (88 is a common white supremacist code for “Heil Hitler”), “American White Man,” and “Valhalla Bound.” The band Achtung Juden (German for “Attention, Jews!”) released songs with names such as “Let the Niggers Kill Each Other,” “Skinhead Coonstompin’,” “White Nationalist,” “White Nations on Fire,” and “Proud White Man,” among others.

Not surprisingly, the lyrics of such groups are often as hateful as the names of the bands and songs are. The band Definite Hate, with which Wade Page played for many years, provides clear examples. Here are some of the lyrics of one of their songs, “Take Action”:

*Today is the first day of a brand new fight
With everything that's happened up until now building up in my mind
No more holding back you're going to listen to what I say
The new voice of a once great race and we're not going away*

*All this time we've waited for our day to come
Been knocked down but we got up and now we're twice as strong
The things we've loved and the pain we've felt can't be expressed
in a song*



Band playing at Uprise, 2009



Northern Hammerskins concert, 2010

So take action take action and make right what this wrong.

*Revolution is in the air a 9milimeter is in my hand
You can run but you can't hide from this master plan
With strength and determination you'll never defeat our pride
With the will to win and not afraid to loose it's time for us to ride*

Even more explicit are these lyrics from the song "Lock and Load" (the word "muds" in the lyrics below is a reference to "mud peoples," a white supremacist term for non-whites):

*Muds are raping, looting, stealing, mugging, robbing, shooting, killing
Breeding more infesting cities spreading drugs with all their deals
Gonna go out on the town lock and load lets have some fun
Gonna shoot your whole brood down and send the others on the run
Vigilantes on the street, we won't stop until we're done.
Might makes right now it's time to fight
It's the law of the land and the law of the gun*

In a final example, Definite Hate displays some regional pride in their song "Welcome to the South":

*Welcome to the south where only the strong survive
Where god race and family rule our lives
Don't come into our towns and try to change my ways
My flag and my people are here to stay*

*Welcome to the south
Fuck you we're holding our own
Just take your damn whoopin and go back home
Our heritage is our hate no excuses to be made
Cause I know that in the streets we've got nothing to say*

Welcome to the south, and now we're taking it back

And we'll light you up at the drop of a hat

Dealers race traitors better not be seen

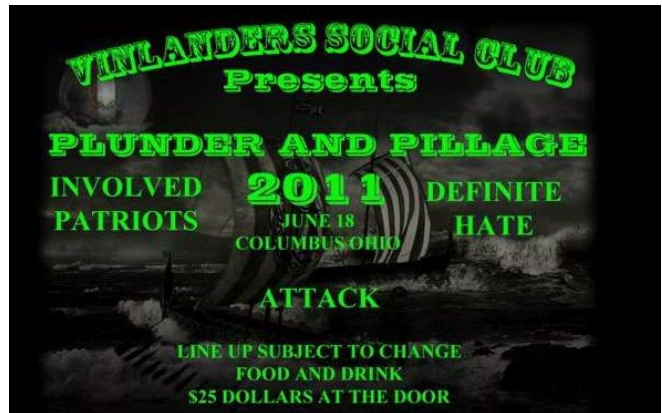
We're taking back the south and keeping it clean

Many bands are affiliated with specific extremist groups. In such cases, band members may be members or associates of such groups and the bands are likely to be invited to play at events organized by such groups. The racist skinhead Hammerskins are by far the dominant group in this respect; more than a dozen white power bands have an affiliation with the Hammerskins. Other white supremacist groups that have associated bands include Volksfront, American Front, the Vinlanders Social Club, the Maryland State Skins, the Golden State Skinheads, and the Old Glory Skins.

WHITE POWER MUSIC CONCERTS

The people who like white power music can listen to it in a number of different ways, from attending live performances to purchasing music CDs to downloading it from the Internet.

The “best” way to listen to white power music, of course, is by attending a live performance. However, this is not as easy as one might think—certainly far harder than for devotees of any mainstream form of music. Because white supremacists are, in an absolute sense, small in numbers and spread out over the entire United States, they can’t easily assemble the numbers it would take to sustain a thriving live performance scene. As a result, many live performances are very small, hardly more than garage band performances in front of a small circle of friends and local white supremacists.



