

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation           **PERSISTENCE AND RESISTANCE: EXAMINING  
THE WHITE RACIAL FRAME IN METAL MUSIC**

Meghan J. Creek, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024

Dissertation directed by:    Associate Professor, Siv B. Lie, Musicology & Ethnomusicology

In this dissertation, I examine how systemic racism and white supremacy have shaped the metal scene in the Western World, the ways in which the scene's white racial frame is maintained, and how scene members are challenging this racial hierarchy. One of the main aims of this dissertation is to bring to the fore the diverse range of political and racial ideologies present in the metal scene. To gain insights into how the metal scene has served as an incubator for neo-Nazism and other white supremacist causes for over thirty years, I designed this project to analyze both the overt and covert ways in which white supremacy affects the metal scene.

Chapter One is a case study of one of the most influential metal musicians of all time, Phil Anselmo, whose white supremacist behaviors and rhetoric and simultaneous, continuous popularity and success provide ample evidence of how the metal scene's white racial frame is constructed and maintained. Chapters Two and Three investigate the metal scene's opposing and diverse political orientations, drawing mostly on historical and current discourses and events tied to black metal, an extreme metal subgenre with deep-rooted ties to neo-Nazism. I compare the artistic aesthetics and non-musical communicative acts of certain far right and anti-fascist black metal bands to illustrate the ways in which overt and covert white supremacy operate and how some artists are subverting the aesthetic conventions of black metal to contest the scene's white racial frame. I also discuss the extramusical anti-fascist activism by members of the scene,

shining a spotlight on the work of the international Antifascist Black Metal Network, which formed in 2021.

This dissertation is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach to research. In addition to drawing on frameworks from multiple fields in combination with musicology, such as semiotic anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, I incorporate methodologies from both historical musicology and ethnomusicology. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six individuals, participant observation at live musical performances, virtual fieldwork, and digital archival work. Most of my research is qualitative, but in Chapter Two I rely, in part, on a quantitative approach to gather evidence to support my argument that there are many more white supremacist metal bands than the average person in the scene realizes.

My research findings demonstrate that the growing far-right faction within the metal scene do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, I argue that overt manifestations of white supremacy are but one effect of the metal scene's white racial frame. By drawing attention to the less visible and unrecognized manifestations of white supremacist ideologies, my work emphasizes the significant effects of white supremacy still inherent to the scene today, adding to and expanding the ways in which those who study and participate in this genre think about and discuss these important issues.

PERSISTENCE AND RESISTANCE:  
EXAMINING THE WHITE RACIAL FRAME IN METAL MUSIC

by

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## Dedication

To Steven  
*Rock in peace, brother*

## Acknowledgements

As I sit here typing these words at 11PM on a Monday, watching my nine-month-old daughter on the baby monitor stirring in her sleep, I am still in awe and disbelief that I have made it to this point of monumental achievement. A dissertation is a strenuous and demanding process on its own, but to spend the last eighteen months of this project first pregnant, then as a new mother, presented me with challenges that I could not have overcome without the support from my mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. This document is nearly 75,000 words, and I have spent a countless number of hours poring over them, changing, deleting, rearranging, replacing, pleading (to find the right ones). And although I spent several months writing this dissertation, I have spent even longer thinking about what I was going to write in my acknowledgements, and what words even exist in the English language that could possibly express the overwhelming amount of gratitude that I feel.

I would like to start by thanking my committee for their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement as I grappled with a difficult pregnancy, endured a stressful birthing experience, and adjusted to motherhood. The comfort that this brought allowed me to be fully present in mind and body for my daughter in the first months of her life, which is something that we as a family will never forget.

The person I must acknowledge first is my caring, supportive, kind, generous, and brilliant advisor Siv Lie. You have been one of the key instrumental forces that pushed and pulled me over the finish line. Working with you has changed my life for the better, and I could not imagine going through this journey without you. Thank you for sticking by me through it all and believing in me, especially when I did not believe in myself. Words cannot adequately describe my gratitude.

Thank you to La Marr Jurelle Bruce for agreeing to be my Dean's Representative in the first place, and for remaining on standby for many months before I was ready to reschedule my defense. I am grateful for the thoughtful insights that you shared with me, and I am eager to engage with your ideas as I continue down this research path. Many thanks to Stephanie Shonekan for making time in your busy schedule as The Dean to serve on my committee; having you as a member of my team honestly meant the world to me because it felt like my graduate studies journey coming full circle, as you have been with me since the very beginning when I was a young master's student who had a lot to learn. To Will Robin and Fernando Rios, thank you for your mentorship and encouragement throughout the course of my degree. I am especially grateful for all the time you spent providing me with thoughtful feedback and critique for various conference papers and earlier drafts of this dissertation. I deeply appreciate your investment in my work and success. With your guidance I know that I have improved remarkably as a public speaker, a writer, a scholar, a teacher, and these are lessons that I will carry with me as I enter this next stage of my professional life.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my interlocutors in the D.C. metal scene and Antifascist Black Metal Network. You have provided me with invaluable insights that have helped to shape this work, and it was always encouraging to me that you showed interest in and were enthusiastic about my work. Thank you for providing me with insiders' perspectives on what is happening in the metal scene; it added much value and meaning to my work. I appreciate your time and admire everything that you are doing as artists and/or activists.

My friends have been such a source of strength for me, and I am so blessed to have you all in my life. Thank you for being there for me during my lowest lows and to celebrate my highest highs—and everything in between! A special thank you to Elizabeth Massey and Rachel

Ruisard for taking me under your wing and showing a new, lost PhD student the ropes, which developed into a beautiful friendship. To Briana Nave: we entered our graduate studies at UMD together and, no matter where we go in life, you will always be That Person for me. And to Max and Victor: I still remember that you were the first ones to talk to me when I visited campus for the first time. After getting to know you both, this act of kindness and hospitality does not surprise me in the least! You are all an inspiration to me; thank you for being my sounding boards, confidants, cheerleaders, comedic reliefs. It helped me immensely to stay afloat and cross that finish line.

Lastly, I am forever grateful to my loving and supportive family—all of them! Your continuous encouragement has helped me to get through this. A special thank you to my mom and dad; I could not imagine doing this without your unconditional love (and patience). And last, but not least, thank you Thomas, for carrying the load when I needed help and convincing me that I could do it. Amelia, Canto, and I are so beyond lucky. I love you.



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## Abbreviations

<i>NSBM</i>	National Socialist black metal
<i>RABM</i>	red and anarchist black metal
<i>ABM Network</i>	Antifascist Black Metal Network

## Introducing the White Racial Frame in Metal Music: A HIStory

The following “encounters” took place during different stages of my research: conducting virtual ethnography, reviewing scholarly literature, and going out into the field. Although experienced at separate times, together these encounters played a significant role in my decision to focus on issues of race in the metal scene for this dissertation. Like metal scholars Deena Weinstein, Robert Walser, Andrew Cope, Lindsay Bishop, and others, at the start of my research I, too, approached the study of metal music from an empathetic standpoint, operating under the premise that metalheads are misunderstood and unfairly stereotyped by society at large. I wanted to contribute to the growing sub-field of metal studies and add my voice to the pile of scholarship aiming to present the metal scene and its members in a positive light and counter society’s misperceptions.

The more immersed in my research I became, the more of a disconnect I noticed between a significant portion of metal scholarship and what I was observing in the field. Conclusions such as heavy metal is “culturally inclusive” (Encounter A) or “anti-patriarchal” (Encounter B) emerged from the scholarly agenda to define, defend, or promote a musical genre and its practitioners, erasing the heterogeneity of scene members’ identities and lived experiences, as well as differences between the hundreds of metal scenes around the world. One of the main aims of this dissertation is to bring to the fore the diverse range of political and racial ideologies present in the metal scene, with a particular focus on the scene(s) in the Western world.<sup>1</sup> With

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<sup>1</sup> When referring to the metal “scene,” I adopt the sociological definition presented by Richard Peterson and Andy Bennett: “the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others.” See Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett, “Introducing Music Scenes,” in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, ed. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 1. They describe scenes as “informal assemblages” that operate outside of the corporate-controlled music industry where artists are treated as brands and music is treated as a product to be marketed to consumers. Music scenes still constitute an industry of sorts, one that adopts a Do-It-

my research, I examine how systemic racism and white supremacy have shaped the metal scene writ large, the ways in which the scene's white racial hierarchy is maintained, and how scene members are challenging this hierarchy.

In order to gain insights into how the metal scene has served as an incubator for neo-Nazism and other white supremacist causes for over thirty years, I designed this project to analyze both the overt and covert ways in which white supremacy affects the metal scene. A significant portion of its members acknowledge that blatant acts of racism, antisemitism, and other forms of bigotry have occurred within the scene, but the extent to which these incidents are problems that need to be addressed is a debatable issue for some fans and musicians. My research findings demonstrate that these types of actions and the growing far-right faction within the metal scene do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, I argue that overt manifestations of white supremacy are but one effect of the metal scene's white racial frame. By drawing attention to the less visible and unrecognized manifestations of white supremacist ideologies, my work deepens our understanding of how firmly ingrained these oppressive beliefs are in the scene's social hierarchy and how it impacts the power dynamics between its members.

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Yourself ethos and is primarily “the domain of small collectives, fans turned entrepreneurs, and volunteer labor” (4-5). I also consider music critics and journalists to be part of a scene because they play a crucial role in circulating discourses and gatekeeping. They identify three types of scenes, all of which can be used to describe different configurations of the metal scene and metal scenes: 1) a *local scene* is one that is tied to a specific geographical location; 2) a *translocal scene* is comprised of “widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form of music and lifestyle”; and 3) a *virtual scene* is comprised of “people scattered across great physical spaces [who] create the sense of scene via fanzines and, increasingly, through the Internet” (6-7). I analyze discourses and behaviors within the contexts of all three types of scenes at various points in this dissertation.

## Encounter A:

Findings from an ethnographic study of live metal performances by University College London PhD student Lindsay Bishop for her in-progress thesis *Smoke, Smells and Skins: Hierarchy in Heavy Metal*.<sup>2</sup>

“Forget wild and chaotic behavior, heavy metal music culture is inclusive and governed by etiquette and codes of conduct, according to new UCL research. After several years on the road, touring with a variety of metal bands from UK, USA and Europe... Bishop has found that the global heavy metal community is complex and transgenerational with elders passing on rules of etiquette, such as mosh pit behaviour, to younger members.”<sup>3</sup>

...

“The study finds that far from the popular perception of ‘angry teenage males’, heavy metal is culturally inclusive, with a rich and varied audience—including many women and older adults—that embraces an array or [*sic*] religions, sexual orientations and political leanings.”<sup>4</sup>

...

“Despite the perception of the heavy metal community ‘as a brutish rite of passage for teenage boys’ Bishop says that, it is a ‘complex, inclusive and global community that now encompasses several generations.’ The metal community has evolved since its inception in the 1960s... Bishop explains, however, that there is still work to be done to change perceptions.”<sup>5</sup>

“I think given the longevity and global scale of heavy metal today, I would say that addressing these stereotypes is critical. Often people talk of the safe space that metal performances give them that they couldn’t find anywhere else. The damaging perception of metal as a hive of violence and cruelty results in many bands and performances being cancelled or outright banned, which is essentially removing this safe space or access to the community.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Lindsay Bishop [Profile],” UCL Anthropology, July 10, 2018, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/research-students/lindsay-bishop>. The following excerpts are not from the dissertation itself, but from a general summary of Bishop’s findings published by University College London and an interview with her by *NME*, a news site devoted to music and popular culture.

<sup>3</sup> University College London, “Heavy Metal Music Is Inclusive and Governed by Rules of Etiquette,” *Phys.org*, September 21, 2018, <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-heavy-metal-music-inclusive-etiquette.html>. Ethnomusicologist Laina Dawes critiques this study as an example of “metal scholarship [that] turns to the global distribution of heavy metal within homogeneous communities as reflective of heavy metal’s purported diversity... [which] does not account for the different political and economic structures within each continent or country, most notably those that reinforce race and gender inequality... [nor does it] consider how the music made, distributed, or received within these systems is reflective of those conditions.” See Laina Dawes, “‘Freedom Ain’t Free’: Race and Representation(s) in Extreme Heavy Metal” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2022), 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> University College London.

<sup>5</sup> University College London.

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay Bishop, “The Anthropology of Heavy Metal – Meet the Academic Challenging the Metalhead Stereotype with Actual Hard Research,” interview by Tom Connick, *NME* (blog), October 2, 2018, <https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/heavy-metal-communities-inclusive-ucl-research-2385797>.



## Encounter B:

Excerpts from the book *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* by Andrew Cope

“The central concern throughout this work... is to address the need for such analysis and to offer a re-evaluation of the rules that define heavy metal as a genre and its distinction from heavy rock.”<sup>7</sup>

...

“In order to clarify my argument I have illustrated the recurrent features of heavy metal... identifying and situating ‘key’ codes that appear to be present in all forms of metal...”<sup>8</sup>

...

“My argument, in the main, aligns hard rock with the blues’ central concerns of gender anxieties and misogyny and therefore buying into the patriarchy. Heavy metal, however, is anti-patriarchal and, by implication, not concerned with themes of gender anxiety that inform much of rock music’s misogynistic frame.”<sup>9</sup>

...

“The argument that proposes heavy metal lyrics are grounded in themes relating to the social conflation of power and patriarchy (which includes the assumption that heavy metal is misogynistic) is clearly misguided and has overlooked the overwhelming evidence that suggests otherwise. There undoubtedly exists a whole body of rock-based music that *is* driven by and celebrates misogynistic tendencies. However, such music, arguably, aligns with blues-based rock music, identified by [Simon] Frith and [Angela] McRobbie as ‘cock rock.’”<sup>10</sup>

...

“The positive representation of women in metal is evident in the adoption of anti-patriarchal sentiments, women-fronted bands in death metal to mainstream metal, female instrumentalists in key bands and all-female metal bands. That same positivity is evident in the signings and releases of record labels, in the live gigs of concert promoters, and in the current writings of journalists. My own research, then, has not only identified misogyny as being predominantly associated with hard rock but, controversially, something that is not, as a general rule, identified with heavy metal.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew L. Cope, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cope, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Cope, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Cope, 141. For more contextualization on “cock rock,” see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 319-21. In basic terms, they define it as “music making in which performance is an explicit, crude, and often aggressive expression of male sexuality... Cock rock performers are aggressive, dominating, and boastful, and they constantly seek to remind the audience of their prowess, their control.”

<sup>11</sup> Cope, *Black Sabbath*, 145.

### Encounter C: In the field

“Are you part of the metal scene?” “Do you actually listen to metal music?” “Who is your favorite band?” These are questions that I have received on numerous occasions throughout the course of my research. In reflecting on these interactions, I have formed a few inferences as to why some people, particularly those outside of academia, are either curious or skeptical about my involvement in the scene as an active member. On the surface, I do not look like the stereotypical metal fan, also commonly referred to as a “metalhead.” I am a woman, and I do not typically wear heavy makeup or dress in all black; my hair is its natural color. My fashion choices do not include leather, frayed fabric, metal spikes, band logos, or belts made of bullets. If I do not look like a scene member, then what motivates me to study this music? Understandably, my interlocutors most likely pose these questions to ascertain my insiderness and evaluate the legitimacy of my research.

During its earliest days, heavy metal fans and musicians were confronted with moral outrage, and the earliest studies of this genre were conducted to educate the public about the merits of this music and defend it against persecution and calls for censorship.<sup>12</sup> Sociologist Deena Weinstein, who wrote the first book-length study about heavy metal, observed,

The intense loyalty and devotion of [heavy metal’s] fans is [*sic*] matched by the contempt and loathing for the genre expressed by those who presume to pass judgment on [these] cultural phenomena. Indeed, it is hard to think of other human phenomena, outside child torture and cannibalism, that evoke such intense abhorrence. Heavy metal polarizes people. Those who are aware of it either love it or hate it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, rev. ed. (Hachette Books, 2000), 1-4; Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993), x, xvi-xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 237.

Although the comment about child torture and cannibalism is a bit hyperbolic, especially by today's standards, many metal fans still wear their status as cultural outsiders as a badge of honor. And while the metal scene is not maligned as intensely as it was in the 1980s, the decade of activity that informed most of Weinstein's analysis, its members are still at risk of hostile interactions and judgments from the rest of society.<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that metal scene members on the whole, especially those in the West, comprise a marginalized population, but the historically negative perceptions of the music and its listeners explains why some might be wary of my intentions.

To return to the Weinstein quote, am I approaching this research with "loyalty and devotion" or "contempt and loathing"? The answer is "neither." But because I do not follow the trend spawned by these early studies of metal of presenting metal music and fans in a positive light and combatting misperceptions, I am sometimes met with suspicion. This reaction only increases when I share the focus of my research: race and white supremacy in the metal scene. Racism in the metal scene also intersects with misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia, and are also important to consider when thinking about the issues that I am addressing, but, for the time being, I have chosen to focus primarily on race. In short, my findings show that racism and white supremacy remain prevalent issues, albeit the impacts of these oppressive forces are not always immediately visible and, therefore, easy to downplay or ignore. The validity of my research, and

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<sup>14</sup> The highly publicized murder of Sophie Lancaster, who was brutally beaten, along with her partner, Robert Maltby, by a group of teenagers for dressing in Gothic fashion in Manchester, England, in 2007, is still a stark reminder of the dangers of participating in an alternative culture like the metal scene. For more information about Lancaster's murder and discussion of violence against Goths, a significant number of whom participate in the metal scene, as a hate crime, see Jon Garland, "'It's a Mosher Just Been Banged for No Reason': Assessing Targeted Violence Against Goths and the Parameters of Hate Crime," *International Review of Victimology* 17, no. 2 (May 2010): 159–77. More broadly, in popular culture metal music has come to signify evil, transgression, power, the demonic, and because of this association it is a common listening choice for antagonists in television and film. See Sabatino DiBernardo, "Heavy Metal's Ironic Edge: Distortion, Demonization and Noise Control," in *Music at the Extremes: Essays on Sounds Outside the Mainstream*, ed. Scott A. Wilson (McFarland, 2015), 201–04.

even my intellect, is typically called into question by those whose own experiences in the metal scene do not align with my conclusions. How could I *really* know what I am talking about when they have always felt accepted in this space, a genuine camaraderie?

### **An Overview**

The focus of my research has been shaped by broader conversations happening in society about systemic racism and white supremacy. I set out to examine how these power structures have shaped and operate within the metal scene, but I soon realized that there was not much in the way of scholarly literature guided by these same concerns that examine issues of race in metal. While a substantial amount of research has been conducted on far-right extremism in the metal scene, most of these studies focus only on overt examples of white supremacy.<sup>15</sup> And, because it is such a recent phenomenon, little scholarly research has examined how some members are collectively speaking out and fighting against the scene's longstanding problems with racism and other forms of bigotry. Certain political events and social movements outside of the scene, such as Black Lives Matter, Antifa, and the 2016 election of Donald Trump, have catalyzed some members' resistance against and intolerance for discriminatory and oppressive ideologies and behaviors in their music scene. Those involved in the scene's burgeoning anti-fascist movement are confronting not only the scene's visible manifestations of white supremacy, but also its more pervasive and concealed effects on the scene. My intention with

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see Kirsten Dyck, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (Rutgers University Press, 2016); Benjamin Hedge Olson, "Voice of Our Blood: National Socialist Discourses in Black Metal," *Popular Music History* 6, no. 1–2 (2011): 135–49; and Benjamin Philip Hillier and Ash Barnes, "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Extreme Right-Wing Ideologies in Australian Black Metal," *IASPM Journal* 10, no. 2 (December 11, 2020): 38–57.

this research is to place my scholarly analysis of these issues in conversation with what some members of the scene on the ground already acknowledge and confront.

In this introductory chapter, I provide an overview of metal music's white racialization and highlight scholarship from across multiple disciplines that inspired and shaped my research and analysis. First, I introduce the scholarship that provides the theoretical frameworks for my discussions and analyses of white supremacy, systemic racism, and racializing discourses, primarily from the fields of sociology and linguistic anthropology. The subsequent section dissects the antagonistic internet-based dispute known as #MetalGate that took place in 2014. The discourses that fueled this "battle" over what constitutes the metal scene and who belongs in it exemplify the attitudes that perpetuate white patriarchal supremacy and continually marginalize scene members of minoritized populations. I start with this contemporary example to show how white supremacy affects the metal scene and then chronologically backtrack to examine rock and heavy metal's racial history. I chose to organize the sections in this order to emphasize the processual nature of racialization, highlighting how past racializing discourses about music can shape the racializing discourses of the present, and how these discourses are perpetuated and/or transformed over time.

After laying out the theoretical and historical foundations for my analysis, I synthesize studies in popular music about race and metal music that influenced my work. I call attention to some of the studies that contributed to metal music's white racialization, even if inadvertently, and the more recent publications that aim to expose and counteract problematic treatments of this topic. Lastly, I describe the three subsequent chapters. Chapter One is a case study of one of the most influential metal musicians of all time, Phil Anselmo, whose white supremacist behaviors and rhetoric and simultaneous, continuous popularity and success provide ample evidence of

how the metal scene's white racial frame is constructed and maintained. Chapters Two and Three investigate the metal scene's opposing and diverse political orientations, drawing mostly on historical and current discourses and events tied to black metal, an extreme metal subgenre with deep-rooted ties to neo-Nazism. I present the artistic aesthetics and non-musical communicative acts of specific bands, such as Mayhem, Darkthrone, and Marduk to illustrate how overt and covert white supremacist rhetoric and behaviors have remained a mainstay in the scene throughout the past three decades, both within the black metal scene and the metal scene more generally. In comparison, I analyze the music of anti-fascist black metal bands Neckbeard Deathcamp and Feminazgûl to show how artists of this political orientation are subverting the aesthetic conventions of black metal in order to counter the scene's active and passive fascist tendencies. I also discuss the recently formed international Antifascist Black Metal Network.

### **Framing metal's white racial frame**

Although metal music is no longer a genre produced and consumed predominantly by White men, how does this original racial framing in both scholarly and public discourses still shape what is considered musically "authentic" and determine who is included in and excluded from the scene?<sup>16</sup> It is widely acknowledged that racism and white supremacy prevails in pockets

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<sup>16</sup> I have chosen to capitalize both Black and White. It is a generally accepted practice to capitalize "Black," but the capitalization of "White" is still contested. The hesitation to capitalize "white" is because that is what white supremacists tend to do, so it runs the risk of affirming these beliefs. The *New York Times* decided against capitalizing "white" as opposed to "Black" because "white doesn't represent a shared culture and history in the way Black does." See Nancy Coleman, "Why We're Capitalizing Black," *New York Times*, July 5, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html>. On the contrary, and the reason that I have chosen to capitalize "White," the *Washington Post* reported that some scholars contend that "keeping white lowercase is actually anti-Black." They quote the sociologist Eva Ewing as stating, "Whiteness remains invisible, and as is the case with all power structures, its invisibility does crucial work to maintain its power." By not capitalizing "white" it "perpetuates the idea that whites are the default race." Additionally, the *Washington Post* quotes philosophy professor Kwame Anthony Appiah as arguing that the capitalization of white "would no longer be a provocative defiance of the norm," and would thus subvert the intentions of white supremacists who capitalize the word. See David Bauder, "AP Says It Will Capitalize Black But Not White," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/ap-says-it-will-capitalize-black-but-not-white/2020/07/20/78ade132-ca91-11ea-99b0-8426e26d203b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/ap-says-it-will-capitalize-black-but-not-white/2020/07/20/78ade132-ca91-11ea-99b0-8426e26d203b_story.html). I will capitalize "White" only referring to the racial category in general;

isolated from the rest of the metal scene, but this dissertation demonstrates that metal's racialized social system is not limited to these fringe factions built upon the tenets of white power.<sup>17</sup>

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains the emergence and development of white supremacy as a racialized social structure in his book, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*:

When race emerged in human history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social structure) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became 'white') over non-Europeans (the peoples who became 'nonwhite'). Racialized social systems, or *white supremacy* for short, became global and affected all societies where Europeans extended their reach. I therefore conceive a society's racial structure as the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce *white privilege*.<sup>18</sup>

Social scientists recognize white supremacy as both a racialized social system and a *racial ideology*, or a "racially based framework(s)," held by individual members of the dominant White race used to "explain and justify... the racial status quo."<sup>19</sup>

White supremacist ideologies underpin racial movements such as white nationalism, white separatism, and neo-Nazism. It is important to remember that not all people, groups, and organizations who express white supremacist ideologies hold the exact same set of beliefs or agreement on how to express those beliefs or advance their cause.<sup>20</sup> After the Second World War, there has been a significant increase in the number of officially recognized and unrecognized nation-states around the world, as well as groups fighting for national sovereignty.

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I will not capitalize the word when referring to white supremacy/supremacists, white racial hierarchy, white racialization, white power, the white racial frame, white blues, and similar terms.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Berg Publishers, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 14-15. Emphases are my own.

<sup>19</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Dyck, *Reichsrock*, 2-3.

Consequentially, this phenomenon has motivated and mobilized the white nationalist movement, or what historian and ethnographer Mattias Gardell refers to as *neonationalism*, which he divides into three categories: ethnonationalism, racial nationalism, and religious nationalism. These categories, while distinct, mutually influence one another and overlap in various ways (e.g. White Christian nationalism).<sup>21</sup> Gardell defines neonationalism as such:

Many nationalist ideologies assert the cultural homogeneity of the nation and trace its origins to a specific ethnic or religious group of which the nation is held to be an ‘organic’ outgrowth.... Neonationalism is the refutation of the state-sanctioned nationalist ideology in favor of an alternative nationalism that is aimed at purging an existing nation-state of everyone held to be extranational or at establishing a new, secessionist nation-state composed exclusively of and by those deemed to qualify.<sup>22</sup>

All three categories of neonationalism can be applied some of the artists and fans discussed throughout this dissertation, but the most relevant is the concept of *racial nationalism*, or the belief that “all members of a given race properly constitute a nation entitled to self-determination in a state of their own.”<sup>23</sup> Racial nationalism manifests differently in different parts of the world, as race is not conceived of uniformly across the globe. Because the focus of this dissertation is metal music in the Western world, I am mainly concerned with white or Aryan nationalists, whose “aim [is] establishing a pan-Aryan ‘white homeland’ that transcends the current nation-state borders of Europe, Australia, and America.”<sup>24</sup> As a response to the rapidly moving globalization and urbanization that has taken place since the end of WWII, these Aryan activists perceive their race as under attack, on the verge of extermination. Gardell explains that the

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<sup>21</sup> Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Duke University Press, 2003), Introduction chap., Kindle.

<sup>22</sup> Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*.

<sup>23</sup> Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*.

<sup>24</sup> Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*.



foundational antisemitic belief, one that is central to white nationalist ideologies, professes, “Globalization [is] a process of homogenization engineered by a secret conspiratorial entity known as the Zionist Occupied Government... [and] the relativization of Western culture [i.e. challenges to its superiority by ‘outsiders’] and the gradual fall of white world supremacy [will happen because] racial enemies have gained control over all ‘the once white countries.’”<sup>25</sup>

One distinct subset of beliefs that falls under the category of white nationalism is *white separatism*, or the desire to create a separate White nation. White separatists, such as Richard Spencer, David Duke, and Varg Vikernes (an infamous black metal musician discussed in Chapter Two), do not see themselves as “white supremacist” or part of a “hate group.”

According to sociologists Betty Dobratz and Stephanie Shanks-Meile, white separatists view themselves as “belonging to white racist groups advocating the need for whites to assert or regain their power in an America that has become too multicultural, favoring minorities over whites and allowing too much immigration.”<sup>26</sup> During their fieldwork, Dobratz and Shanks-Meile observed that the most common slogan they heard chanted by white separatists is, “White Power, White Pride.”<sup>27</sup> In Chapter One I will analyze an incident in which US metal singer Phil Anselmo screamed the phrase “White Power!” at an unprepared audience in 2016 after giving them the Nazi salute. Even though there is no evidence that Anselmo is a card-carrying member of any white nationalist organization, the phrase that he uttered is one that white nationalists use to communicate their beliefs, assert their power, and intimidate those who they view as outsiders to their imagined White nation.

