

White power winning ears with pop rock

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The sound is that of most other pop music - straight rock, heavy metal, folk ballads. But listen carefully, and the words can be disturbing, even shocking. Race war is advocated. Germany's Third Reich is glorified. Blacks and Jews are denigrated, sometimes targeted for violence and destruction.

It's called "white-power music," played by bands with names like "Blue Eyed Devils," "Plunder & Pillage," "Bound for Glory," "Skrewdriver," and "Rahowa" (the acronym for "racial holy war").

As it gains in popularity and acceptance, human rights advocates warn that it is infiltrating mainstream youth culture as a recruiting tool for white supremacist and other hate groups.

"This is a movement that has grown from a few bands in the late 1980s to over 100 bands in the United States today, a movement that has grown from a handful of labels and distributors to over 50 in the US right now, and it has been able to move closer and closer to the mainstream," says Devin Burghart of the Center for New Community, a faith-based human rights organization in Chicago.

Much of the activity is here in the Pacific Northwest, says Randy Blazak, a sociologist at Portland State University in Oregon who studies hate groups. But it is spreading throughout the country. A concert this weekend in Michigan features three such bands. Five other white-power bands will play in Texas the following weekend.

Filling the jukebox

One particularly significant development, observers say, is the recent acquisition of Resistance Records and its affiliated white-power music magazine by William Pierce, head of the National Alliance. The West Virginia-based organization, perhaps the most powerful and active white supremacist group in the country, expects to sell at least 50,000 CDs this year, which will raise money for its cause as well as draw potential recruits among young listeners.

"Young people are not as interested with the details of ideology as they are with the resistance music," says Dr. Pierce, who taught physics at Oregon State University in the 1960s. (Pierce is better known for writing "The Turner Diaries," a futuristic novel about race war thought to have inspired Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh.)

"It's not my music - I'm limited in my musical taste to classical music - but the fact is, whether we approve of it or not, two generations of Americans have been raised primarily on rock," says Pierce in an interview. "So if you want to speak to them in a musical language they are familiar with, it is rock. It is not Mozart, it is not Beethoven, it is the Midtown Boot Boys."

The current issue of Pierce's "Resistance" magazine includes interviews with "Angry Aryans" and other white-power bands. There's also an interview with Matthew Hale, leader of the infamous World Church of the Creator, another fast-growing white-supremacist group.

In conversation, Pierce is mild-mannered and understated. But in his magazine column, he rails against "the Negroid filth churned out by MTV and the other Jewish promoters of anti-White music intended to demoralize, corrupt, and deracinate young

Whites."

Some experts say the trend has accelerated with the backlash against affirmative action for minorities and the growing perception that the economic boom (with its alleged ties to Jewish bankers) has bypassed the working class.

Others note that it's attracting middle-class college students as well. A recent poll of 18- to 29-year-olds conducted for the NAACP found that nearly 53 percent of white respondents essentially agreed with a separate-but-equal philosophy regarding race in America.

Part of the problem, says Eric Ward of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment in Seattle, is that rock-music trade publications aimed at young readers have been running uncritical articles and interviews with white-power bands.

"People make excuses for it, and there's this underlying assumption that anything that rebels is OK," says Mr. Ward. "So if it looks rebellious, if it looks revolutionary, if it looks like it's challenging the status quo, then it must be OK, and that's about as deep as the analysis goes within that subculture."

Both Pierce and his critics see this as attractive to young people going through typical teenage rebelliousness.

"My aim with resistance music is to give them a rationale for alienation, to help them understand why they're alienated, to help them understand the programs and policies behind these alienating conditions, and to give them a target, a purpose for their anger and rage," says Pierce.

Jackboot culture hits suburbia

The problem, as critics see it, is that the aggressively bigoted message that once was restricted to the skinhead music culture, with its violent image of jackboots and swastika tattoos, has spread to other parts of youth culture.

"It no longer is white-power music confined to one narrow musical genre but instead has mutated into a variety of different forms - everything from folk to hardcore and industrial music," says Mr. Burghart.

In response, antihate groups are gathering in Chicago this weekend to promote a "Turn it down" campaign to educate parents, teachers, and young people about this growing trend. Here in Oregon, Dr. Blazak at Portland State University has started Oregon Spotlight, an organization that provides resources to fight hate crime.

"First of all, we need to move beyond the simplistic argument that this is an issue of free speech and censorship, because clearly it's not," says Ward. "Music-store owners make decisions every day about what they sell and what they don't sell. What we're asking is that they educate themselves, and hopefully they won't make the choice to sell bigoted materials."

But he adds that "it's the youths within those [music] scenes who really have the responsibility ... to make a difference. If neo-nazis or other bigots are trying to infiltrate their music, they really have to take the lead in figuring it out, and we have to be there to support them."