Announcement for Plunder and Pillage 2011

White supremacists do make attempts to hold larger, more organized white power music concerts. Usually it takes a committed white supremacist group to organize/sponsor such a concert, which involves arranging a selection of bands, publicizing the event within the white supremacist community, finding a venue, and arranging all of the logistics. The Hammerskins are, once again, the dominant white supremacist group organizing concerts, including an annual large gathering, Hammerfest and, usually, a concert on St. Patrick's Day (considered a "white" holiday). Other popular dates on or around which to organize concerts include April 20 (Hitler's Birthday) and December 8 (the date white supremacist terrorist Robert Mathews, a "martyr" of the movement, died in a shootout with the FBI). One recent concert, held in Tampa, Florida, in January 2012, was organized as a fundraiser for the family of a Key West Hammerskin who died

of an aneurism. This event, dubbed "Slaughterfest" after the last name of the deceased, actually included some local punk and hard rock bands (this is not common) as well as white power music bands like Fuckface88, a Hammerskins-affiliated band that played songs such as "Dead Nigger Dead" at the event.

Though a specific group may organize a white power music concert, the actual concerts are typically open to all interested white supremacists. In fact, such events are one of the ways white supremacists from different racist skinhead groups can meet and associate with each other. Members of groups like the Hammerskins, Volksfront, the Vinlanders Social Club, Supreme White Alliance or others might well come together for a concert and socialize (or occasionally fight).



Flyer for Slaughterfest, 2012

These concerts are not necessarily easy for organizers to put together. Even finding a venue can be difficult, as most mainstream music venues will not knowingly host white power music, nor will most other rentable meeting halls. Failing to find such a location, organizers must seek out some other available space such as a warehouse or, not infrequently, a field or piece of open ground on private property where they can erect a stage.

White supremacists believe they have to be careful about marketing such concerts as well. They know that if they publicize the location of an event that there is a chance that it might be crashed by left-wing anti-racist activists and anarchists (the groups are antagonistic and violent towards each other). They also want to hide from the potentially prying eyes of police or media. However, they need to publicize their events for there to be a chance of a decent attendance. Consequently, they will often announce the date and general location of an event, but require people to contact the organizers to get more precise information—which sometimes is only given out a few days before an event. Occasionally they may take even more precautions, such as giving a location that will turn out not to be the final destination, but merely a checkpoint of sorts, where one of the organizers can “check out” potential attendees and direct those who pass muster to the actual location of the event itself. White power music concerts thus ended up being shrouded in secrecy.



Wade Page at Hammerfest 2011

In 2011, there were at least 18 significant white power music concerts. Most were held either in Florida, Pennsylvania, California, or North Carolina. Events were also held in Maryland, New Jersey, Michigan, Missouri, and Oregon. The bands that made the most appearances included Definite Hate, White Knuckle Driver, 13 Knots, Empire Falls, Involved Patriots, Enforcer, Attack, and Max Resist. Some white supremacists may drive for hundreds of miles to be able to attend such events.

So far, 2012 is shaping up to be a somewhat less active year, in terms of significant organized concerts. One recent event was the so-called “Summer of Hate,” a white power music concert that took place at a VFW hall in El Cajon, California, on July 21, 2012. Organized by the “West Coast Firm,” a group of Hammerskins members and supporters on the West Coast, it included bands such as Chaos 88, Max Resist, and the California-based White Knuckle Driver. At least 70 white supremacists attended, most from California but some coming from as far away as New Jersey, Michigan, Idaho, and Virginia.

THE PURVEYORS OF HATE MUSIC

Because actual concerts are relatively far and few between, more white supremacists are likely to purchase or download white power music over the Internet and listen to it at home or on a personal music player.

An entire network of white supremacist record labels, distributors, and sellers (the three are often indistinguishable) exists to put such music in the hands of eager white supremacist consumers. These on-line storefronts include Label 56, Tightrope Records, Final Stand Records, and many others. However, it is also possible to purchase such music from mainstream Web sites. Amazon.com and iTunes, for example, both sell white power music. Third party sellers also sell hate music through Amazon.com.

The white power music scene exploits the Internet in a variety of ways beyond on-line stores. Some bands may have their own Web pages, while many may have profiles on social networking sites such as Myspace or Facebook. The band Definite Hate, for example, had a social networking profile on Facebook, though Facebook eventually removed it. White power music is a frequent topic of discussion on white supremacist discussion forums such as Stormfront; these forums are also one of the main ways by which upcoming concerts are advertised. From time to time, white supremacists may also create Internet “radio” stations, providing streaming audio broadcasts of white power music. Such sites tend to be somewhat short-lived, but one currently active site is Micetrap Radio, hosted by Micetrap Records. Video hosting sites such as YouTube are another way to access white power music over the Internet.