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<sup>25</sup> Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*.

<sup>26</sup> Betty A. Dobratz and Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile, *The White Separatist Movement in the United States: “White Power, White Pride!”* (JHU Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, *White Separatist Movement*, 9.

Scholarship about race that examines the pervasiveness of white supremacist ideologies across cultural, social, and economic domains helps to explain the totality of the effects of white supremacy on the metal scene. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant define *racialization* as “an ideological process through which racial meaning is attached to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.”<sup>28</sup> Law professor John A. Powell adds to this definition, explaining racialization as “the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that both reflect and help to create and maintain race-based outcomes in society.” He also notes that “Because racialization is a set of historical and cultural processes, it describes conditions and norms that are constantly evolving and interacting with the sociopolitical environment, varying from location to location as well as throughout different periods of history.”<sup>29</sup> The conception of racialization as a *process* is relevant to my dissertation because, rather than perpetuating the widespread idea that metal music and the scene is just “naturally” White and has always been so, I examine how metal became more racialized over time and the discourses that propelled this process forward. This approach highlights the processual nature of race and how it is constructed and reproduced through social action.

Sociologist Joe Feagin’s *white racial frame* paradigm underlies much of my analysis in this dissertation, as it is a useful tool for illustrating that racism in the metal scene is baked into its structure, extending far beyond the overt behaviors and rhetoric typically associated with white supremacy.<sup>30</sup> Feagin defines the white racial frame as a “white worldview that

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 64.

<sup>29</sup> John A. Powell, *Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society* (Indiana University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (Routledge, 2013). I was inspired to incorporate this theoretical framework into my work by music theorist Philip Ewell who argued that the field of music theory, particularly the music, musicians, composers, and intellectuals that it values and

encompasses a broad a persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate.”<sup>31</sup> Musical sounds, styles, and genres can also become indices of racial stereotypes in ways similar to language accents. Feagin adopts the “frame” concept commonly used in cognitive, neurological, and social sciences; it is a “perspectival frame that gets imbedded [over time] in individual minds (brains), as well as in collective memories and histories, and helps people make sense out of everyday situations.”<sup>32</sup> People apperceive the world through multiple frames, depending on how they were socialized.

Feagin argues that the white racial frame is a structure so pervasive that most White people are unaware of its existence or effects, and thus it contributes to the maintenance of systemic racism and white supremacy. It shapes how people think and what they see (or hear) and do not see (or hear). And, in the words of Black feminist scholar bell hooks, “This unconscious maintenance and perpetuation of white supremacy is dangerous because none of us can struggle to change racist attitudes if we do not recognize that they exist.”<sup>33</sup> In order to further explain this social process, I also consider one of the primary mechanisms that is crucial to the maintenance of the white racial frame: *color-blind racism*. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

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privileges, is shaped through a white racial frame. See Philip Ewell, “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (September 2020), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Feagin, 9. He also notes that recently, some social scientists have drawn on the “frame” concept to analyze the “relatively conscious frames of people in particular social movements” (10).

<sup>33</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 54.

defines color-blind racism as a post-Jim Crow era racial ideology that involves explanations of “contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics.”<sup>34</sup>

Because language plays a vital role in producing and reifying white racial structures, I draw on semiotic approaches from linguistic anthropology, or what are sometimes collectively referred to as semiotic anthropology, to illustrate how overt and covert racializing discourses shape the metal scene’s white racial frame. In order to account for the range and specificity of communicative practices humans engage in, a number of linguistic anthropologists draw on the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce for their analytical frameworks. Those who pioneered the field, particularly Milton Singer and Michael Silverstein, considered Peircean semiotics especially useful because of its emphasis on social contextualization in the analysis of signs (including “language” among other communicative modalities such as sound, imagery, gesture, etc.) and their meanings.<sup>35</sup> Because its main thrust is to understand systematically what is actually taking place in acts of communication, I find it useful to parse just how covert racialism operates in the metal scene. I refer to the scholarship of linguistic anthropologists Hilary Parsons Dick and Kristina Wirtz to analyze the metal scene’s *racializing discourses*, which they define as “the actual language use (spoken and written) that sorts some people, things, places, and practices into social categories marked as inherently dangerous and Other.”<sup>36</sup> Their work, along with that of another linguistic anthropologist, Jane Hill, has been foundational to my investigation into the role that language plays in upholding the white racial frame because

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<sup>34</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed overview of this field, see Elizabeth Mertz, “Semiotic Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (2007): 337–53.

<sup>36</sup> Hilary Parsons Dick and Kristina Wirtz, “Introduction - Racializing Discourses,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 21, no. S1 (2011): E2–10.

they demarcate overt and covert racialized discourses, the latter of which operates under the veil of plausible deniability, further perpetuating systemic racism and white supremacy.<sup>37</sup> By focusing my analysis on the more insidious ways that racism operates in the metal scene, my work emphasizes the significant effects of white supremacy still inherent to the scene today, adding to and expanding the ways in which those who study this genre think about and discuss these important issues.

### **Heavy metal vs. extreme metal**

This section provides definitions for and distinguishes between heavy metal, metal, and extreme metal in order to clarify which general style(s) of music I discuss throughout this dissertation, as well as their relative proximity to the commercial music industry. I use the term *heavy metal* to refer to the style that formed in the 1970s that developed the genre's fundamental aesthetics, continuing to codify in the 1980s after amassing a significant fandom and achieving commercial success. The first bands to be considered unambiguously heavy metal were part of the explosive New Wave of British Heavy Metal movement of the 1980s, led by bands like Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, Def Leppard, Motörhead, and Saxon. These groups pushed hard rock's musical syntax to new levels of intensity, incorporating sounds that came to define the genre: thundering volumes, thicker distortion, extended guitar solos and techniques, driving rhythmic pulses, and wailing vocals. Performances depended just as much on visual spectacle as they did musical showmanship, often involving pyrotechnics, flamboyant fashion, and other theatrics. Heavy metal bands in the U.S. in the 1980s took a much different approach to this genre,

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<sup>37</sup> Jane H. Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism* (Wiley, 2009).

developing a style now known as glam metal, or, more pejoratively speaking, hair metal.<sup>38</sup> Well known glam metal bands include Mötley Crüe, Twisted Sister, and Poison. By 1989, heavy metal was *the* dominant popular music genre in the U.S., accounting for roughly 40% of record sales.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the explosive popularity and unprecedented mainstream success of several glam metal bands, some metalheads in the U.S. began seeking out music that was more technically ambitious and focused on darker themes as opposed to the stereotypical topics of “sex, drugs, & rock ’n’ roll.” In other words, they wanted to put the “heavy” back in metal and shed the flamboyant, over-the-top visual aesthetics and stage theatrics that characterized commercial metal. A small cohort of bands, led by Metallica and Slayer, in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area fulfilled these demands, and *thrash metal* was born in the early 1980s. Thrash metal is often considered to be the earliest form of *extreme metal*, as it formed the gateway to the underground scene. Its defining features include an emphasis on speed, virtuosic guitar riffs, extended song form, down-tuned instruments and vocals, and rhythmic breaks. Vocals are either sung, typically with a guttural timbre or yelled, but still with some sort of subtle melodic contour.

Throughout this dissertation, I often refer to extreme metal as simply *metal*. “Extreme metal” is a label given to the music by fans, as opposed to rock critics and the industry to signify its position outside of popular culture. Generally speaking, objects, experiences, foods, artworks, and the like considered to be “extreme” are not intended for the masses. While glam metal

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<sup>38</sup> For a more nuanced take on glam metal than most scholarship on it has to offer, see Sean Kelly and ECW Press, *Don't Call It Hair Metal: Art in the Excess of '80s Rock* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: ECW Press, 2023); and John McCombe, “Hair Metal and Authenticity in the Twenty-First Century Heavy Metal Canon Wars,” in *Modern Heavy Metal: Markets, Practices and Cultures*, ed. Toni-Matti Karjalainen and Kimi Kärki (Helsinki, Finland: Aalto University & Turku: International Institute for Popular Culture, 2015), 319-27.

<sup>39</sup> Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 3.

thrived commercially, thrash metal was an underground genre operating with a Do-It-Yourself approach involving tape-trading, word-of-mouth and self-promotion, self-released demos, and support from indie record labels and concert producers.<sup>40</sup>

Sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris, who conducted the first book-length study of extreme metal titled *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, posits that using the adjective “extreme” is not specific enough to describe this music, because heavy metal is considered extreme relative to many contemporary Western music cultures.<sup>41</sup> Instead, Kahn-Harris argues that the concept of “transgression” is a more productive framework for determining what makes extreme metal “extreme” compared to heavy metal, because it encapsulates the central features of extreme metal aesthetics and culture, which are “excessive, testing and breaking boundaries, invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, while simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and potency.”<sup>42</sup> He identifies three main types of transgression that shape the extreme metal scene: sonic, discursive, and bodily.<sup>43</sup> The extreme metal umbrella covers the genres thrash metal, death metal, black metal, doom metal, grindcore, and the complex web of subgenres and microgenres that co-mingled, splintered, and multiplied from these main categories.

Subgenres and microgenres are often used to denote minute sonic differences, specific thematic materials, and/or geographical location. The discourse regarding genre subdivisions is

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<sup>40</sup> The tape-trading and advertising has moved to the internet today, but other than that, the extreme metal scene still operates similarly.

<sup>41</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Kahn-Harris, 29-30.

<sup>43</sup> Kahn-Harris, 30-47.

extremely charged within the scene; the painstaking care with which artistic characteristics and attitudes are assigned to each subgenre causes fierce debates when a band is placed in a genre category that scene members believe do not fit the criteria. Sometimes these debates and exclusive nature of musical categorization further perpetuate the scene's problems with white supremacy, misogyny, and other forms of marginalization, because musicians of color and women are often pigeonholed into certain styles of metal. For instance, ethnomusicologist Kevin Fellezs writes about how the all-Black thrash metal band Stone Vengeance was labeled as "soul metal" and "Lords of Heavy Metal Soul" by fans and critics.<sup>44</sup> In her article about Cammie Gilbert, the Black lead vocalist for progressive metal band Oceans of Slumber, musicologist Lori Burns quotes Gilbert as stating that women in metal are often lumped into the symphonic metal category (a genre that typically incorporates female vocals in the operatic style) because they are expected to be "hyper-feminine."<sup>45</sup> I will revisit the covert racializing nature of genre discourses when I discuss Pantera and nu metal in Chapter One and black metal in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. The following section lays some historical groundwork and illustrates the stakes of the phenomena that I am investigating. Due to the racialized (and misogynist) discourses that fueled the 2014 conflict dubbed by its instigators as "#MetalGate," it provides important context for other topics of discussion in this dissertation.

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<sup>44</sup> Kevin Fellezs, "Black Metal: Stone Vengeance Sing the Thrash Metal Blues," *Popular Music History* 6, no. 1–2 (2011): 182.

<sup>45</sup> Lori Burns, "Intersections of Gender, Race, and Genre: Cammie Gilbert and Black Female Subjectivity in Metal Music," *AMP: American Music Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (2022): 100.



## #MetalGate

As more scene members and scholars have begun to draw attention to metal's problems with racism, both in its overt and covert forms, some fans, musicians, and critics have responded with hostility to what they perceive as attacks against metal culture and its core values. Some have even gone so far as to assert that, due to these opposing viewpoints, there now exist two separate metal scenes: one working toward a more inclusive and equitable environment and one that wants to preserve the status quo within the scene.<sup>46</sup> Although the effects of systemic racism on the metal scene are becoming more widely acknowledged, some scene members perceive this burgeoning antiracist discourse as conforming to mainstream values and trends—the apparent antithesis of the heavy metal ethos—and an attack on what they consider to be “authentic” metal music and culture.<sup>47</sup> What do these increasingly heated conversations both confronting and reinforcing racism in metal mean for the future of the scene? This growing schism came to the fore during a brief but fiery uproar that took place in 2014 dubbed “#MetalGate” by Cory Van der Pol, a writer for the longstanding right-wing website Death Metal Underground.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Eugene Stryker, “#Metalgate: Former Agalloch Frontman Subject to Pillory from Media, Betrayal from Bandmates, and THREATS of VIOLENCE from Aesop Dekker over ‘Anti-Semitic’ Facebook Comment,” Death Metal Underground (website), March 2, 2019, <http://www.deathmetal.org/news/metalgate-former-agalloch-frontman-subject-to-pillory-from-media-betrayal-from-bandmates-and-threats-of-violence-from-aesop-dekker-over-anti-semitic-facebook-comment/>.

<sup>47</sup> For example, see Michael Hann, “Rock Against Racism? Metal’s Varied Response to Black Lives Matter,” *The Guardian*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jun/22/rock-against-racism-metals-varied-response-to-black-lives-matter>; Vivek Rajkhowa, “How Heavy Metal Got Woke,” *spiked*, September 12, 2019, <https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/09/12/how-heavy-metal-got-woke/>; Cory Van der Pol, “#MetalGate,” Death Metal Underground (website), December 12, 2014, <http://www.deathmetal.org/article/metalgate/>; and Cory Van der Pol, “Heavy Metal Is Not a Blank Slate,” Death Metal Underground (website), September 1, 2015, <http://www.deathmetal.org/news/heavy-metal-is-not-a-blank-slate/>.

<sup>48</sup> Van der Pol, “#MetalGate.” #MetalGate is named after a similar conflict that took place during the same year in the video game community, referred to as #GamerGate, described by a journalist as “an Internet culture war” between two opposing camps: “the historical, stereotypical gamer—young, nerdy, white guy who likes guns and boobs—and the much broader, more diverse range of people who play now.” See Caitlin Dewey, “The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2014,

Like Paul Revere announcing the arrival of the British, Van der Pol sounded the alarm that the metal scene was under siege at the hands of “Social Justice Warriors” or “SJWs.”<sup>49</sup> His impassioned cry was prompted by a statement by leftist metal journalist and activist Kim Kelly in which she shared some of her views on the state of the scene. In her statement, Kelly wrote, “Metal is still dogged by the issues that arise from its deep-seated conservative values, but thanks to an increase in conversations about racism, politics, and feminism, those on the right side of history have gained solid ground.”<sup>50</sup> Van der Pol was quick to respond, renouncing so-called SJWs like Kelly who are supposedly infiltrating the metal scene. His polemics are rooted in the belief that his sworn enemies are not legitimate members of the metal scene: “None of this was brought on by metalheads. It was created by people who wanted to be metalheads, but they felt they could not be metalheads unless the genre agreed with their existing social, political, and lifestyle biases.”<sup>51</sup>

One reader expressed staunch support for Van der Pol’s grievances, lamenting, “God damn. I don’t understand these fucking feminists. They look at us and see a thriving culture

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/>.

<sup>49</sup> The pejorative “Social Justice Warrior” was popularized as part of #GamerGate rhetoric. The label appeared on Twitter in 2011 and, at first, had a neutral or positive connotation, referring to people involved in social justice activism. It was not until #GamerGate erupted that “SJW” was transformed into a derogatory term referring to “a person who expresses or promotes socially progressive views.” See Abby Ohlheiser, “Why ‘Social Justice Warrior,’ a Gamergate Insult, Is Now a Dictionary Entry,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/10/07/why-social-justice-warrior-a-gamergate-insult-is-now-a-dictionary-entry/>. “SJW” quickly became a ubiquitous insult in right-wing circles, so much so that it was added to Oxford University Press’s online dictionary by 2015 (the year after #GamerGate began). The adoption of the SJW slur by right-wingers supports one journalist’s assertions, that #GamerGate (and, subsequently, #MetalGate) was not an “apolitical consumer movement, [but] rather ... a swelling of vicious right-wing sentiment.” See Jon Stone, “Gamergate’s Vicious Right-Wing Swell Means There Can Be No Neutral Stance,” *The Guardian*, October 13, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/oct/13/gamergate-right-wing-no-neutral-stance>.

<sup>50</sup> Kim Kelly, “The 20 Best Metal Albums of 2014,” *SPIN*, December 12, 2014, <https://www.spin.com/2014/12/20-best-metal-albums-2014/>.

<sup>51</sup> Van der Pol, “#MetalGate.”

based on their [*sic?*] shared ideas and love of music. And they attach themselves like leeches. Metalheads don't give two shits about fighting your imaginary hitler(patriarchy) [*sic*], we don't give a shit about your retarded transgender political correctness."<sup>52</sup> Another reader responded with emphatic agreement, explaining that if a person is a true metalhead, then their metalhead identity must supersede all other aspects of their identity:

If you are [part of the scene], you aren't a fucking feminist, or black, or a woman, you are a fucking metalhead, and if you try to bring any of those in as part of your "identity" then you aren't a fucking metalhead. These [SJW] assholes don't seem to get that you can't be a woman and a metalhead, or a gay man and a metalhead, you are simply a metalhead, and all the rest doesn't matter. And if you try to bring in anything else into it, you don't really love metal, because if you do, it is the thing that defines you, not your gender, not your political views, not your sexual orientation, just the love of metal. That other bullshit is stuff for somewhere else, not here. If you don't understand that, then you don't understand fucking metal, and you should leave.<sup>53</sup>

While the primary aim of these "SJWs" is to make the scene more inclusive and safer for those from marginalized populations, Van der Pol and other like-minded individuals clearly felt as though they were trying to deprive scene participants who did not agree with their agenda of their right to freedom of expression. The forms of expression to which he refers are often the ones that exacerbate the marginalization of minoritized scene members.

#Metalgate appears to have been a one-sided battle launched by the metal scene's old guard to maintain the status quo from which they benefit, with not many direct or sustained responses from the "SJWs" against whom they were "defending" themselves. Although the #MetalGate label quickly fell out of fashion, the discourse that it generated has not. These conversations have had a lasting impact on the political climate of the metal scene in various

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<sup>52</sup> GeoDefender, December 12, 2014, 10:18 p.m., comment on Van der Pol, "#MetalGate."

<sup>53</sup> Stijn, December 17, 2014, 5:39 a.m., reply to Jesus, comment on Van der Pol, "#MetalGate."

parts of the world. The rhetoric of the metal scene preservationists remains a part of the scene's discourse today, and many of the "SJWs" they targeted have launched a vigorous antifascist movement within the scene. As part of this movement, a small number of activists formed the Antifascist Black Metal Network in 2021, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.<sup>54</sup>

#MetalGate illustrates the overarching phenomena taking place in the metal scene that I analyze in this dissertation. It is an apt example of the tensions that had been simmering and are subsequently intensifying. As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, politically charged discourses in the metal scene are often shaped directly by events, trends, and movements taking place outside of the scene. In the case of #MetalGate, its flames were, perhaps, stoked in part by events taking place that year that proved to be pivotal moments for US race relations. Sparked by the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012, the Black Lives Matter movement was fully in motion by 2014 with the first major protests taking place in response to the murder of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Given the longstanding presumption that the metal scene is a White, masculine, heteronormative space, the defensive reactions of Van der Pol and friends toward perceived threats by "outsiders" who do not check the boxes of these identity categories is not all that surprising.

### **"A white flame ignited by black blues": the "white blues" and rock's racialization**<sup>55</sup>

Heavy metal grew out of conditions that ensured its establishment as a "White" genre from the beginning. This section provides a brief, albeit crucial, overview of these conditions,

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<sup>54</sup> Black metal is a metal subgenre that began to take shape in the late 1980s, primarily in Norway. It was initially also referred to as "Satanic metal," and still carries strong associations with Satanism and the occult. Black metal is also the most notorious metal style for its associations with neo-Nazism and other white supremacist ideologies. Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation are devoted to black metal, white supremacy, and antifascism.

<sup>55</sup> "A White Flame Ignited by Black Blues," *Rolling Stone*, May 31, 1969, 2. This article was a promotion for the release of White blues guitarist Johnny Walker's self-titled album.

outlining rock music's white racialization that preceded heavy metal's formation. Accounting for the complex racial dynamics already at play in rock music in the decades leading up to heavy metal's initial developments indicates that metal's white racial frame was already constructed before the genre even came to exist. I also challenge the treatment of Black Sabbath, often cited as the first "true" heavy metal band, in narratives of metal's history and origins. The attempts by critics and scholars to demarcate heavy metal from its predecessor, hard rock, places further distance between these genres and the contributions and influences of African American artists and musical styles. I submit that acknowledgment of the continuity between hard rock and early heavy metal aesthetics reveals another continuity: the story of rock's white racialization is not a precursor to heavy metal's story; it *is* an integral part of its story.

When heavy metal emerged in the early 1970s, the US music industry was already firmly segregated along racial lines, particularly regarding what was perceived and marketed as "Black" music versus "White" music.<sup>56</sup> Although the earliest heavy metal pioneers lived in England, US popular music had long been a sought-out import, a trend that accelerated in the 1950s when rhythm and blues ("Black") and rock and roll ("White") topped the US charts. British bands began to develop their own musical styles heavily influenced by these popular US genres. This movement began with the skiffle craze in the latter half of the 1950s, which soon led to what musicologist Roberta Schwartz refers to as the (British) Blues Revival and the development of the British blues subculture.<sup>57</sup> Leading the charge in this revival were, according to Schwartz,

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<sup>56</sup> For more information about the cultural, social, and political contexts surrounding the racialized music industry in the United States, see Matthew D. Morrison, "The Sound(s) of Subjugation: Constructing American Popular Music and Racial Identity Through Blacksound," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 27, no. 1 (2017): 13–24; Erich Nunn, *Sounding the Color Line: Music and Race in the Southern Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); and Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, *Refiguring American Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (New York: Routledge, 2016). For additional reading on the British blues, see Andrew

“young hipsters [who] valorize[d] African American music... [with] a growing appetite for authentic blues.”<sup>58</sup> It was this underlying sentiment that defined blues rock, a style popularized by bands such as Cream, the Rolling Stones, the Animals, and Led Zeppelin.

Supposedly catalyzed by the Beatles’ monumentally successful first performance in the United States in February of 1964, these bands and several other British artists launched the so-called British Invasion, a movement that marked the “‘rebirth’ of rock and roll music produced by new imaginings of White male musicality that came bundled with the *otherness* of British musicians.”<sup>59</sup> In his book *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination*, American Studies scholar Jack Hamilton deconstructs the mythology surrounding the “invasion” coining the term “White Atlantic,” arguing that when the Beatlemania flurry traversed the Atlantic it was but one pivotal moment in an already active musical exchange between the US and the UK.<sup>60</sup> The misrepresentations of this musical trend gloss over the “avenues of exchange that existed... between British musicians and their American, and especially African American,

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Kellett, *The British Blues Network: Adoption, Emulation, and Creativity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 74.

<sup>59</sup> Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 89. Italics are my own.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, 120. The term “White Atlantic” is a reference to Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic.” Published in 1993, Gilroy’s study argued the importance of recognizing a Black Atlantic culture that grew out of cultural exchanges and appropriations between various African, British, American, and Caribbean cultures. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Hamilton presents four major flaws in the British Invasion narrative: 1) it pits the United States against foreign “invaders,” treating it like it was something that happened *to them*, which ignores the prior history of cultural exchange (92); 2) the British Invasion happened overnight, which overlooks the fact that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones’ success in the US was not instantaneous (93); 3) the “invading” British bands are treated as monolithic, even though most of them had little in common with one another besides a shared nationality. In other words, this was not a unified campaign in which White Englishmen were imparting “new ideas about music as art, hedonism, or both... to rock and roll” (94); and 4) the “invasion” metaphor suggests that this phenomenon was one of opposition and not mutual exchange, and also ignores that British music critics adopted this term first when referring to the wave of US artists who toured the UK in the 1950s, such as Jerry Lee Lewis and Sam Cooke (94-95).

counterparts.”<sup>61</sup> Instead, the British Invasion myth “helped to buttress and justify a vision of rock tradition structured around white men.”<sup>62</sup> Ethnomusicologist Evan Rapport expands upon Hamilton’s “White Atlantic” by also considering the colonial history of these exchanges, asserting, “the use of black musical resources by White Americans and White Europeans enacts a kind of colonization in economic terms.”<sup>63</sup> Although Rapport’s study is about the racialized origins of punk music, it is a useful framework for discussions of metal and racialization, as several points throughout his analysis could be applied to metal historiography since both genres grew from the same rock lineage. Punk just so happened to originate on the US side of the Atlantic, while metal originated in the UK, but by the end of the 1970s, both genres had a strong foothold on both sides of the pond.

Maintaining the model that catapulted rock and roll to new heights of popularity in the 1950s, White artists in the U.S. in the 1960s were also deeply invested in appropriating aspects of Black musical traditions and folding it into their own, which perpetuated the same economic inequities and obstructed access for African American artists experienced by their predecessors in the 1950s. Even though Black blues musicians were still active during this decade, it was the music of White blues rocker Janis Joplin that was perceived as the “rebirth of the blues” in the late 1960s.<sup>64</sup> Joplin’s blues rock contemporaries included Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. The music industry’s racial divide in the 1960s was defined by

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<sup>61</sup> Hamilton, 95.

<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Evan Rapport, *Damaged: Musicality and Race in Early American Punk* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), 139.

<sup>64</sup> Ulrich Adelt, *Blues Music in the Sixties: A Story in Black and White* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 114.

remarkably different values and goals than the 1950s, the latter of which witnessed the reinterpretation of rhythm and blues songs by White artists as a marketing tool to attract White audiences. Alternately, according to Black studies scholar Ulrich Adelt, “in a nostalgic search for racial purity, white agents [in the 1960s] were consuming and distributing what they constructed as *authentic* black culture.”<sup>65</sup>

This assertion applies just as much to their British counterparts as it does to American artists like Joplin. For instance, the Rolling Stones’ towering status was due in large part to what Hamilton notes as their “purported connection to blackness and racial transgression, both in a musical sense and a more vague, imaginative one.”<sup>66</sup> The Stones’ supposed aptitude for performing within an African American musical idiom, a belief peddled by the American and British media, surely made them seem more “authentic” to fans and critics as opposed to mere imitators, but it also contributed to the backlash they received in the 1960s, which Hamilton observes was rooted in the “language and imagery of race and racial threat.”<sup>67</sup> As the decade progressed, The Stones’ continual embrace of Black music and musicians during a time in which rock was becoming increasingly White-centric only enhanced their transgressive image.<sup>68</sup>

In her landmark study of the Black Rock Coalition, ethnomusicologist Maureen Mahon argues that The Stones, Joplin, their contemporaries, and 1950s rock and roll predecessors represent the “White Negro” archetype, a concept introduced by White American writer Norman

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<sup>65</sup> Adelt, 114. Italics are my own.

<sup>66</sup> Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 249. For further reading on the Rolling Stones and the White appropriation of Black music, see Patrick Burke, “Rock, Race, and Radicalism in the 1960s: The Rolling Stones, Black Power, and Godard’s One Plus One,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 29, no. 4 (2010): 275–94.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 250.

<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, 250.



