

HATE ROCK

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Hate is hot.

In certain circles -- where despising African-Americans and other racial minorities, gays, lesbians and Jews is a fashion statement -- you can dance to hate and its hard, hard beat.

At least that's the message in the nascent but fast-growing white supremacist music industry. Mostly brain-crunching metal and oi (skinhead) music, its rebellious trappings help racists mainstream their odious message and recruit young people internationally.

"Music is the most effective propaganda tool ever," says Devon Burghart, director of the Building Democracy Initiative at the Center for New Community in Oak Park, a community group that opposes racist activities. "It brings racists together into a so-called 'music scene' that lets them spread their message almost innocently. Because while a young person probably wouldn't even read a racist flier, they'll listen to a tape or a CD 15, 20 times and slowly get into the lyrics that way."

And these lyrics are vicious. The group No Remorse's "Race Traitor" wails: "Now you're pram pushing, you've got a black baby/ You act like a tramp and not like a lady/ You're the lowest of the low, a total disgrace/ Drug infested creature, you're a traitor to your race."

And in "Stukas over D.C.," the band Das Reich sings: "There was no Holocaust but there is one coming/ Fire up the ovens!/ Fire up the ovens!"

White power in the last decade has come out of the shadows. Thanks in great part to the Internet, "racialist" bands and record labels are able to coordinate concerts and sales of music that openly proclaim Adolf Hitler as a hero and advocate racial hatred and murder. The Internet has helped link racist rockers in the United States with their counterparts in Europe, Argentina, Brazil and even Japan. Germany is the biggest market for "hate" music, but the U.S. is a close second.

"We believe (white power music) is a cash-generating vehicle for a movement that leads to violence and even genocide," said Burghart.

Although none of the record labels that produce white power music have ever been formally linked to the Ku Klux Klan, the National Alliance or any other established "hate" group, they share resources and goals.

"They pass out each other's literature," said a spokesman for the Northside Anti-Racist Action, a youth activist group that recently picketed Record Breakers, a Hoffman Estates independent record store for selling white power music. The spokesman, who identified himself only as Justin (he would not reveal his full name for fear, he said, of being a target of racist skinheads), said, "They use each other's events to promote the same politics and each other's activities."

According to a report released this month by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Internet hate sites grew to 254 last year from 163 in 1997 -- and a good number of them are promoting or linked to white power music bands. (Most non-music Web sites promote racist philosophies and sell hate publications and related paraphernalia.)

Besides CDs, racist music sites also sell fanzines, clothing with Klan and neo-Nazi messages, swastika belt buckles and other white supremacist accessories.

White power music got started in England in the early 1980s, with the rise of a band called Skrewdriver. "They were the first to really embrace, publicly, the politics of nationalism," said James Allen, 23, the bass player for Red White and Blue, a self-proclaimed nationalist band based in New Jersey. "There had been other racist bands before, but they wouldn't admit it and there wasn't really any evidence. But in the '80s, suddenly there was Bound for Glory, RAHOWA and a lot of RAC (rock against Communism) bands like Youth Defense League." (RAHOWA , now defunct as a band, is an acronym for "Racial Holy War.")

The movement was fed by the upheaval in Eastern Europe in the late '80s and early '90s, as socialist governments fell and new capitalist economies failed to deliver the jobs and prosperity many had hoped for. Many racist skinheads began wearing short hair, brown shirts, military boots and leather jackets, in emulation of Hitler's followers.

"They're third positionists, neither Communist nor capitalist," said Mark Potok, editor of Intelligence Report, the Southern Poverty Law Center's quarterly newsletter, about the white power bands. "But what they call nationalist or nationalist socialism is really Nazism."

By the '90s, European racist rock had found adherents in the U.S., primarily among disaffected white working-class youth in integrated urban areas undergoing economic disruption. Detroit, Atlantic City, Pittsburgh, Oakland, Los Angeles, parts of Florida and almost every big city in Texas began to develop skinhead scenes that eventually split into racist and anti-racist branches. (In Chicago, according to Burghart, the last racist concert was held in Waukegan two years ago at a private venue.)

Because of strict anti-hate laws in various European countries, many "extreme" racist bands -- groups that called for violent confrontations and killing -- found it easier to record in the U.S., where their hateful speech was constitutionally protected.

In 1989, American racist rockers held an Aryan Woodstock on a private farm in California's Napa Valley and, though the event was rained out, it received national media attention and helped white power musicians coalesce.