One thing that these sites collectively make clear is the international scope of white power music. Though the United States has its own white power music scene, this form of music can be found in Canada, across Europe, in South America, South Africa, and Australia and New Zealand. In addition to American white power music bands, extremists in the United States may listen to white power music from Germany, Poland, Belgium, Scandinavia, or many other places. Most on-line white power music stores offer a highly international selection of music. Foreign bands are listened to in the United States, and American bands listened to abroad (although in some cases, bands may have to create alternative versions of some song lyrics in order to be able to be sold in some foreign countries). American bands sometimes play abroad, and vice versa, although the cost of travel limits the extent to which this can occur. The Internet, however, has no such limitations.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHITE POWER MUSIC

White power music is significant, both to extremists themselves as well as to the larger communities in which they live and move. Music is a powerful medium at all times; music with a message can be more powerful still.

For extremists, the most important role that white supremacist music plays is simply entertainment; that is, after all, the most common purpose for any form of music. However, the messages of white power music are important as well. Obviously, such music conveys hatred: antagonism towards Jews, immigrants, non-whites, Muslims, gays and left-wingers, among others. The music may also generically urge or celebrate violence, coming as it does from a subculture in which violence is largely condoned. If a song happens to combine those two messages, as many do, the music becomes a force to rouse people into action against perceived enemies.

Other white power music songs may glorify heroes or martyrs of the white supremacist movement, whether “original Nazis” such as Adolf Hitler or Rudolf Hess, or more modern figures such as white supremacist terrorists Robert Mathews or David Lane. Some songs are essentially promotional in nature, praising a current group or leader. And many white power music songs are designed to convey some sense of commonality among white supremacists (or selected types of white supremacists, such as racist skinheads), to strengthen the sense that the listeners stand together in a movement with shared ideas, goals, and enemies.

Collectively, these messages strengthen and embolden the white supremacist movement.

For the majority of people, who are not white supremacists, white power music poses several troubling problems. One issue is the role that such music may have in influencing or even creating white supremacist violence. It is true that sometimes there are some pretty direct links between hate music and violence. There have been incidents over the years, for example, in which white supremacists have committed hate crimes right after attending a white power music event. More commonly, white power music can play an indirect role in making violence—especially certain types of violence, such as hate crimes—more likely because it helps make it more acceptable within the movement.

However, one must always treat such an influence cautiously, because while white power music might possibly play a role in egging a listener to violence, it is obviously true that many people will like white power music because they already have accepted the idea that racial violence is justified. In such

cases, the music may not so much influence them as simply reflect back opinions that they already share. Of course, even in such situations, the music can reinforce those opinions.

Even leaving aside the issue of violence, the role that white power music can have in spreading hate within a community is also a genuine issue of concern—it is perhaps the most frequently expressed concern about hate music, usually described as “recruitment.”

It is true that white power music can play a role in recruiting people, especially young people, into the white supremacist movement. However, that recruitment can take one of two forms, active and passive. Most people think of recruitment in terms of active recruitment efforts—in which an extremist or extremist group may attempt proactively to distribute hate music to young people in an attempt to get them “hooked.” This is a tactic that does sometimes occur. In the past decade, perhaps the most notorious attempt to do this was the so-called “Project Schoolyard,” originated by Panzerfaust Records in 2004, which involved selling a compilation white power music CD at cut-rate prices to white supremacists, who would then try to distribute copies of the CD freely at local schools. One indirect result of this attempt, as mentioned in a previous section, was the disintegration of Panzerfaust Records itself. In subsequent years, similar tactics would be repeated several times by different groups and individuals, including one of the former Panzerfaust principals.

However, the actual results did not approach expectations in these cases. This tactic hit up against the basic reality that most people in the United States are not sympathetic to white supremacists. Extremists found themselves spending a great deal of time and effort on a relatively inefficient tactic.

Passive recruitment, in contrast, has the potential to be effective without the same expenditure of effort. Passive recruitment depends on the ready availability of white power music and the chance that significant numbers of people may, on their own, encounter and be exposed to such music. It is the Internet that makes passive recruitment using white power music a potentially effective tactic, because people can encounter white power music “accidentally” while using the Internet in various ways. Of all the people who encounter it, some will be interested enough to look into white power music, and of those people, a certain amount will find the white supremacist movement itself attractive. The difference between active and passive recruitment is similar to the difference between a billboard advertising campaign and a telephone direct marketing campaign.

One thing is clear: where the music helps create more white supremacists, helps motivate existing



white supremacists to violence, or continues to spread hate within American communities, its effects are pernicious.