Mailer to describe “the outsider status of white hipsters and the blacks they (and Mailer) stereotyped and admired.”<sup>69</sup> Mahon goes on to explain the benefits of donning this persona, benefits that their African American idols and peers never experienced:

[White artists’] more easily acceptable versions of black music and their ability to solve the problem of black people in black music do not undercut their talent, but a very real part of their success. White Negroes wear a mask that allows them to experience the excitement of being the dark other, but it is a mask that they can remove if need be. This flexibility is, of course, a luxury no African American can enjoy.<sup>70</sup>

The “White Negro” archetype evokes imagery and characteristics of blackface minstrelsy, a tradition intended as a grotesque parody built upon racist stereotypes of enslaved African Americans and their culture. By contrast, the artists who put on the “White Negro” mask identified with the Black artists whom they admired as “misfits” who were rejected from mainstream (White) society.<sup>71</sup> It would make sense, then, that the style of music performed by White artists who embodied their impressions of Blackness would come to be referred to as the “white blues” by rock critics starting in the mid-1960s. Sociologist A. R. Brown found that, between 1967 and 1974, “white blues” was the most frequently used term in articles found in *Rolling Stone*, even in comparison to “hard rock” and “heavy metal.”<sup>72</sup> Brown also observed that one of the main concerns in the press about the “white blues” was the idea of the “progressive

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<sup>69</sup> Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 248. Notably, Janis Joplin embraced the Beatnik ethos. See Holly George-Warren, *Janis: Her Life and Music* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2019).

<sup>70</sup> Mahon, *Right to Rock*, 248.

<sup>71</sup> Mahon, 248.

<sup>72</sup> Andy R. Brown, “Explaining the Naming of Heavy Metal from Rock’s ‘Back Pages’: A Dialogue with Deena Weinstein,” *Metal Music Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 251. The following is a list of key terms and phrases Brown used to scour the *Rolling Stone* and Rock’s Backpages archives: heavy metal, heavy-metal, heavy metal rock, heavy metal music, white blues, metallic, hard rock, heavy music, heavy rock, and cock rock. The term “white blues” appeared less frequently in Rock’s Backpages archives.

white blues artist... and how musical authenticity can be achieved through a personal ‘artistic’ vision, respecting American roots music traditions but no longer simply emulating them.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, the perceived authenticity and consequential success of these White blues artists hinged on their proficiency in extracting enough aesthetic traits that index Black performance styles and infusing it into their own, while at the same time not performing in a way that was perceived as *too* Black and thus unappealing to White audiences.

The careers and reception of the Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix are a rich site of comparison, illustrating the complex processes in motion during this time that shaped the racial imaginary of participants in rock culture. While the Stones were able to achieve monumental success, simultaneously because of and despite their proximity to Blackness, Jimi Hendrix, the only Black musician central to the blues rock genre was continuously marginalized by rock critics and the music industry. Despite Hendrix’s immense popularity before he died, the *Boston Globe* published an obituary that referred to him as “a black man in the alien world of rock.”<sup>74</sup> While the fame obtained by the Rolling Stones was never viewed with suspicion or treated as an anomaly, Hendrix was perceived as an outsider, one who managed to kick his way through the gates surrounding the “world of rock.” While the Stones were White men who drew heavily on Black musical culture, but at the same time could experiment with how much their performance style signified Blackness, Hendrix was a Black man who could not conceal his Blackness, but his perceived Blackness was gradually erased the more popular he became with White audiences. Mahon explains this complex contradiction: “[F]or many onlookers, black and white, [Hendrix] did not quite embody blackness at all. His white fans could comfortably assert that he ‘wasn’t

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<sup>73</sup> Brown, 251.

<sup>74</sup> Ernie Santosuosso, “Epitaph for Jimi Hendrix,” *Boston Globe*, September 19, 1970, 10.

really black' because he fit so seamlessly into the predominantly white rock milieu."<sup>75</sup> In order to reconcile the fact that he was both Black and an extraordinarily talented musical visionary, he was deemed as "not black, not white, just Jimi."<sup>76</sup>

### **Black Sabbath, White music: heavy metal's perceived whiteness**

This treatment of Hendrix provides strong evidence that rock music was already "understood as the natural province of whites" by 1970, both the year that Hendrix died and the year that is widely considered to be when heavy metal originated.<sup>77</sup> On February 13 of that year, a band in Birmingham, England, by the name of Black Sabbath released their debut eponymous album. To many contemporary metal fans, musicians, and historians, this album marks the official start of the genre.<sup>78</sup> The reason that Black Sabbath is often cited as the original heavy

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<sup>75</sup> Mahon, *Right to Rock*, 249.

<sup>76</sup> Mahon, 249. For insights into Hendrix's direct impact on the development of heavy metal, see Jeremy Wells, "Blackness 'Scuzed: Jimi Hendrix's (In)visible Legacy in Heavy Metal," in *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century*, ed. Judith Jackson Fossett and Jeffrey A. Tucker (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 50-63.

<sup>77</sup> Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, 3. The term "heavy metal" has been used by music critics to describe the style of certain rock bands since the late 1960s but did not become a genre label until the early 1970s. One of the first music scholars to write a history of heavy metal's origins was Robert Walser. He states that the most cited first reference to "heavy metal" appeared in William S. Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch* published in 1962, described as "a beat junkie's [tale of] fantasies and confessions of drugs, sleaze, and violent sex." According to Walser, Burroughs is often credited with coining the term "heavy metal" and sometimes *Naked Lunch* is even thought to have inspired the genre. Walser also debunks this aspect of heavy metal's origin story. Apparently, "heavy metal" is never mentioned in *Naked Lunch*. It actually first showed up in a later Burroughs novel, *Nova Express*, released in 1964, with the characters Heavy Metal Kid and the Heavy Metal People of Uranus. The first time that "heavy metal" was referred to in song lyrics was in Steppenwolf's biker anthem "Born to Be Wild," released in 1968. And, finally, in the early 1970s rock critics Lester Bangs and Dave Marsh began to use the label "heavy metal" to refer to a particular style of popular music in its early stages of development. See Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 8. Deena Weinstein has also written extensively about the origins of the term "heavy metal." See her most recent publication on the topic: Deena Weinstein, "Just so Stories: How Heavy Metal Got Its Name—A Cautionary Tale," *Rock Music Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 2014): 36–51.

<sup>78</sup> For examples, see Gerd Bayer, *Heavy Metal Music in Britain* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009); Ian Christe, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (New York: HarperEntertainment, 2003); Cope, *Black Sabbath*; Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*; Leigh Michael Harrison, "Factory Music: How the Industrial Geography and Working-Class Environment of Post-War Birmingham Fostered the Birth of Heavy Metal," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 145–58; Walser, *Running with the Devil*; and Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*.

metal band is because it has been written into their story that their first album made a substantial break from hard rock's blues influences.<sup>79</sup> Not only were the blues and rock already associated with whiteness by the time *Black Sabbath* was released, but this association was reinforced when the notion that rock's newer, heavier iteration shed the last remnants of its Black musical influences became part the dominant narrative of heavy metal history. To construct a hypothetical fence between these two genres, one through which the blues supposedly did not traverse, undoubtedly contributes to metal's white racialization and hammers another metaphorical nail into the white racial frame.

Borrowing Robert Walser's idea of the "exscription of women" as one of the ways that masculinity is constructed in heavy metal, I argue that the "exscription" of Black musical influences, specifically the blues, is one of the ways in which whiteness is constructed in metal music. According to Walser, heavy metal culture promotes male bonding and "excludes the threat of the feminine."<sup>80</sup> In other words, one appeal of heavy metal is the notion of an imaginary world in which women do not (and never did) exist. The more that metal has temporally and spatially separated from hard rock, the less its blues roots are acknowledged and recognized. This erasure of racially marked musical aesthetics within the boundaries of what is considered by fans to be "authentic" metal music reflects the genre's white racialization.<sup>81</sup>

One clear-cut example of scholarship that draws a hard line between hard rock and heavy metal and argues that the blues is only a central influence of the former is the book *Black*

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<sup>79</sup> For example, see Cope, *Black Sabbath*.

<sup>80</sup> Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 114-16.

<sup>81</sup> For an example of how this process similarly played out in punk, see Rapport, *Musicality and Race in Early American Punk*.

*Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* by musicologist Andrew Cope. Cope aims to differentiate heavy metal from hard rock based on musical syntax, maintaining that “Black Sabbath, in a radical transgression of their blues roots, evolved a new and original form of music,” particularly noting their “judicious omission of blues and rock ‘n’ roll conventions,” even though they began their career as the Polka Tulk Blues Band in the late 1960s.<sup>82</sup> It is difficult to believe that they would shed all blues material from their music in such a short period of time. Led Zeppelin’s music, on the other hand, according to Cope, features several characteristics inherent to the blues, such as the 12-bar blues form and pentatonic major scales.<sup>83</sup> While this claim about Led Zeppelin is indisputable, I will soon discuss the great extent to which Black Sabbath still incorporated blues and jazz conventions in their music, something that Cope and those who take his same approach to genre genealogy conveniently ignore for the sake of argument.

Other scholars treat hard rock and heavy metal in its nascent stages of development as more of a continuum, rather than attempting to disentangle the two and map out when exactly they diverge from one another.<sup>84</sup> This approach aligns more with what A. R. Brown observed in his quantitative research using Rock’s Backpages and *Rolling Stone* archives. While some scholars and metal enthusiasts choose to set a boundary between hard rock and heavy metal,

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<sup>82</sup> Cope, *Black Sabbath*, 70. He supports his claim by citing the following features of Sabbath’s music: 1) power chord progressions, 2) down-tuned, distorted guitars, 3) riffs and melodies that often incorporate the tritone and flat 2nd, 4) modal contours, and 5) through-composed, episodic song form. Before emerging as the godfathers of heavy metal, Black Sabbath began as a blues rock band by the name of the Polka Tulk Blues Band.

<sup>83</sup> Cope, 70.

<sup>84</sup> For example, see Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 6-8.

there was a dissensus among rock critics during the 1970s as to when it was appropriate to use these labels.<sup>85</sup>

As for Black Sabbath themselves? Their guitarist Tony Iommi once told *Rolling Stone* magazine that their early albums were “the same old 12-bar blues really.”<sup>86</sup> Ozzy Osbourne, the band’s first vocalist, expresses the same sentiment in his memoirs:

It’s funny, really, because in spite of our new direction we were still quite a straightforward twelve-bar blues band.... Today you hear people saying that we invented heavy metal with the song ‘Black Sabbath’ [from our first album]. But I’ve always had a bee up my arse about the term ‘heavy metal.’... As far as we were concerned, we were just a blues band that had decided to write some scary music.<sup>87</sup>

The band also drew heavily on jazz influences, citing artists like Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, and Charlie Christian as sources of inspiration, a connection that has been essentially erased from heavy metal narratives.<sup>88</sup> Hank Shteamer, a critic for *Rolling Stone*, recently observed some musical characteristics that support Osbourne’s take and contradict Cope’s assertions:

The quintessentially sinister [song] ‘Black Sabbath’ seems to move away from the overt jazziness of its predecessor [‘Wicked World’], toward a dark, forbidding trudge. But here too, you find traces of the genre: in the main riff’s use of the tritone, an interval common in jazz and blues that employs the so-called blue note; also in Ward’s playing. Listen to the way the drummer keeps a loose, swaying pulse on his ride cymbal during the main riff, making the chasm-like pauses between the beats feel that much more vast.<sup>89</sup>

Today, many scholars, artists, and fans acknowledge that rock is deeply indebted to the African

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<sup>85</sup> Brown, “Explaining the Naming of Heavy Metal,” 251.

<sup>86</sup> Hank Shteamer, “How Black Sabbath Made Heavy Metal Swing,” *Rolling Stone*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/black-sabbath-jazz-swing-influence-bill-ward-948231/>.

<sup>87</sup> Ozzy Osbourne, *I Am Ozzy* (Leicester, UK: W.F. Howes, 2010), 57.

<sup>88</sup> Shteamer, “How Black Sabbath Made Heavy Metal Swing.”

<sup>89</sup> Shteamer, “How Black Sabbath Made Heavy Metal Swing.”

American blues tradition, and Black Sabbath did not sever these ties. The discrepancies in perceptions of blues elements in heavy metal warrants further investigation.<sup>90</sup>

I propose that it would be more accurate to refer to Black Sabbath as “proto-heavy metal” rather than the inventors of heavy metal. This approach would open up space in metal’s historical narratives to acknowledge the racially diverse set of influences on this genre and culture and dispel the notion that heavy metal emerged in “the natural province of whites.” This approach may also lead to the unraveling of the deeply ingrained perception of rock’s whiteness. The label “proto-heavy metal” still acknowledges the profound impact that Sabbath had on the development of heavy metal, but also supports the notion that the generic boundary between hard rock and heavy metal is fluid. Circling back to the British Invasion myth, Rapport poses a question that I think bears repeating: “What is gained from [White Americans] placing Britain rather than black America at the center of their story [about rock]?”<sup>91</sup> By recentering rock history around the British Invasion narrative, it establishes the European lineage of rock and, consequently, punk and metal.<sup>92</sup>

I will end the overview of metal’s white racialization here but will be delving deeper into this topic in the 1990s and beyond in the chapters to come, which will highlight some of the racialized discourses taking place within the metal scene that further instantiated metal’s

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<sup>90</sup> A small number of scholars have conducted work on this issue. For example, see Fellezs, “Black Metal: Stone Vengeance”; Stephen S. Hudson, “Metal Movements: Headbanging as a Legacy of African American Dance,” in *Modern Heavy Metal: Markets, Practices and Cultures*, 445-53; Stephen S. Hudson, “Feeling Beats and Experiencing Motion: A Construction-Based Theory of Meter” (Ph.D., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University, 2019); Stephen S. Hudson, “Compound AABA Form and Style Distinction in Heavy Metal,” *Music Theory Online* 27, no. 1 (June 18, 2021), <https://www.mtosmt.org/ojs/index.php/mto/article/view/639>; and Stephen S Hudson, “Bang Your Head: Construing Beat through Familiar Drum Patterns in Metal Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 44, no. 1 (April 1, 2022): 121–40.

<sup>91</sup> Rapport, *Damaged: Musicality and Race*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Rapport, *Damaged: Musicality and Race*, 141.

perceived whiteness. It is important to have a general understanding of rock and metal's racialized histories, as they provide crucial context for topics covered in this dissertation. In the early to mid-1990s, two crucial phenomena emerged: Phil Anselmo of Pantera began referring to metal as a "White thing" in one of several racist speeches, and the first National Socialist metal bands began to form.<sup>93</sup> Anselmo's white supremacist rhetoric and the newly visible presence of neo-Nazis were only perceived as abnormal due to the extremely overt nature of their racist sentiments. But these occurrences are not all that surprising when one considers the role of white hegemony in shaping the world of rock and metal up until that point. The continued tolerance, and even support in some cases, for these types of oppressive discourses and behaviors over the past three decades (at the time of writing) reveals how metal's white racial frame has been and continues to be strengthened and maintained.

### **Metal and race in popular music studies**

As heavy metal took shape as a genre throughout the 1970s and 1980s, critics and, later, historians differentiated it from hard rock using increasingly racialized language when comparing and contrasting the two genres' musical features: heavy metal was understood as whiter than hard rock. Not only did metal's roots in the blues disappear from the foreground of its historiography, but starting in the 1980s (and possibly earlier), as if to pick up where the British Invasion myth of the 1960s left off, critics and historians constructed a narrative that centers on metal's European classical music lineage. This is one way in which the blues were "exscribed" from the metal world. The earliest examples of this discourse I located were in regards to Metallica, a pioneering thrash metal act that still remains one of the most popular

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<sup>93</sup> These topics will be covered in Chapter One and Chapter Two, respectively.



metal bands in the world.<sup>94</sup> For example, in a concert review for the *New York Times*, Jon Pareles described heavy metal as “a major subspecies of hard-rock – the breed with less syncopation, less blues, more showmanship and more brute force.”<sup>95</sup> Metal history author Ian Christe noted that Metallica’s guitarist, Kirk Hammett, was recruited to the band because they were impressed with his “flashy, ‘European’ style of playing.”<sup>96</sup> Some words used by Christe to describe Metallica’s performance style that may have sounded “European,” or classical include “controlled,” “mechanical,” and “Black Sabbath minus the melancholia.”<sup>97</sup> Metallica’s more “European” style of playing was heard by some as in opposition to blues-based rock. Christe noted certain attributes of Metallica’s music that contributed to its perceived relationship with European classical virtuosity, such as “moody counterpoint,” “clinical approach to heaviness,” fast tempos, complex techniques, and instrumental-centric.<sup>98</sup>

Up until this point, I have been citing scholarship about popular music; in this section I will shift my focus to scholarship specifically about metal music. I will continue to provide more insights into metal’s history of racialization and an overview of some of the main trends and debates in popular music studies of metal especially as it pertains to race. Already in the early 1990s, Robert Walser already noted the shift in discourse concerning heavy metal’s lineage, and whether it traced back to the blues or classical music, observing,

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<sup>94</sup> *Rolling Stone* named Metallica’s 2023 release, *72 Seasons*, album of the year. See Brenna Ehrlich et al., “The 11 Best Metal Albums of 2023,” *Rolling Stone*, December 16, 2023, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/best-metal-albums-2023-1234921699/>.

<sup>95</sup> Jon Pareles, “Heavy Metal, Weighty Words,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 10, 1988, sec. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Christe, *Sound of the Beast*, chap. 5.

<sup>97</sup> Christe, *Sound of the Beast*.

<sup>98</sup> Christe, *Sound of the Beast*.

A heavy metal genealogy ought to trace the music back to African-American blues, but this is seldom done. Just as histories of North America begin with the European invasion, the histories of musical genres such as rock and heavy metal commonly begin at the point of white dominance.... The debt of heavy metal to African-American music making has vanished from most accounts of the genre.<sup>99</sup>

While it is now commonplace for rock history to place significant weight on the contributions of African American musical traditions and artists to the genre, the same cannot be said for heavy metal history. Even Walser, who acknowledges this crucial omission, does not address it further in this book or any future scholarship. Instead, he devoted an entire chapter in *Running with the Devil* to heavy metal's "appropriations of classical virtuosity."<sup>100</sup> While the aim of this dissertation is not to recover or correct aspects of metal historiography per se, I do contend that the genre's whitewashed historiography has shaped the scene's historical and contemporary racial dynamics.

Other scholars, particularly in the field of ethnomusicology, writing about issues of race in rock and metal have focused on how the white racialization of these genres has affected non-White musicians and fans. For example, Maureen Mahon's *Right to Rock* is the first book to share the history of the Black Rock Coalition, a nonprofit organization of Black musicians and writers that came together in 1985 to challenge the notion that rock music by African Americans was no longer "authentically black," a result of the history laid out by Hamilton in *Just Around Midnight*.<sup>101</sup> More recently, in her book *Black Diamond Queens*, Mahon explores the significant contributions that African American women such as Big Mama Thornton, Betty Davis, and Tina

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<sup>99</sup> Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 8-9.

<sup>100</sup> Walser, "Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity," in *Running with the Devil*, 57-107.

<sup>101</sup> Mahon, *Right to Rock*.

Turner made to rock.<sup>102</sup> While Mahon's work focuses on the rock genre, Laina Dawes's dissertation explores the experiences of Black fans of extreme metal and analyzes how the music and the culture surrounding it can potentially counteract, or at least dampen, the effects that systemic racial oppression and generational trauma have had on their lives.<sup>103</sup>

As an interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry, metal studies is peculiar in that it began under the unifying banner of presenting a counternarrative to dispel the negative stereotypes of heavy metal culture and its participants prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s, as perpetuated by academics, rock critics, and (mostly Christian) conservatives.<sup>104</sup> Since the study of metal music gained traction in the mid 2000s, metal scenes all over the world have been subject to research across several academic disciplines, primarily cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and ethno/musicology.<sup>105</sup>

As the first book-length study of extreme metal and a catalyst for further research of this music, sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris's acclaimed ethnography *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* is an entry point for many scholars of this genre.<sup>106</sup> Based on fieldwork in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Israel, Kahn-Harris critically analyzes the various power

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<sup>102</sup> Mahon, *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll*, Refiguring American Music (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>103</sup> Dawes, "Race and Representation(s) in Extreme Heavy Metal." For other examples of studies from the field of ethnomusicology about metal and race, see Dawes, *WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?: A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal* (Bazillion Points, 2012); Kevin Fellezs, "Talk Shit, Get Shot: Body Count, Black Masculinity, and Metal Music Culture," in *Modern Heavy Metal: Markets, Practices and Cultures*, 281-90; and Fellezs, "Black Metal: Stone Vengeance."

<sup>104</sup> Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*; Donna Gaines, *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids* (Pantheon Books, 1991); Walser, *Running with the Devil*; Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*.

<sup>105</sup> Andy R. Brown, "Heavy Genealogy: Mapping the Currents, Contraflows and Conflicts of the Emergent Field of Metal Studies, 1978-2010," *Journal for Cultural Research* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 213-42.

<sup>106</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*.

structures and social dynamics that shape these scenes, while also drawing conclusions about the global metal scene. Here he introduces an idea that numerous metal studies have since cited: the concept of “reflexive anti-reflexivity” to describe the metal scene’s relationship with politics and its tacit acceptance of the scene’s white patriarchal status quo.<sup>107</sup> Reflexive communities operate with a sense of self-awareness and actively seek to define the boundaries and rules of behavior for the space in which they co-exist. Kahn-Harris concedes that the metal scene *seems* like it fits the definition of a reflexive community, but he adds one significant caveat: scene participants’ reflexive practices are only “partial and selective.” He refers to the absence of reflexive reasoning as unreflexivity.<sup>108</sup> But these unreflexive behaviors are not because of ignorance or the inability to “know any better” when confronted with issues such as racism, misogyny, and other forms of marginalization in the scene. Instead, Kahn-Harris argues that scene members purposely stifle their reflexivity. With an anti-reflexive outlook, the scene’s social hierarchy does not need to be called into question. To further capture the complexities of this mindset, Kahn-Harris clarifies that scene participants are not simply unreflexive or anti-reflexive; because they are *consciously* anti-reflexive, they are actually reflexively anti-reflexive.<sup>109</sup> In other words, they are aware of the scene’s prejudicial power imbalance but choose to ignore it and deflect conversations away from this topic should it arise.<sup>110</sup> This concept is a useful tool for analyzing

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<sup>107</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 141-56.

<sup>108</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 142.

<sup>109</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 145.

<sup>110</sup> #Metalgate is a quintessential example of how “reflexive anti-reflexivity” plays out. These anti-SJW traditionalists are aware of what is going on in the scene in terms of power imbalances, but they just do see any need to change.

issues of race in metal, but it does have its limitations, which I will address in the methodology section of this chapter.

Although the early studies of heavy metal in the 1990s presented it as monolithic and dominated by young, working-class, heteronormative, White men, many scholars have since shown that the demographics of the participants in this genre have diversified and that it is no longer confined to the United States and Europe. Ethnomusicologists Esther Clinton and Jeremy Wallach were some of the first to criticize scholars for reinforcing metal's presumed whiteness by ignoring the genre's diverse, massive global fandom.<sup>111</sup> Before publishing this work, Wallach, along with Harris M. Berger and Paul D. Green, co-edited volume *Metal Rules the Globe*, which contains numerous case studies of metal scenes from across the globe, such as those in Brazil, Malaysia, Norway, and Japan, examining how this genre has been adapted to different cultures, both in sound and non-musical meaning.<sup>112</sup>

Many metal scholars are also fans themselves, and thus they draw on their knowledge as scene members to a significant degree. Over the relatively short period that I researched for and wrote this dissertation, this trend began to shift as more scholars published major studies on issues of race in metal, with a particular critical focus on its presumed whiteness. In addition to Dawes's dissertation cited above, sociologist Karl Spracklen published a book that examines the

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<sup>111</sup> Esther Clinton and Jeremy Wallach, "Recoloring the Metal Map: Metal and Race in Global Perspective," in *Modern Heavy Metal: Markets, Practices and Cultures* (Modern Heavy Metal: Markets, Practices and Cultures, Helsinki, Finland: University of Helsinki, 2015), 274–82. Wallach also studied rock and metal in Indonesia; see Jeremy Wallach, *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997–2001* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

<sup>112</sup> Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene, eds., *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World* (Duke University Press, 2011). For additional research about metal from various scenes around the world, see Andy R. Brown et al., *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* (Routledge, 2016).

metal scene as a space that constructs and re-affirms Western society's hegemonic whiteness.<sup>113</sup> Popular music scholar Catherine Hoad also released a monograph interrogating metal's hegemonic whiteness and White masculinity, with a particular focus on scenes in Norway, South Africa, and Australia.<sup>114</sup> She also maintains that we in the field of metal studies must move away from treating whiteness in metal as largely unified; in studying how whiteness is constructed in and shapes three distinctive geographical locations on separate continents, Hoad aims to deconstruct this notion and present a different approach. Especially in line with my own research, she is the first scholar to devote significant attention to leftism and antifascism in metal, a phenomenon that I explore in chapter three of this dissertation. Hoad's work has been a guiding force in my own research, and I intend for this dissertation to add to the body of work that answers her call: "Metal Music Studies itself is of central importance to understanding the role of music cultures across the globe. ... It is thus vital for Metal Music Studies to address the implications of its own complicity in constructing and representing heavy metal as a White-dominated, masculine space."<sup>115</sup>

Treating whiteness as a global monolithic force reinforces its presumed supremacy and normativity. I want to briefly call attention to and highlight the sociopolitical and racial politics of the specific locations of the metal scenes discussed in the remaining chapters. I have already given an overview of heavy metal's earliest developments in central England; within the context of England's remarkable period of deindustrialization during the 1970s, which resulted in a spike

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<sup>113</sup> Karl Spracklen, *Metal Music and the Re-Imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race and Nation* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2020).

<sup>114</sup> Catherine Hoad, *Heavy Metal Music, Texts, and Nationhood: (Re)Sounding Whiteness* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

<sup>115</sup> Hoad, *Heavy Metal Music, Texts, and Nationhood*, 6.

in labor strikes and unemployment rates, among other crises, heavy metal became the “voice” for the White working-class men affected by this phenomenon. This association is still alive today, even though we know that metal now attracts a much more diverse listenership. The metal scene in the Southern United States, particularly in New Orleans, the hometown of Phil Anselmo (see Chapter One), is also, in part, shaped by the extreme poverty experienced by many of its (predominantly White) members.<sup>116</sup> What differs in this location as opposed to Birmingham, England, is the city’s multiculturalism, something that metal musicians in New Orleans cite as an influence on their aesthetics. In Chapter One, I will also demonstrate how Anselmo and his peers use their New Orleans roots either as a justification for (“race relations in our city are so bad, I was just responding poorly to something personal that happened to me involving a Black person”) or a denial of (“I am from the racially diverse New Orleans, it is impossible for me to be a racist”) making racist statements.

Metal music may have started as music with a primarily working-class fanbase, but this does not apply to every scene in the world. For instance, in countries like Brazil, metal musicians are particularly upper-middle to upper class because they are the ones with the financial means to afford even the most basic of equipment required to perform this music. In Chapter Two I discuss the Norwegian black metal scene in the early 1990s, whose membership was from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the reasons that the scene was so adamantly DIY was due to the limited resources of some of its members, but at the same time, their deep-seated

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<sup>116</sup> According to the US Census Bureau, 22.9% of New Orleans’ residents were living below the poverty line and 18.9% of Louisiana’s residents were living in poverty. See United States Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: New Orleans city, Louisiana; Louisiana,” accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/neworleanscitylouisiana,LA/PST045222>. The national poverty rate in 2022 was significantly lower, at 11.5%. See Shrider, Emily A. and John Creamer, “Poverty in the United States: 2022,” United States Census Bureau, September 12, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2023/demo/p60-280.html>.

rejection of the mainstream and the monetary benefits that come with it was not sustainable for those living in poverty. Norway and other Scandinavian countries have, historically, been racially homogeneous with most of their citizens having Nordic ancestry. In the early 1990s, Norway saw a surge in immigration from places like Somalia due to their civil war that began in 1991 and Afghanistan due to the fallout from the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. Consequently, this same period is when Scandinavian black metal bands began to form who espoused white nationalist ideologies. In considering the geopolitical contexts surrounding specific metal scenes when analyzing how they are shaped by white supremacy, we can gain deeper insights into the intricate ways in which white supremacy operates both as a racialized social structure and a racial ideology in specific localities and regions, which could, in turn, shed light on its global impact.