After that, old-time racists such as the Klan's Tom Metzger and neo-Nazi George Byrd began to focus on music as a tool to draw young people into their ranks. Metzger, Byrd and their ilk gave young rockers a working ideology and a theology that justified their prejudices.

"For a while there was a great deal of infatuation with the Christian Identity movement (among the racist rockers)," said Burghart. (The Christian Identity Church believes whites are superior and refers to most other races as "mudpeople.") "Now it's with the World Church of the Creator, which has a chapter in Chicago and world headquarters in Peoria. They believe Hitler was a prophet and that Christianity is a Jewish plot."

Matthew Hale, leader of the World Church of the Creator, recently attracted headlines when his application for a law license in Illinois was rejected based on his racist views.

There is also a recent fascination with Odinism, based on Norse mythology. "Today, it's not like praying to Thor," explained Pajen Johanssen, owner and operator of the Swedish Midgard label, which has many Odinist bands among the 225 different titles

it carries. "It's not so much to pray, but to honor the nature and power of white people."

"They're disguising the message behind different kinds of themes, especially Celtic and Norse mythology," said Potok. "There is a very strong need among white supremacists to create a mythic past, so they come up with these cartoonish scenes of tough tribesmen slaying wild boars and big-chested Nordic lasses strolling through dewy Alpine meadows. This mythic past allows them a world view, instead of just saying, 'I hate black people.' "

"I don't know if it's so much about hate as about racial pride," insisted Johanssen. "There is a part of society that wants to take away our pride, history, way of life. But we're just proud of our culture, our history."

When asked about the group's politics, Red, White and Blue's Allen tried to skirt a fine line: "We're not a hate rock band, we're a nationalist band, but not nationalist socialist. We're not for racism or anti-racist. We lean more toward the right but we're not a Nazi band." But he added that it is extremely unlikely they'd ever play a bill with an integrated band.

"This is all a strategy," said Burghart. "You see, it's one thing to identify a small crew of racist skinheads. It's harder if they're integrated into a bigger arena. The idea now is to move into new and broader scenes, to infiltrate not only politically, but socially, economically and culturally."

"We are gaining acceptance," agreed Allen, whose group has recently begun to get some airplay on college stations.

How much of a business is white power music? Worldwide, probably in the millions of dollars. When Resistance Records, possibly the largest hate music record label and distributor in the United States, was raided in 1997 by Michigan state authorities for alleged tax violations, the company had more than 50,000 white power CDs in stock. At its height in 1997, Resistance's fan magazine had 60 pages. In Sweden, Johanssen's Midgard label, which runs a store and a Web site, claims more than \$200,000 in sales of CDs and related music materials last year alone.

"It's a very organized subculture, and it's growing," said Allen, whose Red, White and Blue has sold nearly 2,000 copies of its debut CD, "Patriotic Glory," since its release by a Belgium label last August -- without commercial airplay, live shows, or formal distribution. "There are hundreds of labels out there and it's all underground."

According to record buyer Robert Glick at Record Breakers -- which has been carrying white supremacist rockers such as No Remorse and Angry Aryans for seven years -- the store sells about three racist CDs a week. It is the only mainstream record store in the Chicago area that admits to over-the-counter sales of white power CDs.

"We have this music because customers asked for it," said Glick. "We didn't even know what it was at first. We are not racists. We have it as a matter of customer service."

Even though white power music represents only a small fraction of the store's sales, Glick said that after ARA's recent protest, it would be hard to stop carrying it. "It's become a matter of principle now," he said. "If I stop selling this, what next? There's a lot of hateful music out there."

Melissa Schop, assistant director of the Chicago chapter of the Anti-Defamation League, agreed. "There's a lot of music out there we find equally appalling as this

racist music, and just as dangerous. But we would never advocate censorship. We believe in education and awareness, and we would hope that people would reject this and all kinds of bigotry."

Caption: PHOTO GRAPHIC

PHOTO: A protester with the Northside Anti-Racist Action pickets the Record Breakers store in Hoffman Estates for selling white power music. Tribune photo by Bonnie Trafelet. GRAPHIC (color): `Strikeforce, white survival/ Strikeforce, yeah/ Strikeforce, kill all rivals/ Strikeforce, into the devil's lair.' -FROM

``STRIKEFORCE" BY SKREWDRIVER.

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