### **Motivations and methodologies**

This dissertation grew out of discrepancies that I encountered between what I read in some metal studies literature and what I observed during my fieldwork that I conducted from 2018 to 2023, both in the Washington D.C. metal scene and virtually. When I first read about Keith Kahn-Harris's reflexive anti-reflexivity theory and his follow-up assertion that metal practitioners view politics as operating entirely outside of the scene, I compared his ethnographic findings to my own to determine if there was any overlap.<sup>117</sup> Although this framework is a useful tool for analyzing the behaviors of a sizable portion of the metal scene, some of my fieldwork findings contradicted Kahn-Harris's assertions. For instance, rather than allowing the scene's homophobia to remain unchallenged, I noted that one of my fieldwork sites, Atlas Brew Works

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<sup>117</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 154.



in Washington D.C., displays an LGBTQ+ rainbow flag with their logo on the front wall next to the main entrance. I have witnessed several musicians at various concerts and festivals speak about political issues to their audiences, such as police brutality, Roe v. Wade, queer rights, Donald Trump's presidency, and more. Additionally, I have read many concert reviews that describe this same type of political activism coming from the artists. And after the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, many participants in the metal scene joined others throughout the world in speaking out against racism. Furthermore, antifascist activism within the scene grew exponentially since I began my research.

The idea of reflexive anti-reflexivity may have been appropriately applicable to the vast majority of the metal scene when Kahn-Harris conducted his research in the early 2000s, especially since most of the interlocutors he cites belonged to the black metal scene, which has the highest number of members who are openly white supremacist compared to other styles of metal. Fast-forward fifteen years to when I began my research on metal music and politics, and this concept no longer accounts for the wide array of political orientations and racial ideologies within the scene. Moreover, implying that all or most members of the metal scene subscribe to this way of thinking reinforces the supposed homogeneity of the scene and disregards its participants' diverse identities and contributions. I chose to center my dissertation analysis on metal's white racial frame in order to challenge these types of assumptions that did not bear out in my field observations.

This dissertation is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach to research. In addition to drawing on frameworks from multiple fields in combination with musicology, such as semiotic anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, I incorporate methodologies from both historical musicology and ethnomusicology. Most of my research is qualitative, but in Chapter Two I rely,

in part, on a quantitative approach to gather evidence to support my argument that there are far more white supremacist metal bands than the average person in the scene realizes. I am compiling a database of bands that espouse neo-Nazi and other fascist and/or white supremacist ideologies or have close ties with bands that do. Most of the information in my database was collected from the websites Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives and 88NSM.<sup>118</sup>

To foreground the ideological heterogeneity of the metal scene in my work, I sought out research participants and sources that would reflect a variety of political viewpoints. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six individuals, four of whom are members of the D.C. metal scene. The other two interviewees are members of the Antifascist Black Metal Network. All interviews except for one were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, in some instances, geographical distance. Participant observation has been another aspect of my fieldwork, although this approach was significantly disrupted due to the pandemic. Observations took place at live musical performances at various venues during 2018-2020 and 2022 in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia: Merriweather Post Pavilion, The Fillmore (Silver Spring), Baltimore Soundstage, Adroit Theory Brewing Company, Café 611, and Atlas Brew Works.<sup>119</sup> I also attended Maryland Deathfest, one of the largest metal festivals in the United States, in 2019 and 2022. Tragically, my fieldwork at the 2022 festival was cut short when, on the first night, an attendee publicly took their own life in close proximity to one of the venues. Although the

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<sup>118</sup> In white supremacist circles, 88 stands for “heil Hitler” because the letter “h” is the eighth letter of the alphabet. “NSM” stands for National Socialist music.

<sup>119</sup> I attended sixteen performances throughout my fieldwork featuring an average of three to four bands: nine shows at Atlas, two shows at the Fillmore, two shows at Baltimore Soundstage, and one show at each of the remaining venues listed. The venues are listed from large to small, both in approximate square footage and average audience size.

festival continued, I felt that I needed to opt out of that research opportunity for both ethical and personal reasons.

In addition to fieldwork at physical sites, my research heavily relies on virtual ethnography, not only due to the COVID-19 shutdowns, but also to observe the vibrant and vast virtual metal scene. Sociologists Richard Peterson and Andy Bennet define virtual scenes as “people scattered across great physical spaces [who] create the sense of scene via fanzines and, increasingly, through the Internet.”<sup>120</sup> Two decades have passed since Peterson and Bennett outlined the differences between local, translocal, and virtual scenes, so most virtual scenes today exist almost entirely online and physical fanzines are distributed as digital webzines. The social dynamics of a virtual scene are unique in that it is a space where people from across the globe come together to participate in “a single scene-making conversation” through settings such as social media, chat rooms, listservs, blogs, news sites, fan sites, YouTube, and the comment sections in these various web platforms.<sup>121</sup> Because a virtual scene is shaped by direct communication between individual fans, it is a space in which fans have a lot more control and influence over the social and power dynamics.<sup>122</sup> In the case of the metal scene, many artists, bands, concert promoters, and other actors also maintain active online profiles.

As defined by Cooley et al., *virtuality* is “the technological mediation of human interaction... and also technologically communicated and constituted realities.”<sup>123</sup> The

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<sup>120</sup> Peterson and Bennett, “Introducing Music Scenes,” 6-7. See fn. 1 of this chapter for a full explanation of Peterson and Bennett’s definition of scenes and how they distinguish between local, translocal, and virtual scenes.

<sup>121</sup> Peterson and Bennett, 10.

<sup>122</sup> Peterson and Bennett, 11.

<sup>123</sup> Timothy J. Cooley, Katharine Meizel, and Nasir Syed, “Virtual Fieldwork: Three Case Studies,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.

underlying ethos of virtual ethnography is to consider and analyze the meaning of virtual texts to both communicants and interpreters. In other words, “focusing on how *people* experience—and invest power and meaning in—communicative technologies returns the ‘ethno’ to virtual *ethnography*.”<sup>124</sup> In a day and age when digital communication is one of the dominant mediums for exchanging information and opinions, virtual fieldwork has become another central ethnographic method. As Cooley et al. maintain, “The virtuality of the Internet is not separated from reality” and thus provides another avenue of research that aligns with a core tenet of ethnomusicology: the “study of people making music rather than the music object exclusively.”<sup>125</sup>

One positive effect of my shift to near-exclusively virtual fieldwork was that it exposed me to a much more diverse pool of metal scene participants in terms of identity, political orientation, and racial ideologies than I would have encountered doing solely in-person fieldwork in the DC area. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, and Reddit have served as major data sources for my research, allowing me to observe interactions between scene members and racialized discourses in a more casual and unfiltered setting as opposed to interviews and other face-to-face encounters.

I also consulted a wide variety of online metal publications, such as magazines, newspapers, fanzines, blogs, and other independently run websites. Some of these sources contain interviews with metal musicians that I would otherwise most likely not have access to because I am not an active member of the scene. These types of publications also shed further

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<sup>124</sup> Cooley et al., “Virtual Fieldwork,” 91.

<sup>125</sup> Cooley et al., “Virtual Fieldwork.”

light on the role that music critics play in defining metal as a genre, how they contribute to its white racialization, and how they reinforce the scene's white racial frame.

### **Chapter descriptions**

This dissertation consists of three chapters, each of which explores a topic that illustrates the overt and covert ways that racism and white supremacy shape the translocal metal scene primarily in parts of Europe and North America. I focus on two major controversial incidents that occurred at different points in his career: 1) a series of white pride speeches he delivered during numerous Pantera concerts during 1995, at the peak of the band's success; and 2) a more recent scandal from 2016 in which Anselmo gave his audience the Nazi salute and screamed "White power!" at the conclusion of a performance. My analysis provides more detail and context about these speeches, such as the nature of their content, the responses from the metal scene during that time, the rest of Pantera's involvement, and Anselmo's forced apology statement. Some in the metal scene, including Anselmo himself, are inclined to treat these incidents as isolated and downplay their racist nature as "unintentional," arguing that these behaviors do not mean that Anselmo is an actual racist or white supremacist.

By pulling together a multitude of primary source materials, many of which have never been cited in previous conversations about this topic (such as newspaper articles from the 1990s and lesser-known YouTube videos), I provide compelling evidence that these incidents are part of a longstanding pattern of racist behaviors coming from Anselmo. Drawing primarily on concepts from linguistic anthropology, such as *erasure*, I analyze how the covert racializing discourses stemming from his 1995 white power speeches and 2016 Nazi salute—including statements made by Anselmo himself, fellow musicians, fans, and journalists—have ensured that

his career remains intact and continually reinforce the scene's white racial frame.<sup>126</sup> Because Phil Anselmo is one of the most influential musicians in metal history, this case study reveals just how deeply entrenched and normalized white supremacy has become in the metal scene.

Chapters Two and Three are complementary to one another, with the former focusing on the origins and spread of National Socialist black metal (NSBM) and the latter focusing on the burgeoning antifascist movement in the metal scene. While ample research has been conducted on NSBM in various parts of the world, a number of these studies treat this subgenre as mostly separate from the larger black metal scene. Chapter Two traces the early development of NSBM and illustrates how its inception was not as distant from the main black metal scene as is often perceived. Because the racist rhetoric and behaviors of the main originators of black metal are proven to have influenced NSBM participants and created a welcoming environment for white supremacist ideologies, I ask whether we can and should consider the earliest official black metal scene in Norway as proto-NSBM. I also analyze how some metal scene members' reactions to NSBM have enabled its continued and growing existence and reinforce the scene's white racial frame.

Lastly, to better understand and illustrate the totality of the issue with National Socialism and other fascist and/or white supremacist ideologies in the black metal scene and in metal more broadly, I describe a database I have been compiling of bands that espouse these political beliefs or have close ties with bands that do. So far, I have collected data from the past thirty years on approximately 2,600 bands across six continents. To my knowledge, this is the first database of its kind in terms of scope, detail, and scholarly approaches. My analysis of this database

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<sup>126</sup> Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

contributes to this chapter's arguments that 1) NSBM does not exist in a vacuum, and 2) National Socialism and other white supremacist ideologies are circulated amongst scene members through a series of covert signs. The veiled nature of these communications obscures the extent to which these oppressive ideologies impact the scene's social structures and power dynamics.

Chapter Three is devoted to the growing antifascist movement in the metal scene, especially in black metal. I shine a spotlight on the Antifascist Black Metal Network, which formed in 2021. Because the network is so new, this dissertation is the first to provide detailed insights into its formation, activities, agenda, and goals. My descriptions are based on knowledge and understanding that I gained through an interview with two network members, explorations of the network's social media platforms, and analyses of popular secondary sources. This chapter also discusses the actions taken by antifascist activists outside of the network, such as the organization of benefit concerts and festivals, as well as protest against concerts by bands with known or suspected ties to white supremacy. I highlight the significant overlap between the criteria that I used to compile the database discussed in chapter two and the arguments that antifascist activists similarly articulate. Many antifascists, including those in the network, are fighting not only against NSBM, but also against the more covert manifestations of white supremacy and other forms of oppression in the scene. The last section of this chapter examines the artistic output of two antifascist black metal bands—Neckbeard Deathcamp and Feminazgûl—to show the variety of ways in which musicians in this movement are manipulating the genre's musical conventions to express their political ideologies and contest the overall scene's white racial frame.

In certain ways, my scholarship on metal's antifascist movement participates in its activism. A classic phrase from *This is Spinal Tap*, a cult classic mockumentary of heavy metal culture in the 1980s, is "turn it up to 11." This expression refers to how heavy metal values extremity and pushing everything to the limit, including cranking amplifiers past their maximum volume of 10. It is my hope that this dissertation and my future work on this topic will amplify the antifascist movement in metal in the same way, "turning it up to 11," both within the scene and the scholarly realm.



## CHAPTER ONE

### “A Vulgar Display of Power”: Philip Anselmo’s Legacy as a White Supremacist Metal Behemoth

The following vignette is my transcription and interpretation of the conclusion of a 2016 concert after which metal figurehead Phil Anselmo gave the Sieg Heil salute to an unexpected audience, taking the metal world by storm. I have decided to describe the content of the video recording of this event through thick description in order to present the full scope of the atmosphere of the concert, Anselmo’s interactions with the audience, his behavior leading up to the incident, and the nature of his physical movement and vocal delivery when performing the Nazi salute. This incident is central to conversations in this chapter about white supremacy in both its overt and covert manifestations, and the responses and consequences following this incident reveal much about how the white racial frame operates in the metal scene.

Scene:  
Dimebash benefit concert  
Lucky Strike Live  
Los Angeles, CA  
January 22, 2016

The atmosphere is buzzing with energy, alcohol sweat, and pure, raw emotion as friends and fans come together to commemorate the legacy of Pantera’s late guitarist “Dimebag” Darrell Abbott.<sup>1</sup> He was murdered by an obsessive fan during a concert with his post-Pantera band, Damageplan, in 2004. Dimebash is an annual event that started in 2010; all the concert’s

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<sup>1</sup> This vignette represents excerpts from my own transcription and description of a video posted on YouTube by an account with the screen name Chris R (@chrisr8892). See Philip H. Anselmo et al., “Dimebash 2016 - WALK,” Lucky Strike Live in Los Angeles, California, recorded on January 22, 2016, YouTube video, posted on January 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j91yKSsFaw&t=51s>.

proceeds are donated to the Ronnie James Dio Stand Up and Shout Cancer Fund.<sup>2</sup> “Give it up for Phil Anselmo, ladies and gentlemen!” exclaims Robb Flynn of Machine Head after the last song of the night. Anselmo responds humbly, insisting that the audience should direct their praise towards the other musicians who were actually playing the music. He then proceeds to deliver a bumbling, drunken speech, pausing at several moments to soak up the emphatic cheering and adulation from his fans. At first, he reciprocates and thanks everyone profusely for being there that night and tells everyone that he loves them. He continues down memory lane, remembering the good times that he shared with Pantera in the ‘90s. Suddenly, he starts yelling at an audience member, whom he (mis)heard saying something disrespectful. A faint “Shut up!” is heard above the white noise, but it is not clear if the fan is speaking to Anselmo, who responds, “No, you shut up. I got the microphone in my hand, and you can suck my giant dick, bro.” He returns to singing the praises of Pantera, declaring that they were the “Antichrist of heavy metal.”

After rambling for another few minutes, as Anselmo basks in one last round of applause, Johnny Kelly, best known as the former drummer for Type O Negative, approaches Phil and motions to him that it is time to go. Another man thanks the crowd for attending the show and wishes them a good night, during which Anselmo commits an act that would become one of the biggest scandals in metal history. He bends his right arm at the elbow, places his forearm and hand straight across his chest, and then forcefully and unapologetically sticks his entire arm straight out in front of his body at an upward angle, an unmistakable Nazi salute. Kelly holds up his other arm to try to mask what has just happened, either because he is in denial of it, or because he wants to protect the reputation of his intoxicated friend. But Kelly’s efforts are not

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<sup>2</sup> Ronnie James Dio was a highly influential and celebrated heavy metal singer from the United States who died in 2010 of stomach cancer. He is best known for taking the place of Ozzy Osbourne as lead singer of Black Sabbath in 1979 and for the success he had with his own band, Dio, which formed in 1982.

enough to mitigate the situation. In the next instance, Anselmo leans forward in a battle stance and, thrusting the full strength of his body into it, roars with all his might and conviction, “WHITE POWER!” before Kelly escorts him offstage.<sup>3</sup>

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By the time this incident took place in 2016, Philip Anselmo (b. 1968) had enjoyed a successful career in heavy metal for over thirty-five years. While it left much of the metal community absolutely stunned, others recognized that this type of behavior and racist rhetoric was not out of character for Anselmo. As one of the most recognizable figures in United States metal, Anselmo and his storied career provide a revealing case study for examining how white supremacy shapes the scene in both overt and covert ways. Together they transformed into the most popular US metal band of the 1990s, adopting a heavier musical style and trading their teased hair and spandex for loose jeans, muscle tees, and a stereotypically masculine persona. With this consequential change in image, attitude, and sonic aesthetics, Pantera signaled that the glam metal craze of the 1980s was coming to an end and they were here to usher in a new era that would permanently change the landscape of metal in the United States and beyond.

Over the course of his decades-long career, Anselmo has proven to be a controversial character, with several instances of statements and behaviors expressing white supremacist ideologies. Since 2016, some members of the metal scene have begun to distance themselves

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<sup>3</sup> The previously cited video of the performance of “Walk” and Anselmo’s post-concert speech did not include him screaming “White power!” after the Nazi salute. The same YouTube user, Chris R (@chrisr8892), posted another video in which he isolated just the Nazi salute and Anselmo’s “White power” yell. See “Phil Anselmo is a Racist! Ruins Dimebash 2016,” Lucky Strike Live in Los Angeles, California, recorded on January 22, 2016, YouTube video, posted January 27, 2016, [https:// youtube.com/ shorts/rVaUIXfvOHg? feature=share](https://youtube.com/shorts/rVaUIXfvOHg?feature=share).

from Anselmo and denounce his actions, but a significant portion of the scene either ignores or excuses his actions, and a small number even condones them. The array of reactions toward Anselmo's racism provides a strong entry point for a close examination of how the white racial frame is strengthened and maintained in the metal scene. In this chapter, I parse what these conflicting responses can tell us about the politics of race in the U.S. metal scene more broadly, interrogating how fan discourse can perpetuate white supremacy in a variety of ways. At the same time, I will also look at how some participants in the metal scene are contesting or resisting the white racial frame. Analyzing a wide array of metal fans' and musicians' opinions in the wake of the Dimebash scandal illuminates some of the complex ways in which racial ideologies circulate in a music scene. To my knowledge, this chapter is the first long-form scholarly writing on Anselmo and Pantera in general. It is also the first critical analysis of their history of racist and white supremacist rhetoric and behaviors, and how the perceptions and reactions toward him from the rest of the scene contributes to the maintenance of its racialized social structure.

In section 1.1 I analyze how Pantera marketed themselves as "real" metal and how this reinforced the scene's white racial frame. By establishing themselves as what a metal band is supposed to look like (White, male), how they are supposed to act (hypermasculine), and how they are supposed to sound (aggressive, non-gimmicky), Anselmo and Pantera have had a significant impact on what and who counts and does not count as part of the metal scene. I examine how enduring Pantera and Anselmo's popularity has been to demonstrate their ongoing power and authority when it comes to shaping and maintaining the metal scene as a White space with their behaviors and rhetoric. Section 1.2 analyzes the discrepancies between how Pantera and Anselmo positioned themselves, promoting their music and beliefs as against racism, and highlighting how their racial stances often rely on the language of color-blind racism. In the

remainder of the chapter, I provide more detail and analysis regarding Anselmo's 1990s white pride speeches and 2016 Nazi salute, with a particular focus on the varying responses from fans, fellow musicians, and critics. While this chapter will show that there are still significant problems with racism in metal, it also demonstrates that more and more people in the scene are speaking out against it in ways that did not happen during prior decades.

### **1.1 Pantera, "real" metal, and the sonic color line**

Spandex. Aqua Net hairspray. Leopard print. Model poses. These are terms that no one would use to describe Pantera today, but they define the band's fashion aesthetics for much of the 1980s when they were following the trends of the day as a glam metal band. Forming in 1981 in Arlington, Texas, Pantera consisted of high-schoolers Donny Hart (singer), Terry Glaze (guitar), Tommy Bradford (bass), Vincent "Vinnie Paul" Abbott (drums), and "Dimebag" Darrell Abbott (guitar).<sup>4</sup> Glaze soon replaced Hart on vocals after he quit, and another local teen, Rex Brown, who went by Rocker Rex at the time, took over on bass. Before they began incorporating the style of the more extreme thrash bands of the day, such as Metallica and Slayer, Pantera drew inspiration from some of the most popular acts of that decade like Van Halen and Kiss. They were also heavily influenced by Judas Priest and Ozzy Osbourne, the godfathers of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) movement, which coincided with and partly shaped glam metal in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I will refer to Vincent Abbott as Vinnie Paul and Darrell Abbott as Dimebag Darrell or simply as Dimebag throughout this chapter because these were their stage names for almost the entire duration of their careers and are more recognizable than their birth names. Darrell Abbott's original stage name was Diamond Darrell after the glam band KISS's song "Black Diamond," which fit more with Pantera's image at the time. He changed it to Dimebag in the early 1990s, which better reflected Pantera's considerable consumption of marijuana (in addition to alcohol).

<sup>5</sup> Glam metal and NWOBHM bands dominated the heavy metal scene in the 1980s, filling stadiums across the world, topping the Billboard charts, and receiving peak airtime on the freshly launched MTV cable channel. By the mid-1980s, however, there was a growing demand and desire among metal fans and musicians for music that was heavier or more extreme in sound and less theatrical or brand oriented. Several thrash metal bands competed to fill

Pantera's alliance with Anselmo in 1987 was a pivotal moment for the band. They did release one more glam album with Anselmo, *Power Metal* (1988), but at his insistence they began to actively transition towards the sound that they are remembered for today, drawing inspiration from their thrash metal idols like Slayer and Metallica, with whom they were personally acquainted with by this point. Anselmo is often given sole credit for transforming Pantera from a small-time glam band to an international metal powerhouse. When their sound reached its full maturity as the "new" Pantera with their second album, *Vulgar Display of Power* (1992), Anselmo even named the band's evolved style after himself: "Philcore."<sup>6</sup> Self-aggrandizement aside, he attracted the most attention for the band due to his admirable talents as a vocalist, as well as his brooding, anti-establishment persona and macho attitude. In a review of a concert promoting *Vulgar Display of Power*, rock critic Michael Kuelker conceded that the other members of Pantera were obviously talented, but "the group's big draw, it seems, is Anselmo, a burly skinhead at whom fans scream for some sort of reaction – a raised fist of approval, a grin or, more likely, a scowl."<sup>7</sup>

As Pantera's success rapidly grew, so too did their collective domineering ego. In this section I will discuss the image that Pantera cultivated for themselves as a band in the 1990s and how it hinged on representing and promoting their music as "real" metal, as the gold standard for

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that void, particularly Metallica, Slayer, and Anthrax, who all formed in 1981. Pantera, too, felt this tug to start making more aggressive music, which eventually left them in need of a new vocalist whose values aligned more closely with the vision that they had for themselves. 1986 and 1987 saw a wave of major releases from the Big Four of thrash metal: Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, Slayer's *Reign in Blood*, and Megadeth's *Peace Sells... but Who's Buying?* in 1986 and Anthrax's *Among the Living* the following year. Pantera knew that, with the success of these albums in the metal world and the popularity of this new style of music, they would have to adapt their sound if they ever wanted to break out of the scene in Texas. See Neil Daniels, *Reinventing Metal: The True Story of Pantera and the Tragically Short Life of Dimebag Darrell* (Milwaukee, WI: Backbeat Books, 2013), chap. 5, Scribd.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kuelker, "Pantera's 'Philcore' Is Whiff of Danger," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 13, 1992, sec. B, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Kuelker, "Pantera's 'Philcore' Is Whiff of Danger."

the genre. One way in which Pantera projected this image was by placing themselves in opposition to other contemporaneous metal acts and genres, such as Metallica, nu metal, anyone else they considered to be part of the mainstream music industry. These oppositions are both gendered and racialized in nature, but due to the scope of this dissertation, my analysis will primarily focus on the racial aspects of the image they projected. In particular, I will analyze the role that the sonic color line plays in comparisons between Pantera (i.e. “real” metal) and nu metal, a genre defined, in part, by its incorporation of artistic aesthetics from historically Black musical genres, primarily rap. This analysis will reveal how peoples’ racialized perceptions of sound maintain the white racial frame.

In his scholarship about country music, Richard Peterson employs the concept of “fabricating authenticity” to illustrate that “authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered.”<sup>8</sup> Musically and visually, Pantera embodied the “socially agreed-upon construct” of an “authentic” metal band and they adeptly wielded their White male identities to reinforce these already established perceptions of authentic metal music and values. In numerous interviews with the press or onstage banter with the audience, at least one band member proudly asserted that they were “*real*” metal. Their values aligned with the wave of thrash metal bands that arose in the 1980s who wanted to reestablish what constituted “real” metal by stripping away the decadence of glam metal and returning the genre to its roots. Instead of the flamboyant visual aesthetics and stage theatrics of acts like Twisted Sister and Mötley Crüe (and themselves in the 1980s!), Pantera dressed in unassuming t-shirts, jeans, and sneakers. Anselmo shaved his head, symbolizing that the band’s “hair” metal days were over. The idea was that they were not

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<sup>8</sup> Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 29.

there to play dress-up; they were there to play music, and they were uncompromising when it came to showcasing their virtuosic talents (as opposed to the perceived simplicity of glam metal) and aggressive personae.

To prove their credentials as “real” metal, the band has often claimed that, even though their musical aesthetics supposedly do not have a broad appeal, their lyrics are relatable to a large swath of listeners, especially young people.<sup>9</sup> In an interview following the release of *Vulgar Display of Power*, Vinnie Paul shares his theory as to why the lyrics on this album, in part, contributed to its acclaim:

He [Anselmo] sings about things people can relate to on an everyday basis. There’s not any hypothetical situations or any of this. He says what he feels and he’s straight to the point. And I think that’s one thing that people really receive in the message when they hear the music, is that they understand what he’s saying because it’s not candy-coated.<sup>10</sup>

The band also often relied on the “pulled-themselves-up-by-their-bootstraps” argument to support their claims of genuineness. They took every opportunity to let the public know that they achieved their success through the grueling work of constantly touring and gained recognition by word of mouth. Vinnie Paul, who at times served as Pantera’s mouthpiece to the press, often boasted, “That’s how we sold [*Vulgar Display of Power*]. We haven’t sold it through radio or MTV, it’s strictly through touring with good bands. We worked it from the ground up.”<sup>11</sup>

As much as Pantera presented themselves as uncompromising and aligned their values

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<sup>9</sup> Ironically, music critics and other members of the metal scene lob criticism at nu metal for their lyrics appealing to young people, which, in that context, are considered childish and immature and one aspect of that genre’s perceived lack of seriousness. Pantera, however, is celebrated for this approach to lyricism.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Sculley, “Long Tour Helped Spark Pantera’s Latest Recording,” *Monroe County Clarion Journal* (Columbia, IL), December 6, 1992, sec. B.

<sup>11</sup> Lynn Saxberg, “Vulgar Display Resides in the Name Only, Pantera’s New Release Hits Positive Note,” *Ottawa Citizen*, March 4, 1993, sec. D. Paul is referring to Pantera’s experiences as the opening act for heavy metal heavyweights Judas Priest, Megadeth, and Skid Row during their respective tours.



with the underground Do-It-Yourself ethos—a signifier of authenticity—they, too, relied on the very sources of promotion they criticized other bands for taking advantage of. Their record label ATCO Records was by no means a small, independent label and provided them with financial and marketing support that surely contributed to, or possibly enabled their success. In fact, there are multiple pieces of evidence that highlight the hypocrisy in the image that Pantera worked to project. For instance, as much as the group berated other bands who, according to them, went too commercial or mainstream, Pantera consciously strove for and celebrated their gold and platinum album ratings.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Paul’s claim that they sold their music with little help from MTV is entirely concocted. Their music videos for “Walk,” “Mouth for War,” and “This Love” were part of MTV’s weekly rotation, as were the videos for singles from future albums. The cable channel even followed the band for a week documenting their promotional tour when they released *Far Beyond Driven*. Pantera members were also interviewed on numerous occasions on MTV’s *Headbangers Ball* and similar programs.<sup>13</sup> For a few years in the mid-1990s, the theme song for *Headbangers Ball* was a remix combining multiple songs from *Vulgar Display of*

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Dave Ferman, “Pantera Makes It Big with Metal Sound, ‘Vulgar Display of Power,’” *Salina Journal* (Salina, KS), December 30, 1992. In this interview, Vinnie Paul shared, “By the time we get off the road next spring, we’ll have been touring for more than a year, which is a long time, but we want that gold record for ‘Vulgar.’”

<sup>13</sup> For example, see “Pantera: *Headbangers Ball* Interview with Phil Anselmo & Rex Brown,” interview by Vanessa Warwick, *Headbangers Ball*, MTV, recorded live in March 1991, London, UK, YouTube video, 17:43, posted on January 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5dRSR9gZZo&t=9s>; “Dimebag Darrell and Phil Anselmo (Pantera) on *Headbangers Ball* (1991),” interview by Riki Rachtman, *Headbangers Ball*, MTV, recorded live on April 13, 1991, YouTube video, 4:12, posted on March 5, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qc7e96Gnmw&t=2s>; “Pantera – *Headbangers Ball* on the Road (1992),” interview by Riki Rachtman, *Headbangers Ball*, MTV, recorded live March 14, 1992, Fayetteville, NC, YouTube video, 5:09, posted on September 11, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzYFWOT\\_s4w&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzYFWOT_s4w&t=1s); “Pantera: ‘*Headbangers Ball*’ Interview with Phil Anselmo & Vinnie Paul,” interview by Vanessa Warwick, *Headbangers Ball*, MTV, recorded live on March 13, 1994, Los Angeles, CA, YouTube video, 15:41, posted on January 15, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njcHUAAdmGw4>; and “Pantera US Tour 96 Part 1,” interview by Vanessa Warwick, *Headbangers Ball*, MTV, recorded live on December 8, 1996, Kalamazoo, MI, YouTube video, 9:56, posted on May 20, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v0hkR1Q3js&t=473s>. There are several other examples from throughout the 1990s.

Power, including fan favorites “Fucking Hostile” and “A New Level.”

To further solidify their reputation as a “real” metal band, Pantera pit themselves against metal and alternative bands that they viewed as sacrificing heaviness and seriousness in their music to gain mass popularity. One illustrative example of Pantera’s fabrication of authenticity comes through the band’s efforts to differentiate itself from nu metal, a genre that began to take shape in 1994 when Pantera was experiencing their massive success with *Far Beyond Driven*. Nu metal combines elements of metal music with elements from several other styles of music, primarily rap, funk, alternative rock, industrial, and grunge.<sup>14</sup> The first album to be considered nu metal was released by Korn, also during 1994. In creating music that had less distortion, volume, virtuosity, and brute aggression, bands in genres like nu metal appealed to wider audiences, which in the eyes of Pantera rendered their music inauthentic. Anselmo makes this deliberate opposition clear when he insists, “Rap-metal is such a tired thing. And something that has never ever, gone away, is true hardcore heavy metal. And we happen to play a version of the hardcore heavy metal style with a true angst and an absolute beautiful dominance.”<sup>15</sup> He made these comments in an interview with music critic Jerry Bradley, who hailed Pantera as heroes “out to save metal from its current state of super-commercial suckdom.” In another interview

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<sup>14</sup> Over the course of the subsequent few years, nu metal quickly took Pantera’s place in topping the charts. It is quite plausible that Pantera’s ire toward nu metal stemmed from the fact that these bands’ popularity eclipsed their own, challenging their status as the Kings of Metal. This is not to say that Pantera’s popularity immediately plummeted as the nu metal trend exploded in the mid-1990s. Their next two albums, *The Great Southern Trendkill* (1996) and *Reinventing the Steel* (2000), still both peaked at number four on the Billboard 200 chart, but they never again reached or exceeded the success that they achieved with *Far Beyond Driven*.

<sup>15</sup> Jerry Bradley, “Superjoint Ritual: Hardcore Heavy Metal Supergroup at Mugsy’s,” *Southern Illinoisan*, July 17, 2003, Vol. 110, no. 198 edition, sec. Flipside. While Anselmo is technically speaking about another band of his, Superjoint (originally named Superjoint Ritual), he often drew similar comparisons between Pantera and rap-influenced rock and metal. Because some nu metal bands incorporated rapping into their music, it was sometimes referred to as rap metal or rap rock.

with journalist Victor Martinez, Anselmo referred to nu metal musicians as “pretentious jerks.”<sup>16</sup>

Musicologist Erik Smialek describes nu metal as “a form of aggressive music in the rock tradition that could appeal to white male teenagers who would not take heavy metal seriously.”<sup>17</sup> It could attract this demographic because it did not contain any vestiges of glam metal, which by then had fallen out of fashion. The perception of nu metal as “less serious” places it more in the pop category in the rock/pop binary, which popular music scholar Janne Mäkelä explains is a scheme in which “rock was metonymic for authenticity and pop for artifice.”<sup>18</sup> The boundary between rock and pop is also heavily gendered, as explained by rock scholar Leerom Medovoi: “Rock provided a male preserve of masculine heroes whose story is the struggle for authenticity against the ever-present danger of selling out to the feminizing horror of pop.”<sup>19</sup> Together, the gendered and authenticity-oriented axes of the rock/pop binary made nu metal a target of ridicule within the metal scene, dubbed “the worst genre of all time” by music critic Lucy Jones years after its peak in popularity.<sup>20</sup> Nu metal bands are still active today, but the genre’s popularity waned significantly in the early 2000s.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the contemporaneous and retrospective slander against nu metal contributes to the perceived racialization of metal as white. Many nu metal bands borrow traits associated with hip hop culture and music and fuse them with metal, such as

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<sup>16</sup> Victor R. Martinez, “Superjoint Ritual Pure Metal Music,” *El Paso Times*, August 26, 2003, sec. D.

<sup>17</sup> Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music,” 76.

<sup>18</sup> Janne Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined: Cultural History of a Rock Star* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 100.

<sup>19</sup> Leerom Medovoi, “Mapping the Rebel Image: Postmodernism and the Masculinist Politics of Rock in the U.S.A.,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-1992): 158.

<sup>20</sup> Lucy Jones, “10 Reasons Why Nu-Metal Was the Worst Genre of All Time,” *NME* (blog), September 20, 2013, <https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/10-reasons-why-nu-metal-was-the-worst-genre-of-all-time-764675>.

rapping, the use of turntables, and fashion (e.g. Adidas tracksuits, gold chains, and dreadlocks). For many in the metal scene, anxieties surrounding rap music and its subsequent influence on certain metal bands were racially motivated. Ethnomusicologist scholar Laina Dawes explains,

When the West coast hip hop scene became prevalent around the mid-90s, it started to get notoriety as being as nihilistic as some of the metal bands, and there started to be a clear division in terms of race and music listening. Black people listened to hip hop to be angry, white people listened to heavy metal. When the two genres converged with nu metal in [the] early [20]00s and you saw more white kids using traditional hip-hop beats to accentuate heavy metal, that was a real problem for a lot of traditional metal guys (like Pantera): ‘We don’t like this merging.’<sup>21</sup>

These reported attitudes are an example of what Jennifer Lynn Stoeber defines as the *sonic color line*, or the “audible contour” of race, a “process of racializing sound—how and why certain bodies are expected to produce, desire, and live amongst particular sound—and its product, the hierarchical division sounded between ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness.’”<sup>22</sup> The sonic color line is constructed and maintained by the *listening ear*, which denotes both “how dominant listening practices accrue—and change—over time, as well as [...] how the dominant culture exerts pressure on individual listening practices to conform to the sonic color line’s norms.”<sup>23</sup> As a historically African American musical genre and culture, hip hop aesthetics code as Black, or at least not White, to the listening ear, and within the metal scene these sounds do not represent the norms of the sonic color line. Metal fans’ rejection of nu metal’s blending of metal and hip hop music can be considered an example of how the sonic color line “policing racial difference

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<sup>21</sup> Dave Everley, “Does Metal Have A Problem With Race?,” *Metal Hammer*, March 27, 2016, <https://www.loudersound.com/features/does-metal-have-a-problem-with-race>.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (NYU Press, 2016), 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line*, 7.

through the ear” within the metal scene.<sup>24</sup>

Among many of its own members, the metal scene is rendered a White space, and the music is heard as racially unmarked. In actuality, metal music’s whiteness is inaudible to many of its White listeners because, especially in the U.S., White sounds—such as those associated with European classical music, like virtuosic solos, extended techniques, and complex song forms—are perceived as the norm or default for the genre, defined in opposition to sounds of racialized others. When sounds such as hip hop beats that code as Black enter that space, some listeners hear them as an intrusion. In particular, musicians and critics, the people who contribute the most authoritatively to popular understandings of metal, are most responsible for policing these racialized sounds. By reinforcing the genre’s racialized norms that they themselves have defined, they are, therefore, also largely responsible for the maintenance of the genre’s white racial frame.

The remainder of this chapter will analyze some of Pantera’s overt and covert white supremacist behaviors and rhetoric drawing on evidence from interviews, song lyrics, and onstage banter with audiences. While these racist incidents occurred, Pantera simultaneously maintained a successful career, eventually earning the reputation as the “saviors” of US metal.<sup>25</sup> By rubber-stamping Pantera and Anselmo’s place in the metal scene, critics, fans, and musicians signal that white supremacy is not only tolerable in the metal scene, but defensible. The fact that so much of Anselmo’s overtly white supremacist behaviors over the years has been excused, downplayed, or unnoticed is evidence of the stronghold of the white racial frame in the metal scene. In this position of power, Pantera and Anselmo have maintained the authority to act as

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<sup>24</sup> Stoeberl, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Krovatin, “How Pantera’s Vulgar Display Of Power Saved American Metal,” *Kerrang!*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.kerrang.com/features/how-panteras-vulgar-display-of-power-saved-american-metal/>.

gatekeepers of the metal scene, excluding and marginalizing those who have not met their aesthetic standards or mirrored their own attitudes and personae.

## **1.2 “It’s For Everybody”: Pantera and color-blind racism**

Given Pantera’s elevated reputation in the metal scene and Anselmo’s status as one of its most preeminent musicians, they have played a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the scene’s white racial frame. Although I will touch on evidence that reveals racist attitudes held by other members of the band, this section will focus primarily on Anselmo’s history of racism during his time with Pantera. As the frontman of one of the most prominent metal bands in the 1990s who played a central role in defining and reinforcing the genre’s boundaries, Anselmo seems to be granted quite a bit of leeway or often afforded the benefit of the doubt when it comes to expressions of racism and white supremacy. These privileges have been further extended as he has managed to maintain a successful career with other bands after Pantera broke up in the early 2000s, since he continued fronting groups such as Down and Superjoint.

Throughout the course of my research, I have conducted extensive media searches and uncovered a widespread pattern of the press entertaining his excuses for clearly racist comments, and many members of the metal scene accepting his apologies without further interrogation. This is not to say that his bigotry did not alienate any Pantera fans, but his actions never made enough of a negative impact to dampen the power that he wielded over the scene. Drawing on evidence collected through virtual fieldwork, one of the ways in which I demonstrate this lack of impact is by citing comments by fans made within the past five to ten years still defending his words and actions from the 1990s. The trivial consequences and continued defense of his actions, none of which disrupted his career during the Pantera era, speak to how normalized racism and white supremacy are in the metal scene.

Unlike Anselmo's 2016 Nazi salute described at the beginning of this chapter, much context surrounding Anselmo's racist remarks during his Pantera days is not part of the discourse about Anselmo's racial ideologies, which obscures the behavioral pattern. This absence could be because members of the general public do not have easy access to some of the sources I have drawn on to construct my arguments in this dissertation, such as digitized newspaper articles that are not discoverable with a simple internet search. But given how fans, critics, and musicians have defended his actions over the years, it is reasonable to assume that, even if access to these sources were not an issue, opinions would not change.

This section describes and analyzes several examples from Anselmo's time with Pantera that reveal how his white supremacist ideologies manifest in overt and covert ways, including song lyrics, onstage dialogue, and interviews. Evidence of Anselmo's racism both during and after his time with Pantera will also demonstrate that his "White power" outburst at Dimebash in 2016 was not an anomaly, but rather an uninhibited expression of his racial beliefs. I will analyze song lyrics and other statements made by Anselmo and his bandmates that are prime examples of color-blind racism, which sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva defines as post-Jim Crow era "new racism," where White people explain "contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics."<sup>26</sup> Much of Anselmo's rhetoric reflects one of the four central frames Bonilla-Silva describes as used to maintain color-blindness: minimization of racism.<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>26</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 11.

<sup>27</sup> The other three frames are as follows: 1) abstract liberalism, which Bonilla-Silva explains as "using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g. 'equal opportunity,' the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g. choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters; 2) naturalization, which "allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences. ... [In other words,] 'segregation' is natural because people from all backgrounds 'gravitate toward likeness.'"; and 3) cultural racism, which "relies on culturally based arguments such as 'Mexicans do not put much emphasis on

frame is, perhaps, the most recognizable form of color-blind racism and is based on the idea that the Jim Crow era is over, and, therefore, racial discrimination no longer has a significant impact on the lives of Black Americans.<sup>28</sup> Even in the face of racially motivated incidents, it “allows whites... to still accuse minorities of being ‘hypersensitive,’ of using race as an ‘excuse,’ or of ‘playing the infamous race card.’”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the minimization of racism often involves downplaying instances of racism or denying that they ever happened and gaslighting those on the receiving end of racism to convince them that they are overreacting.<sup>30</sup> In a 2020 interview, Doc Coyle of the band Bad Wolves, explained how this phenomenon plays out for him as a Black musician in the metal scene: “There’s this idea that if I haven’t experienced [racism], then it must not exist. It kind of speaks to this idea of the limitations of empathy.... By saying it doesn’t exist – that’s the definition of gaslighting.”<sup>31</sup>

One way in which Pantera gaslit “those on the receiving end of racism” was to add another facet to their cowboys-from-hell identity. With the release of *Vulgar Display of Power* (1992), they presented themselves as crusaders against racism. Vinnie Paul once explained that the album is “a reaction to the racism and politics” that they saw all around them, and “It’s anger that’s channeled into a productive form.”<sup>32</sup> He also described their shows as bastions of racial

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education’ or ‘blacks have too many babies’ to explain the standing of minorities in society.” Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.

<sup>30</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 47-49.

<sup>31</sup> “Why Aren’t There More Black Heavy Metal Musicians? Suffocation’s Terrance Hobbs Weighs In,” *Blabbermouth*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.blabbermouth.net/news/why-arent-there-more-black-heavy-metal-musicians-suffocations-terrance-hobbs-weighs-in/>.

<sup>32</sup> Geri Parlin, “Channeling Their Energy: Fed Up with the System, Pantera Chooses to Express Rage in Music,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 23, 1992, sec. B.



harmony: “We see all kinds of people at our shows. There’s no racial tension at our shows. They catch the vibe.”<sup>33</sup> Even if Paul’s words are to be taken at face value, Pantera’s shows were soon rife with racial tension. By 1994, their concerts would attract a noticeable number of neo-Nazis, and it would soon become commonplace for Anselmo to rant about “reverse racism” and other white supremacist talking points. I will describe these speeches in more detail later in this section.

On several occasions, Anselmo and his bandmates praised his wise clarity and supposed open-mindedness regarding issues of race when it came to his lyrics. In an interview Anselmo bragged, “The guys just let me go off on things because they respect what I have to say... But I never go off half-cocked. You’re not going to make your point unless you come at it with some knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> His authoritative status as a “real” metal frontman extends to his opinions on political and social matters, and fans still cite Pantera song lyrics as evidence that Anselmo is not racist. With a deeper analysis of his lyrics’ meaning and context, it becomes clear that Anselmo condemns the oppressed fighting for their basic human rights just as much as, if not more so than, he critiques white supremacists.

During a 1992 interview with MTV’s *Headbangers Ball*, host Riki Rachtman asked Anselmo and Paul to talk about their upcoming record release, *Vulgar Display of Power*. While they were sure to emphasize that this album would be their most extreme and angry output yet, Anselmo added that there was a positive underlying message in his lyrics that warranted extra attention from listeners:

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<sup>33</sup> Parlin, “Channeling Their Energy.”

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Jaeger, “Pantera: Heavy Metal Band on a Mission,” *The Record* (Hackensack, NJ), April 21, 1992, sec. B.

Well, there's a lot of things, especially on MTV, about racism and things like that that's really, I feel, from just a black standpoint. And I have, you know it's ok; they have all the reason in the world to be angry and the 'Rise, black man, rise' and all that stuff. But [our album is] coming from a non-racist white point of view, and, uh, they're really strong lyrics and considering the crowds we play to – we get black kids, Mexican kids, white kids, Japanese, etc., etc. – it's for everybody. And that's what this album is for. It's for everybody, and everybody can relate.<sup>35</sup>

Anselmo seems to position his “non-racist white point of view” in opposition to, presumably, a “racist” Black point of view. He is most likely referencing rap music specifically, as evidenced by his future rants against the genre’s “anti-white” lyrics, to be discussed later in this chapter. It is also plausible that Anselmo was exaggerating the racial diversity of Pantera shows because a mere three years later he would declare to an audience, “This is our world, and tonight is a white thing.”<sup>36</sup> In an apparent disregard of this statement, in current debates regarding Anselmo’s racism, his claim that the music on *Vulgar Display of Power* is for everyone, from a “non-racist” point of view is evidence enough for Pantera loyalists that he is not racist, even though the opposite argument could be made.<sup>37</sup> His mention of Pantera’s non-White fans also raises the question, how would a “non-racist white point of view” appeal to them? And if his lyrics are from a White point of view, are they really for everybody?

The two songs that are most often cited as supposedly promoting racial unity are “Rise” and “No Good (Attack the Radical).” Both songs align with Anselmo’s comments in the *Headbangers Ball* interview cited above. The lyrics in these songs imply that Anselmo believes

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<sup>35</sup> “Pantera – Headbangers Ball on the Road,” interview by Riki Rachtman, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Lepage, “Pantera Singer Apologizes for Racial Tirade,” *The Gazette* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada), March 9, 1995, early edition, sec. B. This incident will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>37</sup> For example, see Niksa (@nick\_977), comment on “Pantera – Headbangers Ball on the Road,” October 2021: “they should play this clip whenever someone accuses Phil of being racist. And this was 29 years ago!!!!” More examples of fan interpretations will be provided below in analyses of two songs from this album, “No Good (Attack the Radical)” and “Rise.”

that the ways in which Black Americans were combating white supremacy were responsible for the racial divide in the United States, and his songs were intended to bridge that divide. I will also present evidence that fans hold these same sentiments today. The white supremacist ideologies present in these lyrics are veiled as color-blind statements, particularly through the minimization of racism, particularly illustrated by the sentiment that racism is an issue of the past and “we” (Black and White people) need to work together to move on. More generally, these lyrics blame the suffering of Black Americans on their own actions, rather than acknowledging the existence of systemic racism.

The song “No Good (Attack the Radical)” takes a more blatant stance on issues with race in the United States when compared with “Rise,” beginning with the line “In the states there’s a problem with race because of ignorant past burned fires / Because of ignorant past burned fires / From evolution we’ve been killing each other / I figure man should have it down to a science.”<sup>38</sup> A reader today could, upon first glance, interpret these lyrics as anti-racist because they expose the band’s largely White fanbase to the argument that racism is wrong. I have encountered many debates among fans dating from 2015 to 2023 as to whether these lyrics are racist in various online forums, and I would argue that more fans than not believe that these lyrics are not racist and spread an overall positive message. One YouTube commenter argued, “There is nothing in Pantera's music that is racist. In fact it is a theme of equality that runs through all of their songs especially with Phil Anselmo.”<sup>39</sup> Another Anselmo supporter protested, “Anyone who says Phil is racist is a complete and utter moron. What he did/said (the 2016 Nazi salute) is undeniably

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<sup>38</sup> “No Good (Attack the Radical),” Spotify, track 7 on Pantera, *Vulgar Display of Power*, Atco Records, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Schmidt (@peterschmidt2246), comment on “Pantera – No Good (Attack the Radical) (Lyrics),” 2017, YouTube video, posted on December 14, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yN18uooopc&lc=UgjGi\\_CF-eayAngCoAEC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yN18uooopc&lc=UgjGi_CF-eayAngCoAEC).

stupid but that was him being a tasteless-joke-cracking mess. Saying shit like that doesn't make you a racist though. A racist doesn't write lyrics like these.”<sup>40</sup> Another fan comment provides more insight as to why others might think this way: “How anyone could think this song is racist is beyond me. It’s about being proud of yourself and behaving in a way that is true to who you are inside.... Don’t listen to the lyric editor who is using terms like ‘racist dog whistle’ to try to twist the song meaning. It’s perfectly straightforward.”<sup>41</sup> But I argue that is exactly how this song’s lyrics operate, as one resounding racist dog whistle.

Verse 1:

In the states there’s a problem with race  
Because of ignorant past burned fires  
From evolution we’ve been killing each other  
I figure man should have it down to a science

No chance  
Not for a minute  
Not for a second  
I won’t be defensive  
I’m straight out in my opinion  
You’d better listen to a man who knows what he is saying  
I’ve seen your side  
You run and hide for the mere fact that you feel inferior  
Be superior  
And know your interior

Pre-chorus:

Race, pride, prejudice  
Black man, white man  
No stand  
Live in the past  
We make it last  
A hated mass  
No solution  
Mind pollution  
For revolution

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<sup>40</sup> IsoSubject5 (@IsoSubject5), comment on “Pantera – No Good (Attack the Radical) (Lyrics).”

<sup>41</sup> Disciple\_1776, 2018, comment on “No Good (Attack the Radical),” Genius, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://genius.com/Pantera-no-good-attack-the-radical-lyrics>.

Chorus:  
So lo, behold my eyes  
This land of fools will rise  
No good  
For no one  
You're no good  
For no one

Anselmo delivers the first part of each verse with a slow rap-like cadence, a rare choice for him, most likely to draw attention to the lyrics and make them more discernible. While the first part of the verses sounds narrative, the second half (when Anselmo switches to harsh yelling and emphatic screams on certain words) is confrontational and declamatory. The lyrics become no longer a clear call to fight against the oppression of marginalized races, but rather a declaration that Anselmo's point of view is the right point of view. As he asserts in the first verse, "You'd better listen to [him]" because "he knows what he is saying." In the pre-chorus, Anselmo delivers a message similar to the one in "Rise," suggesting that both Black men and White men take pride in their race, resulting in prejudice toward one another. His lyrics in the pre-chorus also imply that the United States' racial divide is perpetuated by Black people and White people equally, and if Black people keep "living in the past," then there can be no "revolution" for change.<sup>42</sup>

Although many fans do cite this song as evidence that exonerates Anselmo from accusations of racism, some have a greater awareness, perhaps, of this country's historic and current race relations and thus a better grasp on the implications of this song. For example, in 2020 another user on the website Genius asserted that the lyrics in verse two are particularly anti-Black: "You blame oppression and play the role of criminals / To rape and burn shows progress is minimal." Not only did this person criticize the lyrics, but they also attacked Anselmo

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<sup>42</sup> "No Good (Attack the Radical)."

personally, submitting that his 2016 Nazi salute is “pretty solid proof” that “Phil is almost certainly a racist cunt” and the lyrics of “No Good (Attack the Radical)” further support that notion.<sup>43</sup> Reflecting some of the oldest negative stereotypes in the white racial frame, Black criminalization and hypersexualization, Anselmo accuses Black Americans of playing the race card and reacting inappropriately to their experiences with racism with violence and property destruction.

Verse 2:

You blame oppression and play the role of criminals  
To rape and burn show progress is minimal  
White hoods and militants you know it's such a pity  
Living, breathing  
Violence in your city

If one man  
Had one home  
In one world  
Held live alone without variety  
Full of anxiety  
No one to point at, question  
Or even talk to in his private grave  
No matter what color  
He wouldn't be saved from hell  
He dwells  
A closed mind playing the part of prison cells<sup>44</sup>

These lyrics in the second verse were most likely in reference to protests and riots in the name of racial justice that took place in the early 1990s. For instance, the brutal beating of Rodney King at the hands of four Los Angeles police officers took place one year before *Vulgar Display of Power* was released. While the officers involved were indicted on charges of excessive force, they were acquitted two months after the album was released, igniting a series of riots that

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<sup>43</sup> Brandon, 2020, comment on “No Good (Attack the Radical),” Genius, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://genius.com/Pantera-no-good-attack-the-radical-lyrics>.

<sup>44</sup> “No Good (Attack the Radical).”

resulted in the deaths of sixty-three people and one billion dollars' worth of property damage.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that this highly publicized civil upheaval, of which Anselmo was most likely aware, did not involve a spike in rape cases in the cities where these events took place like he claimed in his lyrics. Given the monumental success of *Vulgar Display of Power*, this song played a significant role in perpetuating this racialized falsehood through current times.

The next line in the second verse about “white hoods and militants” obviously refers to the Ku Klux Klan, and given Anselmo’s habit of equating white supremacists with activists for racial equality, the “militants” are most likely the people involved in the riots or groups similar to the Black Panther Party. This interpretation is supported in how the lyrics racialize each side of the political spectrum; the radical left is non-White (“criminals” who riot), and the radical right is White (“white hoods”). Again, Anselmo is drawing on the false logic that blaming both sides equally for racial tensions and conflict is the same thing as racial equality. He uses harmful stereotypes to criticize those who protest white supremacy and explicitly blames them for the slow progress in the fight against racism. Furthermore, his statement about the Ku Klux Klan does not read as a strict denunciation of the racial violence perpetuated by this group.

Lastly, while some of these lyrics seem to refer to radicals on the far right and the far left, many fans today interpret “No Good (Attack the Radicals)” as an attack on leftists only. There is no place where this is more evident than in the YouTube comments for this song. Dozens of new comments have been posted over the last few years, with an extreme spike around the Black Lives Matter protests surrounding the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020. Several users argue that the lines “You blame oppression but play the role of the criminals; to rape and burn

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<sup>45</sup> Ryan D. Enos, Aaron R. Kaufman, and Melissa L. Sands, “Can Violent Protest Change Local Policy Support? Evidence from the Aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot,” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 4 (November 2019): 1013.

shows that progress is minimal” still ring true today, with one posing the question, “Did Pantera just predict the future?”<sup>46</sup> Another fan lauded this song for sounding like a right-wing version of a Rage Against the Machine song, a band known for their progressive politics.<sup>47</sup> Still today, some listeners hold up this song as evidence that Anselmo is not racist, despite his yelling “White power!” on stage in 2016, and assert that his accusers are the “fools” referred to in the lyrics.<sup>48</sup>

At first glance, the lyrics for “Rise” could be interpreted as an uplifting power anthem urging people of “every creed and every kind” to come together with the hope of building a better tomorrow.<sup>49</sup> The lyrics are ambiguous at times but when considering Anselmo’s comments on race in the previously cited MTV interview and soon-to-be known views on issues of race, a clearer message begins to form, and it is not as simple or positive as fans and some critics purport.

Verse 1:

We’ve got no time to lose  
Your news is old news  
Hate this, hate me, hate this  
Right approach for the wrong  
It’s time to spread the word  
Let the voice be heard  
All of us, one of us, all of us dominate  
And take the motherfucking world!

Chorus:

Mass prediction, unification breathing life into out lungs  
Every creed and every kind to give us depth for strength  
Taught when we’re young to hate one another  
It’s time to have a new reign of power

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<sup>46</sup> Solanacia (@Arcturusalt), 2017, comment on Pantera, “No Good (Attack the Radical) (Lyrics),” YouTube video, 4:56, posted in 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yN18uooopc>.

<sup>47</sup> Uncle (@Joe93819), February 2022, comment on Pantera, “No Good.”

<sup>48</sup> For example, see Serpis (@serpis.aiartist), 2016, and Nu Metal Historian (@numetalhistorian), 2022, comments on Pantera, “No Good.”

<sup>49</sup> “Rise,” chorus lyrics, Spotify, track 6 on Pantera, *Vulgar Display of Power*, Atco Records, 1992.



Make pride universal so no one gives in  
Turn our backs on those who oppose  
Then when confronted we ask them the question  
What's wrong with their mind?  
What's wrong with your mind?  
It's time to Rise  
Rise, Rise  
It's time to Rise

Verse 2:  
We've lived with past mistakes  
And we've lived with our own  
Forgive, forget forgive / be a man, not a child  
There are no tears for peace  
Or the common sympathies  
Educate, reinstate, educate  
A thing of past the trouble in the states<sup>50</sup>

Even though the lyrics in this song do not reference Black people directly, based on Anselmo's complaint in the MTV interview cited above that "a lot of things [in music] ... about racism and things like that [are] from just a black standpoint," it is plausible that he is addressing Black people. In this song he implies that, in holding onto their past in anger, Black Americans are partially or wholly culpable for their current situations, and systemic racism is not to blame. The lyrics in the first verse, "Your news is old news," imply that it is not shared news, and the reports of Black oppression are "old news," a thing of the past, and only relevant to or believed by Black people. This notion is made clearer in the second verse with the lyrics "We've lived with past mistakes, and we've lived with our own. Forgive, forget forgive / be a man, not a child." Anselmo goads Black people to follow the example of White people who have overcome and moved beyond the "mistakes" made during the slavery and Jim Crow eras. He condescendingly admonishes racial justice activists to "be a man," forgive and forget, and stop

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<sup>50</sup> "Rise," Spotify, track 6 on Pantera, *Vulgar Display of Power*, Atco Records, 1992.

acting like children. In other words, he tells them to stop playing the “infamous race card” (to again reference Bonilla-Silva).

In his vocal delivery, Anselmo merges lines three and four of the first verse (“Hate this right approach for the wrong”), which sounds intentional because he does not do this with any other phrases. This approach supports the interpretation that Black Americans can hate Anselmo and his plan for combating racism, but he believes that if everyone of all races unite and follow his lead, then they will all “dominate and take the motherfucking world.” The chorus supports this interpretation, preaching universal racial pride for Whites as well as minoritized populations (especially Black people, presumably), something Anselmo believes that White people have been denied. This claim is supported by his future rants against rap’s “anti-White” lyrics, fueled by his perception that Black pride equals “reverse racism.” He also expresses that both White and Black people are taught to hate one another, that they are equally racist towards each other, erasing the truth that Black oppression is a result of systemic racism and white supremacy in the process.

### **1.3 Vulgar Displays of Racism**

Despite projecting the image that their music contained positive messages about racial equality and unity, Anselmo and, to a lesser extent, Pantera’s first public accusations of racism came two years after the release of *Vulgar* during an interview with Kurt Loder on MTV in 1994. According to Loder, certain members of the press thought some of the lyrics on this album were racist, but he could not find any evidence to support these claims.<sup>51</sup> He did admit, however, that

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<sup>51</sup> “Pantera Accused of Racism – MTV 1994,” interview by Kurt Loder, MTV, recorded live in 1994, YouTube video, 3:18, posted in 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiihpmeoIns>. I have been unable to locate opinions to which Loder refers regarding Pantera’s racist lyrics.

while the lyrics contained the “usual apocalyptic hardcore spew,” phrases such as “building a blood” and “kill them all” could be cause for concern.<sup>52</sup> Before going to the live interview, the news anchor notes that Anselmo is wearing a shirt with a variation of the triskelion (also known as a triskele), a symbol that looks like a three-pointed swastika.<sup>53</sup> When asked about this report a few years later, Vinnie Paul defended Anselmo’s fashion choice, arguing that MTV got it all wrong:

We’re not racist. Phillip [*sic*] (singer Anselmo) was wearing a T-shirt that had an emblem out of a ‘Star Trek’ movie. It does slightly resemble a swastika, but it’s only got three petals instead of four, and they’re rounded on the end. It’s not a racist symbol but MTV showed the video footage of Phillip wearing the shirt and said it was. We corrected them, and they apologized on TV.<sup>54</sup>

The video evidence of this encounter suggests otherwise. Anselmo was wearing a shirt for the band Carnivore, known for their allegedly tongue-in-cheek far-right political views with song titles such as “Male Supremacy,” “Race War,” and “Jesus Hitler.” Another t-shirt inspired by this band’s music depicts a swastika wrapped around a crucifix and quotes lyrics from “Jesus Hitler”: “Is this the second coming... or the Fourth Reich?”<sup>55</sup> The founder of Carnivore, Peter Steele, went on to form Type O Negative who toured with Pantera extensively in the mid-1990s. Anselmo sometimes joined Type O Negative on stage to perform their “Kill All the White

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<sup>52</sup> These lyrics are from the song “Use My Third Arm” and the full phrase is “Building a blood in water scent,” which should not be considered as racialized. Anselmo wrote this song in response to a negative experience that he had with the Dallas police, and the lyrics clearly tell the story of revenge with a vengeance on authority figures who abuse their power. See Daina Darzin, “Pantera: Rebel Yellers,” *Rolling Stone*, June 30, 1994, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/pantera-rebel-yellers-104051/>.

<sup>53</sup> “Triskele,” Anti-Defamation League, May 3, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/triskele>. After the Second World War, this specific version of the triskelion was adopted by the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, a white supremacist group that formed in South Africa in the 1970s. It has since become a common tattoo for white supremacists and is part of the logo for the racist skinhead group Blood & Honour.

<sup>54</sup> Corey Levitan, “Pantera Survives Musical Blackout,” *News-Pilot* (San Pedro, CA), November 14, 1997, sec. K. I cannot find any proof that MTV apologized privately or on the air.

<sup>55</sup> “Jesus Hitler,” Spotify, track 7 on Carnivore, *Retaliation*, Roadrunner, 1987.

People,” supposedly a parody of how they interpret the goal of the Black Power movement.<sup>56</sup> This song’s message aligns with various speeches that Anselmo made during Pantera concerts during the same time period, minus the parodical tone.

When asked about his controversial lyrics that some critics have allegedly accused of being racist and homophobic during this MTV interview, Anselmo, completely vexed, balks, “Everyone’s a judge is the point. [inaudible] I’m judged again. [mimicking tone] What do you mean by that? [clip skips ahead] I have friends of every color and every creed... [inaudible], and that’s how I believe and you’re only a fool if you don’t.”<sup>57</sup> Cutting to a different screen, the interviewer pointedly remarks “Well then, some fools seemed to have found their way to Pantera,” followed by a video clip of a fan walking into a Pantera concert doing a “Sieg Heil” salute and yelling “White power.” Anselmo neatly avoids condemning these behaviors by Pantera fans, scoffing that “them kids are gonna yell what they’re gonna yell anyway.”<sup>58</sup> In a 1995 interview Vinnie Paul shared his take as to why MTV accused them of racism in this segment: “Philip has his head shaved and at a New York concert one guy in the audience was yelling neo-Nazi slurs. We’re not always understood.”<sup>59</sup> Paul’s interviewer supported his claims by turning these words into the article’s headline: “Don’t Be Deceived by Looks.” Based on incidents that would take place over the course of Pantera’s 1995 tour, a more appropriate headline would have been “Don’t Be Deceived by Our Denials of Racism.”

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<sup>56</sup> For example, see Type O Negative, featuring Phil Anselmo, “Type O Negative- Kill All the White People (with Phil Anselmo),” Saint Louis, MO, recorded live in 1997, YouTube video, 5:14, posted in 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFMYHEczWmY>.

<sup>57</sup> “Pantera Accused of Racism – MTV 1994.”

<sup>58</sup> “Pantera Accused of Racism – MTV 1994.”

<sup>59</sup> Jeff Pearlman, “Don’t Be Deceived by Looks: Under That Wicked Exterior Is a Misunderstood Heavy-Metal Pacesetter,” *The Tennessean* (Nashville), January 20, 1995, sec. Weekend.

During an unknown number of concerts in 1995, Anselmo delivered a series of racist, anti-Black speeches. Although his opinions about Black culture, Black-on-Black crime, and so-called “reverse” racism had been brewing since before the release of *Vulgar Display of Power* in 1992, evidenced by the interview and lyrics discussed earlier in this chapter, the immense popularity of rap music in the mid-1990s brought Anselmo’s grievances to a fever pitch. He could, apparently, no longer sit idly by and keep his thoughts to himself regarding issues of race in the United States.

Scene:

Pantera concert  
Auditorium de Verdun  
Montreal, Quebec  
March 4, 1995

“Now. I gotta problem,” a muscular and shaven Philip Anselmo adamantly declares to a packed auditorium.<sup>60</sup>

He briefly pauses, allowing the audience’s palpable energy to boil in anticipation of what would follow. At this time, Anselmo is the vocalist and frontman of the most popular heavy metal band in the United States; how serious could his problem actually be?

He charges on, stating, “My problem is the trends of today. And the biggest fuckin’ trend of all...” He pauses again and defiantly, or perhaps with an air of disgust, spits on the ground, winding up to make a fierce disclaimer before freely speaking his mind.

“Real quick, you listen to me. Pantera, if you ever read my lyrics before, if you ever read what I’ve written, you gotta understand this: We have friends of all colors, and all kinds. We are not a racist band.”

Anselmo attempts to continue speaking, but the crowd drowns him out with their thunderous cheering, whistling, and clapping. Annoyed, he urges them to quiet down, lest they miss the words he is about to preach.

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<sup>60</sup> This passage represents my own transcription and description of a video posted on YouTube by an account with the screenname NASTYxNICKYx (@NASTYxNICKYx) on December 14, 2009. See Philip H. Anselmo, “Phil Anselmo Giving a Speech on Races and Respect,” Auditorium de Verdun in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, recorded on March 4, 1995, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eDp4wFUPMw&t=62s>.

Matter-of-factly, he continues, “If you conduct yourself like a gentleman, and you act like a human being, you ought to be treated as such. Am I correct on that, you agree with me?”

The audience again applauds, with some throwing up signs of the horns, a hand gesture in heavy metal culture that can signal respect for or approval of a band or a song. Vinnie Paul, Pantera’s drummer, plays a short riff as if to agree with Anselmo’s assertion.

After much buildup, Anselmo reveals what his problem is: “The thing that bothers me the most is the black [small pause as crowd starts stirring] rap bands and fuckin’ rap and all the fuckin’ white kids buyin’ their albums and shit because they think it sounds neat and nifty. They go to dance clubs, and they dance and fuckin’ take fuckin’ X (ecstasy) and shit like that, and dance to this rap shit. And listen: the rap bands, the majority of them, the hardcore motherfuckers are pissing all over your white culture. They don’t fuckin’ want your fuckin’ culture at all, they fuckin’ dog out every white person that was ever born, and they don’t know *any* of us. Do you understand that?”

He pauses, perhaps to soak in the crowd’s reactions, a wash of cacophonous screaming and whistling in approval. Perhaps some of them are elated that someone—a famous musician whom they admire no less—has the gall to articulate what was already on their minds.

Next, Anselmo turns his attention to issues beyond the music industry, offering the Canadian audience his hot take on things that have been weighing heavily on his mind recently.

“In the United States, where we live, the black people walk around with t-shirts ‘n’ shit that say ‘It’s a Black Thing, You Wouldn’t Understand.’ And my favorite one of all is ‘Stop Black-on-Black Crime.’ You know what that means? That means stop black people from killing each other. What does that say to you?”

He briefly pauses, and the crowd is audibly riled. The logical explanation in his mind? “That means it’s ok to kill white people, doesn’t it. That’s what it means to me. It don’t say ‘Stop Fucking Crime’! It says ‘Stop Black on *Black* Crime’! It’s ok to kill a white motherfucker, no problem!”

The guitarist, “Dimebag” Darrell Abbott, casually saunters around the stage in the background.

With utter indignation, Anselmo continues: “Look, let me tell what. Let me tell you what. If you walked around with a fuckin’ t-shirt on that said ‘White Pride,’ you would be a racist. You would be a piece of shit, motherfuckin’ racist.”

The concertgoers burst into a raucous frenzy, voicing support for Anselmo’s perspective. He attempts to quell the roar so that he can deliver his final urgent message:

“From here on, this point on, all you white kids out there, let me tell you something that no other motherfuckin’ band, white band, in the world has any guts to say. Let me say it right now. When you wake up in the motherfuckin’ morning, and you look at yourself in the goddamn mirror, have all the fuckin’ pride in your heart, man. Have all the fuckin’ pride in the world, man.”

In emphasis of that last point, he thrusts his fist in the air. The crowd erupts with booming celebratory cheers, reaching peak volume. Anselmo gestures for them to be even louder.

He's not finished though. To conclude his speech, Anselmo proclaims: "Because we are the great people. And you know what? Maybe, just maybe, tonight is a white thing. And the black will not understand what the fuck I'm talking about. Does that make sense to you? Open your eyes, open your eyes. It's fuckin' reverse discrimination, is what it is. And this is one band that ain't gonna take fuckin' jack shit from fuckin' nobody. You understand me? Are you proud of who you are?!"

He pauses to survey the yells of affirmation, unsatisfied with the audience's performance. "That's about half of you, I'm gonna ask you again! ARE YOU PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE?!" The final word of this question is vocalized as a vicious scream, immediately followed by Dimebag striking a chord on his guitar.

Before launching into the song "Primal Concrete Sledge," Anselmo signs off with, "You think of that, and you sleep and think about it. Because it's your world, motherfucker. It's your world."

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Anselmo's "racial tirade," as Mark Lepage of Montreal's *Gazette* dubbed it, occurred during Pantera's Far Beyond Touring the World tour to promote their seventh studio album, *Far Beyond Driven*.<sup>61</sup> This type of speech, rife with white supremacist ideology, would most likely be a career-ender for musicians today, yet an alarming number of people in the United States metal scene *still* treat it as an example of "Phil being Phil." There was minimal press coverage of this incident. Eight additional Canadian newspapers published summaries of it in their music or entertainment sections, each a truncated version of the Lepage article in *The Gazette*. *Kerrang!*, a London-based periodical devoted to rock and metal music, released their critical take on Anselmo's behavior the following month.<sup>62</sup> Media outlets in the United States, his home country, did not report on it at all. This speech only became part of US metal scene discourse in recent

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<sup>61</sup> Lepage, "Pantera Singer Apologizes for Racial Tirade."

<sup>62</sup> Paul Rees, ed., "'I Was Out of My Head!': Phil Anselmo Says 'Racist' Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!," *Kerrang!*, April 1, 1995.

years because of Anselmo's 2016 Nazi salute, which prompted some to investigate his history of racism, and the availability of the YouTube videos that I used for my transcription.

Reading through the more recent commentary on this 1995 speech, it soon became clear to me that most curious journalists and fans were using this video as their only source. While the video alone offers damning evidence of Anselmo's white supremacist views, if some of the prominent magazines that interviewed him after the 2016 scandal consulted the reports on his 1995 Montreal speech—or even analyzed the speech's transcript in full—perhaps they would not have allowed Anselmo to reduce the incident to a misunderstanding of a t-shirt, unquestioned. The following excerpt is from his first longform interview after the 2016 “White Power” scandal with J. Bennett of *Decibel* magazine, a major metal music periodical based in the United States:

People say I have a history of racism. When I was in Pantera, I was completely and utterly confused when, in the '90s, the T-shirt started circulating that said, “Stop Black On Black Crime.” Today, as a damn-near-50-year-old man, living in 2016 where America is divided so completely, I understand it and support that sentiment completely. But as a young man in my 20s, I didn't understand it and I did speak out vehemently against it because to me it basically said, “Stop black on black crime, but everyone else is fair game.” That's how I took it. And anybody could get that misconception. So, there's your mighty racist history right there. I took offense to a T-shirt.<sup>63</sup>

Soon after, *Rolling Stone*, arguably the biggest name in music criticism in the world, cited this passage from the *Decibel* interview in their own interview with Anselmo. Rather than challenging Anselmo's claims or providing more context, the *Rolling Stone* journalist instead focused on how these accusations of racism have hurt the musician's feelings, providing the following quote from him:

The word “racist” has been thrown around so much over the past three years or so that people do not realize the heaviness of that particular accusation. To think that

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<sup>63</sup> Phil Anselmo, “Superjoint's Phil Anselmo's First Longform Interview Since Dimebash,” interview by J. Bennett, *Decibel*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.decibelmagazine.com/2016/10/17/superjoint-s-phil-anselmo-s-first-longform-interview-since-dimebash/>.



I think I'm superior to someone else because I have pale skin when I know in my heart... I think people that look through the lens of race and want to find racism will find it no matter where they're fucking looking.<sup>64</sup>

Anselmo's excuses for his racist rant in 1995, that he was young and misunderstood a slogan on a t-shirt, as well as the treatment of this episode by some of the biggest names in rock and metal music criticism twenty-one years later, are clearcut examples of what linguistic anthropologists Susan Gal and Judith Irvine refer to as *erasure*. Gal and Irvine define erasure as "an aspect of ideological work through which some phenomena (linguistic forms, or types of persons, or activities) are rendered invisible."<sup>65</sup> They further explain, "Whatever is inconsistent with [a person or group's] ideologized schema either goes unnoticed or is explained away... creating an axis of differentiation requires selecting some qualities and ignoring or downplaying others."<sup>66</sup> In this case, Anselmo and his interviewers are ignoring the other comments that he made in this speech that are undeniably racist, and the interviewers are enabling this process by providing Anselmo with an international platform to share "the truth" with concerned fans and diminish the problematic nature of this speech.

Montreal journalist Mark Lepage's article on the Pantera singer's diatribe adds further context and details about what took place offstage as well, providing further insight into

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<sup>64</sup> Phil Anselmo, "Phil Anselmo Opens Up About Racism, Pantera's Legacy, Childhood Abuse," interview by Kory Grow, *Rolling Stone*, December 22, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/phil-anselmo-opens-up-about-racism-panteras-legacy-childhood-abuse-2-190726/>.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 20. Gal and Irvine differentiate *ideology* from *ideological work*: "Ideology, for us, is not like a miasma that hovers over a community, or like a rock that hits someone on the head. Instead, we understand it as productive – as part of people's creative interpretations of their situation and part of their consequent social action... therefore, we will speak not of 'ideology' but of *ideologizing* and *ideological work*: the active making of social life" (14).

<sup>66</sup> Gal and Irvine, *Signs of Difference*, 20. Gal and Irvine define an *axis of differentiation* as "a schema of qualitative contrast both for indexical signs and for what they are taken to represent" (19).

Anselmo's racism.<sup>67</sup> Lepage based much of his report on the word of music critic Mitch Joel who was at the concert. Joel shared how upset the venue's security guards were with Anselmo's speech, most of whom were Black, and alleged that Anselmo demanded that his own head of security "Tell the n\*\*\*ers to stop eyeballing me."<sup>68</sup> Both the security guards and two Black women fans confronted Anselmo backstage; the fans first encountered Vinnie Paul, who reportedly responded unsympathetically and left no doubt in their minds that he was racist. A few weeks after the Montreal concert, Anselmo issued an apology letter, claiming that these encounters really shed some light on his wrongdoings:

First, to the black girl who has seen Pantera six times, thank you for telling me how upset you were at me; it made a difference and I was very sincere with my apology. Second, I'd once again like to apologize to the security guards at the show. They were classy and professional, and came to talk to me after the show when they really didn't need to at all. They opened my eyes. And yes, they were black men.<sup>69</sup>

It is hard to believe that Anselmo would be as apologetic to these individuals if he did not think they were being respectful, "classy," or "professional" when addressing him. He most likely did not write this apology letter of his own accord, and this speech probably would not have become part of metal scene discourse if it were not for Joel releasing an open letter to the Canadian and US music industry decrying Anselmo's actions and threatening to widely publicize this incident.<sup>70</sup> He sent the letter to Pantera's manager and numerous North American music publications.

Anselmo's apology statement illustrates that erasure has always been one of his primary

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<sup>67</sup> Lepage, "Pantera Singer Apologizes for Racial Tirade."

<sup>68</sup> Lepage, "Pantera Singer Apologizes for Racial Tirade," 6.

<sup>69</sup> Rees, ed., "Phil Anselmo Says 'Racist' Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!," 5.

<sup>70</sup> Rees, ed., "Phil Anselmo Says 'Racist' Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!," 5.

tactics to excuse his racist behaviors and rhetoric, and the explanations he gave for the Montreal speech laid the groundwork for his defense against these types of accusations for years to come. His many supporters would adopt the same approach when coming to his defense. He begins the letter by “tak[ing] responsibility for [his] harmful words,” but rather than acknowledging that these words were racist, he apologizes for these “harmful words... [that] *may have* racially offended our audience.”<sup>71</sup> He continues by explaining why this night was different from other nights that he spoke about race during his concerts:

On any normal night the speech that I give on the subject of racism goes in the direction of unity. A unity of pride, for in today’s society (especially in the USA) white people are basically stripped of any pride, and if any is shown, that white person ... is labelled a racist. However, if, say, a black or Hispanic person wears T-shirts on the street boasting their pride and heritage, it is seen as okay... The speech that I made to the audience was so pro-white that even as I made it, I knew it had come out wrong... On this particular night, I sunk as low as the people that I claim to hate. I made a very human mistake. And on behalf of the rest of the band (who are mad with me also) I plead for your forgiveness, for this is a mistake I will never make again.<sup>72</sup>

Anselmo seems to have forgotten his admission in this 1995 letter that he knew his speech on that night was blatantly “pro-white” during his interviews in 2016 quoted above. Furthermore, his concept of racial equality—that every race, including the White race, should be allowed to show pride in their race—highlights his ignorance when it comes to issues like systemic racism and the United States’ history of racial oppression perpetrated by the White population. And while Anselmo claims that his bandmates were upset with him for this speech, it was most likely because it brought them negative publicity and not because of the message. In an interview a month prior to the Montreal show, Vinnie Paul expressed similar disdain with “racist” Black rap

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<sup>71</sup> Rees, ed., “Phil Anselmo Says ‘Racist’ Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!,” 4. Emphasis is my own.

<sup>72</sup> Rees, ed., “Phil Anselmo Says ‘Racist’ Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!,” 4. Underlines are from the original letter.

artists:

You can flip on MTV or any TV station... and there's rap bands and black people and all they want to do is "down Whitey" and "Whitey did this"... I didn't drag anybody over here in a damn ship and chain them up... That's something that happened a long time ago. They got to get over it and we could all live peacefully together.<sup>73</sup>

Paul's statement challenges the common misperception in the metal scene that Anselmo was the only problematic member of Pantera, something that some fans cite as a reason to still listen to the band's music.<sup>74</sup>

Even though the media, fans, and scholars only ever mention the Montreal speech when discussing Anselmo's history of racism in the 1990s, his apology letter indicates that he preached about issues of race often when touring with Pantera during this time. I found a compilation video online of him delivering five additional variations of this speech in unknown locations on unknown dates.<sup>75</sup> In one of his rants he corroborates what he said in the letter, telling the audience that he feels strongly about these issues (white pride, reverse racism) and is going to speak about them during every show. Moreover, one of the fans who confronted Anselmo after his speech in Montreal shared that an acquaintance of hers attended a Pantera concert in Quebec

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<sup>73</sup> Lisa Langley, "Gear Up for Metal - Pantera's Due," *Springfield News-Leader* (Springfield, MO), February 3, 1995.

<sup>74</sup> Additionally, a video of Dimebag Darrell using the N-word surfaced in 2022 on Reddit and immediately went viral. The incident took place at an event during which Dimebag was signing merchandise and meeting with fans. He casually commented that he would not sign a guitar for someone unless the "n\*\*\*er" could prove that he could play. I cannot find the source for this allegation, but apparently the person he was referring to was white, not that this fact excuses his use of this racial slur. "Video of Pantera's Dimebag Darrell Using Racial Slur Goes Viral," YouTube video, 2:03, posted on July 20, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fly12\\_kAyFM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fly12_kAyFM). I have yet to read all of the nearly 8,000 comments on this video, but of the dozens that I have read, all of them are from fans defending Dimebag's honor, especially since this video was posted nearly twenty years after he was murdered.

<sup>75</sup> "Phil Anselmo White Pride Speeches (Compilation)," YouTube video, 11:49, posted on September 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHdYLG4itCQ&t=15s>

the previous night, and, apparently, Anselmo's rhetoric was even more racist.<sup>76</sup> By analyzing the videos of these six speeches, it is clear that they were part of the band's setlist because they always played the same song afterwards: "Primal Concrete Sledge." Like Vinnie Paul's disparaging comment cited above about Black rappers, this gives the impression that the other members of Pantera supported his rantings. A review of concert in Wisconsin supports this assertion:

The speed metal man beat on his chest as he praised marijuana, denounced fighting (weird and ironic), and warned us against anti-white messages he says are creeping up in the media and gangsta rap songs. "The whole trend on the news and talk shows is that there is a white problem," Anselmo said. "But what they all seem to forget is that it's the black people trying to cause separation." Meanwhile, guitarist Diamond Dimebag Darrell, bassist Rex and drummer Vinnie Paul looked on, but didn't look surprised.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, in three separate speeches, including the one in Montreal, Anselmo prefaces them by saying that he is speaking on behalf of himself and the rest of the band.<sup>78</sup> Their passive behavior further demonstrates that racism was most likely an issue with the entire band, not just Anselmo. His comment that Black people are responsible for the United States' racial divide also leaves little doubt in the message of the band's lyrics in songs like "Rise" and "No Good (Attack the Radical)."

In addition to the excuses that Anselmo offered in his apology statement—his distress over "anti-white" racism and the suppression of White culture, a personal issue, and human nature—Pantera's manager, Walter O'Brien, provided *Kerrang!* with further context:

This isn't the first time Phil has said something onstage. He feels very

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<sup>76</sup> Lepage, "Pantera Singer Apologizes for Racial Tirade," 6.

<sup>77</sup> Natasha Kassulke, "Speed Metal Band Pantera Captivates Crowd," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison), February 14, 1995, sec. C.

<sup>78</sup> "Phil Anselmo White Pride Speeches (Compilation)."

passionately that Rap bands get away with racist statements because they're black. He is strongly against all forms of racism. The problem in Montreal was he was drunk... Also, he was pissed off because our new video had been banned by MTV because of its "excessive" use of violence. Yet it's no more violent than any Rap video, which MTV are quite happy to play.<sup>79</sup>

Not only do Anselmo and O'Brien attempt to manipulate the meaning of Anselmo's words with heaps of excuses and claims that he is actually anti-racist, but they also enact the process of erasure by making no effort to address other comments of his that most reasonable people would perceive as racist. Soon after sharing O'Brien's insights, the *Kerrang!* journalist provides the reader with another one of Anselmo's justifications for his views on race. He grew up in the "racial hotbed" of New Orleans, where Anselmo describes the "hostilities between the black and white communities" as "so extreme they've had to be virtually segregated."<sup>80</sup> In a separate interview with *Q* magazine in 1994, Anselmo added,

I don't support any White Power movement and that's not the band's thing... The truth is, black people in the South where I'm from hate me when I walk down the street just cos I'm white and have tattoos. I'm not saying I hate them, but if one of them's dead, bleeding on the ground, I'm not gonna help him up cos I know if it was the other way around he'd piss on my body.<sup>81</sup>

This statement is at odds with one he made during his 2016 interview with *Rolling Stone* after the Nazi salute incident. Instead of blaming his upbringing for his ire towards "racist" rap music, Anselmo lovingly described the city as being inhabited by "a diverse fucking crowd of people," especially in the French Quarter where he grew up. He also shared that he was raised by a single mother who "dated black men and whatever and they were in my house that I lived in—they

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<sup>79</sup> Rees, ed., "Phil Anselmo Says 'Racist' Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!," 6.

<sup>80</sup> Rees, ed., "Phil Anselmo Says 'Racist' Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!," 6.

<sup>81</sup> Rees, ed., "Phil Anselmo Says 'Racist' Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!," 6. I could not locate the original interview with *Q*.

spent the night and all that—and all I had was fucking love for them.”<sup>82</sup>

This anecdote is an example of another type of reason Anselmo often cites when denying accusations of racism: he cannot be racist because he has Black friends that he invites into his home, he has dated Black women, he plays in bands with people of color, and his heroes are Black.<sup>83</sup> In nearly every speech of his that I have documented from the 1990s, he makes a point to preface each beratement of Black rappers and Black pride by letting the audience know that Pantera has friends of every “kind,” “color,” “creed,” and “walk of life.”<sup>84</sup> Even though he referred to himself as White in the 1994 interview cited above, Anselmo more recently described himself as “mixed-breed” because he is “fucking Sicilian, French and the only ‘white’ part of [him] would be [his] great-grandmother’s side of the family.” As if to say that Black people should stop complaining about slavery, he adds that his White great grandmother “picked cotton from dawn ‘til dusk ‘til her hands were destroyed and bloody.”<sup>85</sup> Anselmo also referred to himself as “a honky, a hundred percent motherfucking white” in one of his 1990s white pride speeches before he complained that White people were not allowed to express white pride because they would be labeled racist, even though he was “born in 1968” and “not responsible for motherfucking jack shit that happened and nobody else is.”<sup>86</sup> Like Vinnie Paul in an earlier referenced interview, Anselmo is claiming that White people during the 1990s had nothing to do with slavery, so Black people should stop being angry about it. This section offers examples of

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<sup>82</sup> Anselmo, “Phil Anselmo Opens Up About Racism.”

<sup>83</sup> Rees, ed., “Phil Anselmo Says ‘Racist’ Rant Was a Drunken Mistake!,” 6; Anselmo, “Superjoint’s Phil Anselmo’s First Longform Interview Since Dimebash.”

<sup>84</sup> “Phil Anselmo White Pride Speeches (Compilation).”

<sup>85</sup> Anselmo, “Phil Anselmo Opens Up About Racism.”

<sup>86</sup> “Phil Anselmo White Pride Speeches (Compilation).”

many statements made by Anselmo and Paul that are reflective of color-blind racism. From blaming the living conditions of Black Americans on “anti-white” rap lyrics performed by Black rappers, to attributing Anselmo’s white power rhetoric to personal issues or drunkenness, Pantera and their supporters explain away, or erase, the harm these racist comments cause and minimize the experiences that Black Americans have with racism both within and outside of the metal scene.

#### **1.4 The “Persecution” of Phil Anselmo**

Anselmo’s behavior after his “apology” for both his white power speech in 1995 and his Nazi salute transgression in 2016 illustrates a definite pattern: he says or does something racist, some people get upset, and, in order to save face, Anselmo issues an apology, one that is seemingly heartfelt so that enough people believe him, grant their forgiveness, and remain loyal to him. Soon after his “apology,” after those who have forgiven him have likely moved on, Anselmo lambasts the media and others who accused him of racism in the first place. For example, during a concert in 1995 with another one of his bands, Down from his hometown of New Orleans, Anselmo made a speech during which he attacked MTV and other “fucking left-wing assholes that are effing so goddamn politically correct.”<sup>87</sup> This took place less than a year after his controversial speech in Montreal (and numerous others). MTV did not actually report on his white pride “sermons” in the 1990s, so he is most likely referring to the 1994 segment that I discussed earlier in this chapter that raised questions about Pantera’s connections to white supremacy. After his 2016 Nazi salute, Anselmo negated his apology before he even offered one. Before he realized how outraged many in the metal scene were over his actions, he posted this

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<sup>87</sup> Phil Anselmo, “Down – Houston, TX – 12-28-95 – FULL SHOW,” YouTube video, speech begins @ 1:01:25, posted on August 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrT-Rmnggeo&t=3740s>.



response under the YouTube video showing the entire ugly incident:

Ok folks, I'll own this one, but dammit, I was joking, and the "inside joke of the night" was because we were drinking fucking white wine, hahaha... Of all fucking things. Some of y'all need to thicken up your skin. There's plenty of fuckers to pick on with a more realistic agenda. I fucking love everyone, I fucking loathe everyone, and that's that. No apologies from me.<sup>88</sup>

While he did issue an apology with a more sincere tone shortly after making these comments, he again nullified his statement when he came out of hiding for interviews and to resume his performance career later in 2016.<sup>89</sup> Firstly, he came up with what could be interpreted as a more sympathetic excuse for his egregious behavior, one that places the blame squarely on others. He shared with talk show host Eddie Trunk eleven months after the incident:

This was a gig for my murdered guitar player and from the second I stepped out on the stage until the very end, and you can watch the YouTube footage for yourself, me growing more and more (drunkenly might I add, but that's neither here nor there) aggravated by these, just, uh, two or three little hecklers... See this word gets thrown around like it's, uh, easygoing or something. But when people start screaming "racist!" over and over and over and over again at me, what I did was show them ... the ugliest possible thing I could think of at the time was. And there's one point in that video that I invited them to come up onstage and I dared 'em to call me that to my face and I'd break their jaws. So at the end of the show, and I knew everybody was getting cleared out, and whatnot ... [lets out an exasperated sigh] I lost my shit so to speak.<sup>90</sup>

I have been unable to find video proof of these hecklers or any corroboration from other concert attendees.<sup>91</sup> Shortly before the scene described in this chapter's opening vignette, Anselmo

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<sup>88</sup> Housecore Records (@HOUSECORERECORDS), January 2016, comment on "Phil Anselmo is a Racist!"

<sup>89</sup> See "Philip Anselmo Apology," YouTube video, 1:29, posted on January 30, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gShmJV2BSr0&t=12s>.

<sup>90</sup> "Eddie Trunk interviews Phil Anselmo," recorded on December 15, 2016, YouTube video, 1:04:28, posted on December 22, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhTVj\\_OfSfc&t=2367s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhTVj_OfSfc&t=2367s).

<sup>91</sup> Anselmo does reference a video in his interview with Eddie Trunk that supposedly shows him threatening the audience members who were calling him "racist," inviting them onstage so he could "break their jaws." After reviewing a different video posted on YouTube, one that claims to feature all of Anselmo's talking between songs, I did observe him threatening an audience member, but it sounded like he misheard them yelling that Pantera "was not heavy metal," because he responded, "We *weren't* heavy metal man?! You come up on this stage and say it to me to

became belligerent with a fan that he misheard, thinking that they were insulting Pantera, so it is plausible that he misheard these so-called “hecklers” as well, if this interaction even occurred at all.<sup>92</sup>

Like his responses to the “left-wing assholes” accusing him of racism in the 1990s, he took every opportunity available to belittle and dismiss his critics in 2016, often employing pejoratives popularized by #GamerGate two years prior, such as “Social Justice Warrior” and “virtue signaling.”<sup>93</sup> For example, he mocked Robb Flynn of Machine Head who came out as Anselmo’s most public and vocal critic after the Nazi salute. Flynn, who performed with Anselmo the night of that incident, posted an eleven-minute YouTube video condemning Anselmo’s actions as racist and the metal scene for tolerating them.<sup>94</sup> He mocked Flynn on the Eddie Trunk Show, snidely stating, “That’s where little Robert comes in. ‘Look at my virtue. Living in... what, California?’ ... Context doesn’t matter to these SJWs and you know what I’m saying. The Social Justice Warrior.”<sup>95</sup> In another interview around the same time, Anselmo referred to the online attacks on his character (i.e. accusations of racism) as “fake and

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my face.” At no point during this video did I hear fans shouting at him that he was a racist, nor did I witness Anselmo responding to any audience members in a way that implied they had called him a racist. See russdudeman (@russdudeman), “Dimebash 1-22-16 All of Phil Anselmo’s Bits Between Songs,” Lucky Strike Live in Los Angeles, California, recorded on January 22, 2016, YouTube video, posted on January 28, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKBCTssIG20>.

<sup>92</sup> Anselmo et al., “Dimebash 2016 - WALK.”

<sup>93</sup> According to Cambridge Dictionary, virtue signaling is “an attempt to show other people that you are a good person, for example by expressing opinions that will be acceptable to them, especially on social media. Virtue signalling is the popular modern habit of indicating that one has virtue merely by expressing disgust or favour for certain political ideas or cultural happenings.” See <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/virtue-signalling>. Virtue signalers are perceived to be exaggerating their levels of care for social justice issues, that their statements are insincere. For a full discussion of #GamerGate and how it relates to issues in the metal scene, see the Introduction of this dissertation.

<sup>94</sup> “Robb Flynn - Racism in Metal,” YouTube video, 11:00, posted on January 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCBKzWg4WYo&t=1s>.

<sup>95</sup> “Eddie Trunk interviews Phil Anselmo.”

sociopathic.”<sup>96</sup> Three years after the 2016 scandal in an interview with *Kerrang!*, the same major UK publication that was among the few that exposed his racism in the 1990s, he was asked if the Dimebash controversy was something that he had moved past. Anselmo scoffed, “I feel like it’s ridiculous. I made an off-colour joke and ‘Boom!’—it’s like I’m literally Hitler! I’m not.... I don’t have a racist bone in my body.”<sup>97</sup>

The backlash experienced by Machine Head’s Robb Flynn after he condemned Phil Anselmo for his racist actions in 2016 is a particularly illustrative example of potential consequences an artist may face if they express anti-racist views. A few days after the anonymous YouTuber posted video footage of Anselmo’s Nazi salute, Flynn posted his reaction to Machine Head’s official YouTube account, commending the fan for doing the right thing, even though he had to know full well that he was going to incur “the wrath of the metal community” (which he did).<sup>98</sup> Not only did Flynn take the hard stance that Anselmo is a racist, he admonished the metal scene for its history of tolerating or excusing these types of transgressions from Anselmo, including its response in 2016:

And you know, the crazy thing is that out of all the things that are being said, the majority of people are just like [in a mocking tone] “Oh, give him a break! Oh, here comes the PC police now, and the Social Justice Team. Y’all just need to thicken your skin and stop being such pussies when somebody screams out ‘White power!’ and Sieg Heils! Liberals this, liberals that.” Only in the metal community is something like this so, so brushed off.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Philip Anselmo on Dimebash Incident: Online Scrutiny is ‘Fake and Sociopathic,’” interview by Graham Hartmann, *Loudwire*, YouTube video, 5:24, posted on January 4, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPq9BZkebrQ&t=4s>.

<sup>97</sup> Sam Law, “Phil Anselmo: ‘I Am Reckless and I Am Absurd on Purpose,’” *Kerrang!*, May 7, 2019, <https://www.kerrang.com/phil-anselmo-i-am-reckless-i-am-absurd-and-i-am-all-over-the-place-on-purpose>.

<sup>98</sup> “Robb Flynn - Racism in Metal,” YouTube video, 2:10, posted on January 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCBKzWg4WYo&t=1s>.

<sup>99</sup> “Robb Flynn - Racism in Metal,” 2:40.

Flynn made clear that it was not just the scene's response to Anselmo's actions at Dimebash that frustrated him. He commented that he had spoken with numerous musicians who, over the years, witnessed Anselmo throwing the Nazi salute and mouthing "White power" during performances, and failed to confront him.<sup>100</sup> And while Flynn had also never previously called out Anselmo and did agree to perform with him that night in 2016, despite knowing of his history of white supremacist displays, he is still the only high profile metal musician that rebuked Anselmo so severely and closed the door on any chance for redemption.

In an interview five years later, in 2021, Flynn described the vitriol and violence that he experienced after his video went viral:

A thousand death threats, and fucking crazy stalkers, and my kids being scared and my wife being scared, for fucking years, it lasted for years. It was bad. We had to get security... it was fucking ugly... really, really scary. It was a very difficult time. And it still kinda goes on. Even to this day, amazingly. It's been five years now, five and a half years, since that video went up, and I'll still get death threats.<sup>101</sup>

This example alone demonstrates the extent to which racism and white supremacy are still downplayed or not recognized as a problem within the metal scene, despite the repeated blatant and egregious displays of both by Anselmo. After attempting to hold the metal scene accountable for racism, or, at least, their empowerment of racists, Flynn was chastised for overreacting and threatened with violence.

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<sup>100</sup> "Robb Flynn - Racism in Metal," 8:43. For example, see Pantera, "A New Level (Seoul, Korea, 2001)," YouTube video, 1:58-2:05, posted on April 10, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNFMeJXjsrM>. Anselmo throws a Sieg Heil salute and bellows "White power!" into his microphone during a performance of this song.

<sup>101</sup> "Machine Head's Robb Flynn Still Gets Death Threats for Calling out Racism in Metal," *Metal Hammer*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.loudersound.com/news/machine-heads-robb-flynn-still-gets-death-threats-for-calling-out-racism-in-metal>.

According to Anselmo, unlike Flynn, many of his other peers and fans showed him compassion:

You wouldn't believe the amount of support I got from my fellow peers in the business – straight-up support and love and understanding of me because they know me, and they know I don't have [an] ounce of literal hate in my body. I might show angst, and I might get angry at a few things and get a lot off my chest when I needed to, but after that, I'm done with it man. That's that. It's something I can walk away from and move forward.<sup>102</sup>

Adam Crosier of the band Hymns was one of Anselmo's fiercest defenders, and his sentiments reflect the opinions of many Anselmo's close supporters:

This slanderous attack against Phil Anselmo in the metal media right now is reaching a despicable level of ugly; inept judgment.... Philip is one of the most caring, compassionate, loving, and intelligent individuals that I have ever met... he treats everyone as equals and with absolute respect; as long as the person deserves that respect and conducts themselves in an appropriate manner. I know, without a doubt, that Phil Anselmo is NOT racist. I'm ashamed to be part of a metal 'community' today that reacts in such a sanguine judgmental manner towards one of the greatest metal musicians/vocalists of all time.<sup>103</sup>

When *Blabbermouth* published Crosier's comments no less than three days after Anselmo's Nazi salute went viral, they received a slew of comments on Facebook attacking them for still dwelling on the issue and debating whether Anselmo is a racist. In the words of one disgruntled fan: "Omg shut up about this already. He's an idiot, he apologized, let's move on. Is there no other metal news? Geezus."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> "Philip Anselmo Says He Got 'Support and Love and Understanding' From Peers in Music Business Following 'Dimebash' Incident," *Blabbermouth*, January 27, 2017, <https://blabbermouth.net/news/philip-anselmo-says-he-got-support-and-love-and-understanding-from-peers-in-music-business-following-dimebash-incident/>.

<sup>103</sup> "Philip Anselmo Is Not Racist, Says Hymns Leader Adam Crosier," *Blabbermouth*, February 1, 2016, <https://www.blabbermouth.net/news/philip-anselmo-is-not-racist-says-hymns-leader-adam-crosier/>.

<sup>104</sup> Lori Law, February 1, 2016, comment on *Blabbermouth.net*, "PHILIP ANSELMO Is Not Racist, Says HYMNS Leader ADAM CROSIER (link to article)," Facebook, February 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Blabbermouth.net/posts/philip-anselmo-is-not-racist-says-hymns-leader-adam-crosier-httpwwwblabbermouthn/1164958710189457/>.

Anselmo's bandmates in projects such as Superjoint and Down, many of whom had known Anselmo for at least three decades by this point, echoed Crosier's opinions in their public statements regarding the incident. Jimmy Bower, who, like Anselmo, was another prominent figure in the New Orleans metal scene and collaborated with him on several projects, explained to one interviewer:

Knowing Phil and our extremely dark sense of humor, I blew it off as him being stupid. Then Robb Flynn put the video up saying how his feelings were hurt, and the people things were starting to say [sic] made me understand that what he said was not cool and not funny... It was really weird because it honestly wasn't a big deal to me, just because I know how Phil is. Dude, we joke about stupid shit. The bullshit that we come up with among friends... I guess the lesson learned is that you can't do that around other people... I just wish people could take things with a grain of salt nowadays instead of everyone being so serious.<sup>105</sup>

Bower also put forth the same type of defense that Anselmo did regarding the impact of living in New Orleans and racial acceptance: "You can't be racist if you're from New Orleans. There's so many different cultures here; you just can't do it. And you're raised to understand that."<sup>106</sup>

Bower and Anselmo's views exemplify one of the many "semantic moves" that White people use, as described by Bonilla-Silva, to "sandwich their racial statements between slices of nonracial utterances."<sup>107</sup> One of the most common semantic moves, to the point of becoming a stereotype itself, is the claim, "Some of my best friends are Black; how could I possibly be racist?" While these musicians are not citing specific Black friends as evidence of their anti-

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<sup>105</sup> Jimmy Bower, "Jimmy Bower on 'White Power,' Superjoint and the N-Word," interview by J. Bennett, *CLRVYNT*, October 4, 2016, <https://clrvynt.com/jimmy-bower-interview/>.

<sup>106</sup> "Jimmy Bower on 'White Power.'"; "Phil Anselmo Opens Up About Racism"; and "Eddie Trunk interviews Phil Anselmo."

<sup>107</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 53.

racism, at least not in this instance, their insinuations that it is essentially impossible for them to be racist because they grew up in a multicultural city serve the same purpose.

Not everyone in the scene was so quick to stand up for Anselmo (Crosier expressed his words less than two weeks after the 2016 incident), at least not publicly, nor were they this steadfast in their convictions that Anselmo is, indeed, not racist. More commonly, other musicians took stances similar to that of Neurosis' Scott Kelly, who admitted that Anselmo "fucked up... [and] said some shit that you can't really take back... [but] From what I've heard, he's taken steps to change his life and he's taking things more seriously."<sup>108</sup> Scott Ian of Anthrax denounced Anselmo's actions, but offered the disgraced singer the opportunity to make reparations and redeem himself: "First and foremost, we are friends. I love Phil Anselmo like a brother. He's family to me.... But I had to say something publicly about it, because to me, silence is being complicit."<sup>109</sup> In his official press release, Ian wrote,

Hate speech. Racism. Inflammatory rhetoric. All dangerous no matter what the context. I have zero tolerance for any of this.... Philip's acts were vile and that should be the focus here, anything else is just noise. Philip has apologized, and I would like to offer him the opportunity to really show how much he loves everyone by making a donation to the Simon Wiesenthal Center (a non-profit organization that fights antisemitism).<sup>110</sup>

Anselmo also berated Ian for what he perceived as Ian's hypocritical criticism of his behavior. In an interview he asserted that Ian does not have a spotless track record when it comes to racism,

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<sup>108</sup> "Neurosis's Scott Kelly on Philip Anselmo: 'I Think He F\*\*ked Up, Man,'" *Blabbermouth*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.blabbermouth.net/news/neurosiss-scott-kelly-on-philip-anselmo-i-think-he-fked-up-man/>. Neurosis toured with Pantera in the 1990s.

<sup>109</sup> Scott Ian, "Anthrax's Scott Ian on Inter-Band Harmony, Phil Anselmo's Atonement," interview by Kory Grow, *Rolling Stone*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/anthraxes-scott-ian-on-inter-band-harmony-phil-anselmos-atonement-227473/>.

<sup>110</sup> Bram Teitelman, "Metal Responds to Phil Anselmo's Nazi Salute: Anthrax, Machine Head, Rita Haney & More," *Billboard*, February 3, 2016, <https://www.billboard.com/music/rock/phil-anselmo-nazi-salute-white-power-metal-reactions-6866065/>.

either, referring to an album titled *Speak English or Die* that Ian released with his band Stormtroopers of Death in 1985. He mocked Ian, who is Jewish, for challenging him to donate to the “Nazi Hunter Jewish Cause or whatever,” writing it off as virtue signaling and complaining that no one in the press acknowledged that he supposedly did make a donation within an hour of Ian’s call.<sup>111</sup>

The varying responses from fans, media, and other musicians surrounding Anselmo’s numerous racist and white supremacist behaviors and rhetoric throughout the course of his decades-long career are emblematic of the types of racializing discourses that take place within the metal scene that contribute to the maintenance of its white racial frame. Given the open access to and exchange of ideas possible in the age of the internet, the 2016 incident has generated especially ample evidence of the longstanding problems with racism that the scene has yet to confront and the many different “semantic moves” its participants employ to avoid doing so. It also, perhaps, revealed a lack of awareness amongst scene members of the scene’s relationship with white supremacy, and of the white power movement in general. For instance, Ian noted that he encountered many questions as to why Anselmo’s Nazi salute was such a “big deal,” with one fan asking “Why does Scott [Ian] ask for a donation to the Simon Wiesenthal Center? That’s a Jewish thing. White Power has nothing to do with the Jews.”<sup>112</sup>

While Ian believes that much of the scene’s issues with white supremacy could be remedied through education, Flynn took a less forgiving stance. He ended his 2016 post-Dimebash video monologue about racism in metal with a statement of disbelief: “I don’t get how

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<sup>111</sup> “Eddie Trunk Interviews Phil Anselmo.”

<sup>112</sup> Ian, “Anthrax’s Scott Ian on Inter-Band Harmony, Phil Anselmo’s Atonement.”



this kind of shit is tolerated. I don't get how this shit is even blown off as acceptable."<sup>113</sup> This chapter has analyzed the mechanisms at play, especially the metal scene's racial structure, that created the conditions for this exact sort of response to Anselmo's Nazi salute to occur. And even though Flynn posted this video only two days after the metal scene became aware of what transpired at Dimebash, he accurately predicted the impact (or lack thereof) that it would have on Anselmo's career. There was initial fallout, but Anselmo was only sidelined for six months from recording new music, performing, and, apparently, *still* ranting about rap music and getting belligerent with Black security guards.<sup>114</sup> He still maintains a successful career today; as of this writing, Pantera is on a reunion tour with Zakk Wylde and Charlie Benante replacing the now deceased Dimebag Darrell and Vinnie Paul, respectively, that will conclude in 2024.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Pantera established themselves as the standard-bearer for metal during the 1990s, a status that was supported and reinforced by their sizable fanbase and adoring critics. Many people in the metal scene believed that metal was a dying genre during this decade because it had lost its commercial popularity that it had acquired in the 1980s. It was overshadowed by the grunge craze led by bands such as Nirvana, Alice in Chains, and Soundgarden. There were still numerous metal bands that earned success in the 1990s, but they were mostly part of the

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<sup>113</sup> Robb Flynn - Racism in Metal," 9:08.

<sup>114</sup> This is a reference to an impromptu speech Anselmo made during a performance with Down at the Psycho Las Vegas festival in August, 2016, which echoes some of the same opinions of rap that he expressed in the 1990s. He stated: "And everybody wants to go home and listen to that fucking shitty shit called hip hop... I deal with the real deal, none of the fake deal any fuckin' day. Or the 'trendy' deal, or the fucking bullshit any fuckin' day of the week." He then turned on the security guard and sneered, "Don't look at me motherfucker. Do your job. Ain't your fault I hate hip hop. Fuck you. [Rap] sucks. Let somebody come tell me something different. I'll fucking have them shittin' their teeth for a month. Don't look at me! Do your fucking job!" See "Phil Anselmo on hip-hop, tell's [*sic*] black security guard off," recorded on August 26, 2016, Psycho Las Vegas, The Joint at Hard Rock Hotel, YouTube video, posted on September 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM3B0igUTkM>.

underground scene, which is not a lucrative career path and all but guarantees that a band will not be signed to a major record label. Before Pantera burst onto the scene, the only other metal band selling out stadiums in the early 1990s was Metallica, but with the release of their 1991 album, *Metallica*, their credentials as a bona fide metal band were called into question. Some in the metal scene equated Metallica's selling out stadiums with selling out, a phenomenon that Smialek describes as happening when fans "feel betrayed when confronted with [an artist's] increasing popularity beyond [their] subculture... Metallica's shifts away from subcultural markers of authenticity were compounded by their suspicions toward the band's growing mass audience."<sup>115</sup> Metallica abandoned the transgressive aesthetics that characterize extreme metal for a more radio-friendly style of music, something that Pantera was able to avoid and still maintain a high degree of success. And when Metallica made this switch, the members of Pantera saw this as an opportunity to rise to the level of the metal elite.<sup>116</sup> They wrote *Vulgar Display of Power* (1992) as a response to the Black Album, and it represents the full realization of the vision that they had for themselves.

Pantera's monumental success and their constant declarations of their status as "real" metal reinforced the already-established white racialization of metal music. Within metal's white racial frame, their music constitutes what metal music should sound like and what it is supposed to communicate, they look and act how metal musicians are supposed to look and act (White and hypermasculine), and their (primarily White) fanbase looks like metalheads should look. And in

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<sup>115</sup> See Erik Smialek, "The Unforgiven: A Reception Study of Metallica Fans and 'Sell-Out' Accusations," in *Global Metal Music and Culture and Metal Studies*, ed. Andy R. Brown, Karl Spracklen, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Niall W.R. Scott (New York: Routledge, 2016), 107.

<sup>116</sup> Brad Angle, "'Vulgar Display of Power': 10 Things You Didn't Know About Pantera's Masterwork," *Revolver*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.revolvermag.com/music/vulgar-display-power-10-things-you-didnt-know-about-panteras-masterwork>.

a space like the metal scene, the more “authentic” a musician and/or fan is perceived to be, the higher their social standing becomes, the more credibility they are given, the more authority they are granted, and the bigger impact they can have on maintaining the white racial frame. Because Pantera’s music is considered to be a crucial part of metal history in the U.S., it is, perhaps, easier for their devoted followers to overlook their hypocrisy, even (or especially) if their attitudes and rhetoric perpetuate racism and uphold white supremacy. Members of Pantera and many of their fans embody the archetypal White male metalhead, which is both a product and reinforcer of the scene’s white racial frame. Some may even feel that to critique Anselmo and Pantera for their racist and white supremacist expressions would be synonymous with critiquing the metal scene and its members as a whole.

In examining the behaviors of and discourse surrounding such a highly respected and influential band like Pantera, we can glean insights about the politics of race in the U.S. metal scene, and perhaps in other scenes across the world dominated by whiteness. The white racial frame model is an effective tool for revealing the myriad ways in which issues of race shape a popular music scene and impact its participants’ experiences. It is not maintained through a series of isolated incidents or the behaviors of individuals. Rather, it draws its power from a web of factors that mutually reinforce one another. This chapter represents only one of numerous case studies that illustrates how this process plays out in the metal scene and how deeply white supremacist ideologies are embedded into this space. Metal music is surely not a mainstream genre in the US anymore, so the issues I have raised in this chapter may seem exclusive to a fringe alternative culture. But Pantera’s albums did top the Billboard charts when Phil Anselmo deemed metal a “white thing” in the 1990s. Even today, in commenting on Anselmo’s 2016 Nazi salute, one journalist asserted, “For Americans of a certain age, there was a time when heavy metal was synonymous with Pantera.... That the group remains such a mainstay, such a central

presence in popular music, reflects that there is something in the world maintaining its relevance, something well beyond the confines of heavy metal.”<sup>117</sup> In the next chapter, I will discuss the metal scene’s connection with far-right extremism and how, in some instances, it has promoted, incited, and economically supported physical and institutional violence perpetrated by white supremacist individuals and organizations. With that in mind, given Anselmo’s far-reaching and seemingly everlasting influence in the metal scene, his displays of power are not only vulgar, but also dangerous.

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<sup>117</sup> Alexander Billet, “Metal’s Bleeding Edge,” *Jacobin*, March 17, 2016, <https://jacobinmag.com/2016/03/metal-anselmo-pantera-rock-against-racism-nazis/>.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Black Metal is for White People”: How National Socialist Black Metal Grew Its Roots

Even if challenges to forms of power are difficult within the scene, reflexively anti-reflexive opposition to politics also ensures that the scene has not become a bastion of the far right. The relationship to racist and fascist discourses and practices has remained a playful, rather than a committed one. We should not mitigate the real hurt caused to those who suffer racist abuse. However, *such incidents remain isolated* and are not translated into concerted campaigns. The opposition to politics is at least even-handed. In opposing anti-racist activity, the scene also opposes racist activity. Members with the most overtly fascist and racist views have been pushed to the furthest margins of the extreme metal scene, into a closer accommodation with the Nazi music scene.<sup>1</sup>

This is an excerpt from sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris’s seminal ethnography on select extreme metal scenes in which he makes assertions about the isolated presence of far-right politics within the scene.<sup>2</sup> As stated in the Introduction to this dissertation, Kahn-Harris’s concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity can still be a useful tool for analyzing behaviors of some scene participants today, but it has become more and more inadequate when it comes to describing the scene’s general relationship with and reactions towards politically charged topics.

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Berg Publishers, 2007), 155-56. Emphasis is my own. Reflexive anti-reflexivity refers to the idea that many members of the metal scene are aware of its prejudicial power imbalance but choose to ignore it and deflect conversations away from this topic should it arise. For a more detailed explanation and critique of this concept, see the Introduction of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn-Harris refers to a singular metal scene throughout his book even if he is referring to a specific country, but he also explains that the global metal scene contains many local scenes within it. See Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 22. While many metal scenes around the world undoubtedly share commonalities and interact in various ways, referring to a “global” metal scene does not account for the cultural, social, and political differences between local, regional (both within national borders and between global hemispheres), and national scenes. Even metal styles performed worldwide whose practitioners subscribe to the same generic conventions or political ideologies do not constitute a scene. In the case of National Socialist black metal, for instance, some musicians within various scenes adapt National Socialist values to respond more directly to their unique social and political circumstances and their interpretations of black metal’s stylistic traits sometimes contain influences of local musical traditions rather than adhering to the European blueprint. For example, see Isley Unruh, “The New Wave of Indigenous National Socialist Black Metal,” August 31, 2022, <https://isleyunruh.com/new-wave-indigenous-national-socialist-black-metal/>.

The argument that the scene is not a “bastion of the far right” does reflect the beliefs of numerous scene members, at least in the United States, but the case study about Phil Anselmo in the previous chapter directly contradicts this stance. As one of metal’s most well-known and successful frontmen, Anselmo has a history of openly expressing racist views that align with far-right political talking points. One could argue that, technically, Anselmo’s behaviors are isolated incidents because most other metal musicians of his stature do not espouse these opinions, at least not out loud. Additionally, because Anselmo insists that his 2016 Nazi salute was a drunken mistake, and because some of his colleagues defended it as a product of his dark humor, this incident could be cited as an example of the metal scene’s “playful” treatment of racist and fascist discourses. According to Kahn-Harris’s logic, if Anselmo were an actual racist and fascist, he would have been exiled to the far corners of the scene.

Even though Kahn-Harris’s writings clearly demonstrate that he does not shy away from exposing and confronting racism in the metal scene, by leaving unacknowledged the covert and more pervasive ways that racism and white supremacy shape the scene’s social structures, arguments like his only further entrench metal’s white racial frame. The primary intervention that I make in this chapter is examining semiotic ideologies concerning race within the context of National Socialist black metal (NSBM).<sup>3</sup> Semiotic ideologies are ideas about how signs function or should function in the world, so by examining these ideologies, we can better grasp the underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that people bring when assessing whether something is racist or not. This approach is an effective way to parse how white supremacy shapes the metal scene as it can reveal some of the more insidious ways that various forms of communication

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<sup>3</sup> Although NSBM is not the only example of white supremacist metal music, it is the most widespread and notorious.

uphold the scene's white racial hierarchy and continually contribute to the marginalization of participants of color and other perceived outsiders.

The view that racism and fascism exist only in small pockets of the metal scene, and the belief that displays of these ideologies in the main scene are not to be taken seriously, represent what some cognitive anthropologists refer to as the “folk theory” of race and racism. The folk theory or model refers to the “everyday understandings of the world” present in all societies, analyzed through an ethnographic lens.<sup>4</sup> Beliefs based on folk theory are perceived by their adherents as everyday common sense and are often at odds with theories developed by scholars and scientists. In her book *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill outlines the core folk theories about race held by many white people in the United States: 1) race is biological, and racism will eventually disappear on its own after enough interracial marriage and reproduction; 2) racism is the product of visible beliefs and actions of individuals, and these types of people are mostly of the past or exist outside of mainstream society; and 3) all individuals, regardless of their identity, are naturally prejudiced, and people “prefer to be with their own kind.” According to this last theory, African Americans, Latinx people, or those of other minoritized races are just as racist as white people and their racism has the same consequences, a belief that minimizes the effects of white racism and white guilt.<sup>5</sup>

Folk theories of race are maintained, in part, through *language ideologies*, defined by linguistic anthropologist Paul Kroskrity as “conceptions [that], whether explicitly articulated or embodied in communicative practice, represent incomplete, or ‘partially successful,’ attempts to

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<sup>4</sup> Jane H. Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism* (Wiley, 2009); Roy G. D’Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, 6-7.

rationalize language usage.”<sup>6</sup> Susan Gal and Judith Irvine, also linguistic anthropologists, expand upon the notion that language ideologies are “partial”:

We see ideologies... as views of the world that are *partial*, in both senses of that word. They are partial in that they are incomplete, because someone else, viewing the world from a different standpoint, would see a different picture; and they are partial in that they are interested - in the political and legal sense of an interested party, someone who has a stake in a situation and how it turns out.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, language ideologies are ideas about how language should or does operate in the world. These rationalizations about the forms and functions of different types of discourses often serve the political and economic interests of the people who share them.<sup>8</sup> Hill argues that “A central function of language ideologies in the reproduction of White racism is that they make some kinds of talk and text visible as racist, and others invisible.”<sup>9</sup> Racist stereotypes, slurs, and epithets are primary examples of communicative acts that are generally recognized as such. Conversely, covert racializing discourses are not explicitly about race. Instead, the implicit racist sentiments are indexed through talk and text about topics other than race.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Paul V. Kroskrity, “Language Ideologies,” in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Blackwell, 2004), 496. Language ideologies are sometimes referred to as linguistic ideologies.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, 33-34. I adopt Hill’s definition of “discourse,” which she refers to as “all varieties of talk and text... including the actual material presence, in structure and content, of language-in-use in history and at particular moments of human interaction.” Rather than using the more common Foucauldian definition, that discourse is “the set of fundamental preconditions not only for talk, but for thought and understanding itself,” Hill’s definition of discourse aligns more so with how this term is used in linguistic anthropology because “it is in these material presences that ideas actually live, and it is through these that people acquire and share knowledge.” Hill states that she prefers “the more politically loaded term ‘ideology’ for some of the preconditions of language that Foucault labels as ‘discourse’” (32).

<sup>9</sup> Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Hilary Parsons Dick and Kristina Wirtz, “Introduction - Racializing Discourses,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 21, no. S1 (2011): E2–10.



Covertly racialized meaning is “co-constructed” between interlocutors through shared inside jokes, linguistic registers, and other forms of socializing.<sup>11</sup> For example, I recently read a tweet describing someone’s experiences interacting with some of their fellow white Iowans: “When white people in Iowa City want to say something racist, they’ll complain about the influx of ‘people from Chicago,’ gauge your reaction, and go from there.”<sup>12</sup> This general statement about Iowa City’s white residents points to shared *semiotic ideologies*, which anthropologist Webb Keane defines as sets of “basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world.”<sup>13</sup> According to ethnomusicologist Siv B. Lie, “a semiotic ideology about a social category (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) has to do with which signs are thought to authentically represent that category.”<sup>14</sup> In this case, the phrase “people from Chicago” implicitly refers to the city’s non-white inhabitants, or perceived invaders, who moved from a much larger, supposedly crime-ridden urban center. Or, perhaps, those who espouse this ideology assume that every person of color living in Iowa City must be from Chicago. The very word “Chicago” thus evokes ideas about urbanity and crime, in turn indexing racialized others by comparison with implicitly White Iowans.

Through analyses of various discourses in the metal scene regarding race, this chapter illustrates how two core folk theories in particular shape the general opinions about this issue. The first of these theories is the idea that racism is an anachronistic, individual flaw, which often

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<sup>11</sup> Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Komaniiecki (@Komaniiecki\_R), Twitter, March 3, 2023, 6:56 PM, [https://twitter.com/Komaniiecki\\_R/status/1631805664740663298](https://twitter.com/Komaniiecki_R/status/1631805664740663298).

<sup>13</sup> Webb Keane, “Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things,” *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 419.

<sup>14</sup> Siv B. Lie, *Django Generations: Hearing Ethnorace, Citizenship, and Jazz Manouche in France* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 8.

manifests in various iterations of “If it were not for a few bad actors, racism in metal would not be an issue.”<sup>15</sup> The second folk theory, which centers on claims of naturalized prejudice (that everyone prefers to congregate with their own kind), reflects the sentiment, “There are not a lot of Black people who participate in metal because they prefer music that is part of their culture, like rap.”<sup>16</sup> Members of the metal scene form and reinforce racial ideologies and influence the beliefs of others, both through what is uttered aloud in explicit and implicit terms, and through what is left silent. This process takes place through a variety of communicative forms, such as metal media publications, social media posts and interactions, onstage banter between musicians and fans, casual conversations between fans, lyrical content, album artwork, and merchandise design. While there are obvious examples of explicit manifestations of racism, like Anselmo’s infamous Nazi salute and National Socialist black metal as a whole, that a large portion of the US metal scene denounces (or, at least, does not actively support), there are many more instances of covert racialized discourses among scene members that subtly maintain the scene’s white racial frame and establish it as a space that tolerates white supremacist ideologies.

One way in which racialized discourses are veiled or concealed is through *erasure*, which Gal and Irvine define as a process “through which some phenomena (linguistic forms, or types of persons, or activities) are rendered invisible.”<sup>17</sup> In the metal scene, a common way that this sociolinguistic phenomenon plays out is when musicians or bands accused of racism or other

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see Dom Lawson, “Racism Is Phil Anselmo’s Problem, Not Metal’s,” *The Guardian*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2016/feb/02/racism-phil-anselmo-pantera-problem-not-metal-problem>.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see “‘It’s about Culture’: Fozzy Guitarist Explains Why ‘Black People’ Don’t Go to Metal Shows,” *Vanyaland*, June 27, 2014, <https://vanyaland.com/2014/06/27/culture-fozzy-guitarist-explains-black-people-dont-go-metal-shows/>.

<sup>17</sup> Gal and Irvine, *Signs of Difference*, 14; 20.

forms of bigotry declare that they are “not political,” exempting any statements they have made that could be construed as such from further scrutiny. One effect or outcome of this process is that “a social group or a language may be imagined as homogeneous, its internal variation disregarded.”<sup>18</sup> The essentialized social group could either be the speaker’s own group or an outside group. It is important to note that erasure is not synonymous with eradication, in that a defining feature of erasure is that inconsistencies or variations within an ideologized schema can go unnoticed or ignored. Erasure is an effective way to maintain the scene’s white racial frame and the way in which this process plays out applies directly to the discourses and behaviors that I am analyzing in this chapter.

In the next section I provide a brief history of NSBM and an overview of its practitioners’ central beliefs and forms of expression. I challenge the assumption, held by numerous members of the metal scene and scholars like Kahn-Harris, that far-right extremism is an isolated issue that does not affect the rest of the scene. Through an examination of the actions and rhetoric of members of one of the earliest black metal scenes, formed in Norway in the 1980s and 1990s, I illustrate how these black metal pioneers prompted, and even encouraged, the development of NSBM. By exploring these connections, I demonstrate that NSBM’s origins and continued existence are far more intertwined with the black metal genre as a whole than is often acknowledged or recognized by many members of the metal scene and some scholars. I analyze not only the express beliefs of active participants in metal’s National Socialist movement and their Norwegian forefathers, but also the various covert racializing acts of those who support this movement on the periphery, such as the defense of free speech, economic support, neutral

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<sup>18</sup> Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000), 38.

responses, and passive silence. Lastly, to further dispel the opinion that NSBM and other forms of white supremacist metal are, for the most part, isolated from the rest of the metal scene and are reflective of the beliefs of individual actors, I present and contextualize a database I am compiling to track these types of bands across the world. My data collection is an ongoing process, but so far, I have entries for over 2,600 white supremacist bands across six continents. To my knowledge, this is the first database of its kind in terms of scope, detail, and scholarly approaches.

This chapter is intended to complement chapter three of this dissertation, which discusses the rise of the antifascist movement in black metal. This movement's participants are fighting against not only NSBM, but also the metal scene's social structures and power dynamics that allow white supremacy and other forms of oppression to persist. I have two aims with the present chapter: 1) to provide a clear picture of the totality of oppressive forces that antifascist activists are working to weaken and eventually eradicate from the metal scene; and 2) to support, expand upon, and further contextualize with scholarly analysis the assertions put forth by antifascist activists regarding both overt and covert manifestations of white supremacy. Discussions of the antifascist movement's agenda in the next chapter reveal that these activists' views align with the arguments I make throughout this entire dissertation in terms of how systemic racism and white supremacy shape the metal scene. In essence, this chapter will demonstrate that NSBM did not sprout on its own. Rather, it is an ideologically charged iteration of the broader black metal genre, germinating from the same roots.

## **2.1 National Socialist black metal: origins and ideologies**

National Socialist black metal (NSBM), sometimes referred to as neo-Nazi black metal or Aryan black metal, is defined more by its political and racial ideologies than as a distinct sub-

genre of black metal. NSBM participants promote not only neo-Nazism, but also neo-fascism, neo-*völkisch*, and other white supremacist ideologies. Like the Nazis, NSBM values are heavily influenced by aspects of the *völkisch* movement that began in the nineteenth century. The word “*völkisch*” does not have an English cognate. According to historian Johannes Dalfinger, the term “describes a specific form of being national whereupon the nation (in German here: *das Volk*) is understood as something primordial, rooted either in racial origin or in natural- geographical environment, or in longtime and virtually unchangeable traditions, cultural habits, and language (or in a combination of these elements).”<sup>19</sup> The Nazi party expanded upon the “*völkisch* worldview, combining it with fascist elements.”<sup>20</sup> Core values of the *völkisch* movement inspired what would become one of the main slogans of the Third Reich, “*blut und boden*” (blood and soil), fueling their ultimate goal of establishing a racially defined *Völkskörper* (national body, i.e. “blood”) united in one geographical space (“soil”). Among several ideologies espoused by the *völkisch* movement, it was especially characterized by scientific racism, antisemitism, populism, and romantic nationalism.

In his work on post-Second World War occult Nazism, historian Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke identified a neo-*völkisch* movement that originated in the United States and Europe in the 1980s. He observed, “Just as the original *völkisch* movement arose as a defensive ideology of German identity against modernity in the late nineteenth century, this neo-*völkisch* revival acts as

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<sup>19</sup> Johannes Dalfinger, “The Nazi ‘New Europe’: Transnational Concepts of a Fascist and *Völkisch* Order for the Continent,” in *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossolinski (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 266. For more information about connections between the Nazis and the *Völkisch* movement, see Samuel Koehne, “Were the National Socialists a *Völkisch* Party? Paganism, Christianity, and the Nazi Christmas,” *Central European History* 47, no. 4 (2014): 760-90; and Carl Müller Frøland, “Part II. The Organic Nation: The Emergence of the *Völkisch* Ideology,” in *Understanding Nazi Ideology: The Genesis and Impact of a Political Faith*, trans. John Irons (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2020), 46-77.

<sup>20</sup> Dalfinger, “The Nazi ‘New Europe,’” 267.

a defensive ideology of white identity against multiculturalism, affirmative action and mass Third World immigration.... many of them are drawn... toward esoteric themes of Aryan origins, secret knowledge and occult heritage.”<sup>21</sup> Today’s neo-*völkisch* movement is predicated on fears generated by the white supremacist and antisemitic “great replacement” theory, or the belief that the white race is at risk of becoming extinct and replaced by “inferior” non-white populations due to “race-mixing,” multiculturalism, immigration, and other factors. Most often, blame is placed on the “Jewish elite” for this allegedly impending white genocide.<sup>22</sup>

While National Socialism is the primary political orientation for this music, bands who espouse fascist beliefs more generally or other expressions of white supremacy and far-right extremism can be labeled NSBM as well. In addition to the symbols, imagery, and propaganda associated with the Third Reich, Holocaust glorification, Holocaust denial, and neo-Nazism, many NSBM bands also incorporate references to ethnocentric European paganism or heathenism. An increasing number of white supremacist metal bands are drawing on pagan themes to express white nationalist and other racist beliefs, which aligns with the trend that historian and ethnographer, Mattias Gardell, began observing in the 1990s in far-right circles:

During the 1990s racist paganism emerged as one of the most dynamic trends of the increasingly radicalized but highly fragmented and schismatic radical-racist milieu in the United States. Currently surpassing traditional racist vehicles, such as national socialist parties and the Ku Klux Klan(s), in terms of numbers and influence, racist paganism has caught the attention of a new generation of racial

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>22</sup> See Betsy Friauf and Michael Phillips, “White Supremacy, Frontier Myths, the ‘Great Replacement’ Theory, and the Making of American Mass Killers,” in *All-American Massacre: The Tragic Role of American Culture and Society in Mass Shootings*, ed. Eric Madfis and Adam Lankford (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2023), 98-101; and Kirsten Dyck, “‘They’ll Take Away Our Birthrights’: How White-Power Musicians Instill Fear of White Extinction,” in *Historicizing Fear: Ignorance, Vilification, and Othering*, ed. Travis D. Boyce and Winsome M. Chunnu (Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2019), 73–87.

activists and is well on its way to reducing earlier racist creeds, such as Christian Identity, to the status of an “old man’s religion.”<sup>23</sup>

According to sociologist Karl Spracklen, some black metal bands claim to be against Christianity, modernity, and globalization in favor of “an imagined heathen, pagan, pre-Christian world: the old north of Europe.”<sup>24</sup> Varg Vikernes, of the one-man band Burzum, one of the most infamous and influential neo-Nazis of the metal scene, exemplifies this phenomenon. Unlike his Satan-worshiping peers in the 1990s Norwegian black metal scene, he was a devotee of the Norse god Odin. In an interview with the authors of the book *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Vikernes explains that the arsons of several Christian churches across Norway in the early 1990s were acts of vengeance:

[The Christians] desecrated our [pagan] graves, or burial mounds, so it’s revenge. The people who lie in the graves are the ones who built this society, *which we are against*.... How are we going to know our culture when they build churches on top of it?... The Fantoft Church with the *horg* (heathen altar) which the church sits on top of—that’s blasphemy, severe blasphemy.... Absolutely all of our holy sites have been desecrated like this.<sup>25</sup>

Vikernes’s vehement anti-Christian attitude reflects common themes found in black metal and is what Spracklen refers to as “imagined Vikingness,” that which represents “everything desired, and everything perceived to be missing, in the modern world.”<sup>26</sup> In this spirit, Burzum and other

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<sup>23</sup> Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Duke University Press, 2003), Introduction chap., Kindle.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Spracklen, *Metal Music and the Re-Imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race and Nation* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2020), 104.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, rev. ed. (Feral House, 2003), 155-56. The Fantoft Stave Church was built in the mid-twelfth century in the Sognefjord and was eventually moved in pieces and rebuilt near Bergen in the late nineteenth century. It was destroyed by arson on June 6, 1992, by members of the black metal scene. Even though an image of the church after the fire appeared on Burzum’s 1993 EP *Aske*, which is Norwegian for “ashes,” Vikernes was found not guilty of this particular arson. He was, however, found guilty of several other church arsons across Norway. The Fantoft Stave Church has since been reconstructed and is now surrounded by a security fence.

<sup>26</sup> Spracklen, *Metal Music and the Re-Imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race and Nation*, 117.

bands who adopt the same themes promote ideas such as defending the fatherland, pure bloodline, and heathen/Viking culture—especially against the so-called invasion of outsiders, which to them means immigrants, Jewish people, and anyone else who they do not perceive as being of white European descent.<sup>27</sup>

Black metal in general embraces an anti-Christianity stance, with many bands invoking Satanism in their musical and visual aesthetics, as well as in their overall personae. Within NSBM this anti-Christianity sentiment remains, but rather than only indexing a rejection of one of society's hegemonic forces of power, it also signifies antisemitism. Many NSBM bands and followers are against Christianity solely because it stems from Judaism.<sup>28</sup> Vikernes even goes so far as to assert that (presumably white) Christians are actually victims of a Jewish conspiracy and his goal is “to awaken the rest of the Norse tribe from a Judeo-Christian, social-democratic slumber” (even though this stance somewhat contradicts his hatred of Christians for destroying his pagan heritage and taking over his ancestors' lands).<sup>29</sup> In the same vein, because Satan is part of the Christian belief system, some neo-Nazi black metallers avoid references to Satanism in their music because it is incompatible with their antisemitic ideologies and pagan values.<sup>30</sup> Contrarily, because Satanism and fascism both value the strong dominating the weak, some NSBM bands combine aspects of Nazism and Satanism or incorporate Nazi occultist themes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For a deeper analysis on the ways in which NSBM draws on discourses relating to race, nation, and culture, see Benjamin Hedge Olson, “Voice of Our Blood: National Socialist Discourses in Black Metal,” *Popular Music History* 6, no. 1–2 (2011): 135–49.

<sup>28</sup> Although anti-Christian themes are more commonly expressed in NSBM, by the same nature these bands are typically anti-Islam as well.

<sup>29</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Olson, “Voice of Our Blood,” 139.

<sup>31</sup> The idea that Nazism was somehow connected to or derived from the occult flourished in Western popular culture after the Second World War. By the 1960s, historian Nicholas Goodrick-Clark concluded that, thanks to “crypto-



National Socialist black metal was pioneered by bands who formed in the early 1990s and are still revered and mostly active today, such as Burzum, Germany's Absurd, Poland's Graveland, and the United States' Grand Belial's Key. Some of these NSBM bands codified and exerted great influence on the black metal genre as a whole. Burzum is considered by many in the scene, including writers for widely read metal publications, to be one of the most influential black metal artists of all time. For example, in 2018 *Revolver* magazine released their top twenty-five black metal albums, and Burzum's 1992 eponymous album made the list, deemed by the authors as "one of black metal's earliest masterpieces."<sup>32</sup> Another major metal periodical, *Decibel*, recently published a book about US black metal by one of their journalists Daniel Lake. The opening sentence of the chapter on Grand Belial's Key is a declaration that "[Burzum] are, without doubt, one of the most influential [United States black metal] bands of the '90s."<sup>33</sup>

Contrary to those who believe that there is little interaction or connection between the NSBM scene and the broader black metal scene, including Kahn-Harris's assertion discussed in the introduction of this chapter, the National Socialist faction of the black metal scene considers

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historians," "the Nazi phenomenon [was presented] as a product of arcane and demonic influence." His work centers around investigating Nazi mythology, such as the claim that Adolf Hitler was demonically possessed. See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, 3rd ed. (I.B. Tauris, 2004), 218. He further explains in a later work that during this period Nazism became associated with mysticism, and this "quasi-religious evaluation of Nazism had begun to exercise a horrid fascination upon the Western mind" that led to "a sensational and fanciful presentation of [Nazism's] figures and symbols." Removed entirely from its political and historical context, Nazism and the Third Reich were recontextualized in popular culture through books, graphic novels, and films. For those who bought into Nazi occultism, Nazism was considered the "embodiment of evil in a modern twentieth-century regime, a monstrous pagan relapse in the Christian community of Europe. The total defeat of the Third Reich and the disappearance, suicides and executions of its major figures lent a further uncanny aura to the image of Nazism." See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, "The Nazi Mysteries," in *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (NYU Press, 2002), 107. To learn about connections between Nazism and Satanism, see Goodrick-Clarke, "Nazi Satanism and the New Aeon," in *Black Sun*, 213-31.

<sup>32</sup> J. Bennett et al., "25 Essential Black-Metal Albums," *Revolver*, August 9, 2018, <https://www.revolvermag.com/music/25-essential-black-metal-albums>.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Lake, *USBM: A Revolution of Identity in American Black Metal* (Decibel Books, 2020), 46.

itself a “logical extension of the political and spiritual dissidence inherent in black metal.”<sup>34</sup> In a recent publication, black metal scholar Ryan Buesnel observes that “NSBM retains key elements of black metal’s original ethos and can claim that it represents historical continuity” and that its practitioners can “[take] refuge in its self-appointed status as the rightful inheritors of the black metal legacy of rebellion against dominant cultural, religious, and political narratives.”<sup>35</sup> These claims offer a different perspective to the opinion that NSBM exists only on the fringes of the black metal scene or even adjacent to it. Instead, these authors suggest that, based on the views of its practitioners, NSBM is not as separated from “regular” black metal as popular narratives suggest. This underlying relationship, even if it is sometimes (or often) unrecognized by members of the rest of the metal scene, perhaps, is one of the reasons that so many scene participants passively support or do not openly reject NSBM.

## **2.2 Norwegian black metal in the 1990s: Proto-NSBM?**

To understand how NSBM participants view NSBM as a “logical extension” of black metal, we need to examine black metal’s origins. In the first part of this section, I describe the genre’s most typical musical characteristics, particularly the conventions codified by the Norwegian and broader Scandinavian black metal scene in the 1990s. It is these characteristics that many musicians and fans associate with black metal in its original form. Because of the historical ties and nostalgia-inducing nature of these particular musical qualities, they act as indices of authenticity, of what constitutes “real” black metal. The Norwegian black metal scene hosted some of black metal’s leading standard bearers, such as Mayhem, Darkthrone, Emperor,

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<sup>34</sup> Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, 307.

<sup>35</sup> Ryan Buesnel, “National Socialist Black Metal: A Case Study in the Longevity of Far-Right Ideologies in Heavy Metal Subcultures,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 4 (2020): 408.

Satyricon, Gorgoroth, and Burzum. Even though there were important developments in black metal in other places around the globe in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as Brazil and Japan, the genre's Norwegian roots remain central to black metal's popular historiography.<sup>36</sup> As I discussed in the Introduction chapter of this dissertation, metal's dominant historical narrative is a key component in constructing and maintaining the scene's white racial frame because it often privileges the contributions of white men to the exclusion of others.

Since black metal's violent beginnings in Norway in the late 1980s, its scene has been a fertile and even openly welcoming environment for right-wing extremism and white supremacy.<sup>37</sup> Of the bands comprising this scene, only Burzum is typically labeled as NSBM.<sup>38</sup> Besides Vikernes, musicians in the Norwegian scene did not explicitly embrace neo-Nazi or racist pagan ideologies. Instead, some of them were most likely crypto-fascists, meaning they often concealed their fascist beliefs to avoid any negative backlash, instead depending on covert

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, the Wikipedia page for black metal only focuses on developments in Europe, except for the handful of mentions of artists from other continents as examples of various black metal subgenres. Wikipedia, s.v. "Black Metal," last modified January 1, 2023, 6:36 p.m. UTC, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_metal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_metal). Norwegian black metal bands were aware of black metal bands outside of Europe in the 1990s. In addition to taking inspiration from Brazil's Sarcófago, Mayhem's founder, Euronymous's independent record label Deathlike Silence Productions released an album by the Japanese band Sigh.

<sup>37</sup> The Norwegian metal scene is often referred to as the "second wave" of black metal. The "first wave" of black metal took place in the early to mid-1980s with bands such as England's Venom, Sweden's Bathory, Denmark's Mercyful Fate, and Switzerland's Hellhammer, and Celtic Frost. Although these first wave bands influenced the Norwegian bands, black metal emerged as a distinct genre during the second wave. With the exception of Bathory, these first wave bands are referred to by some as "proto-black metal." The band Sarcófago of Brazil also inspired the Norwegian bands, especially their tradition of wearing corpse paint, black leather, bullet belts, and metal spikes. Despite this connection, Sarcófago is often not listed as part of the first wave of black metal, most likely because they are not European.

<sup>38</sup> Historian Kirsten Dyck labels this entire Norwegian black metal scene as NSBM and credits these bands with creating this political sect. While Dyck's claims are plausible on the surface, when she argues that Norwegian black metal bands combined Satanic and Nietzschean themes with National Socialist ideology, she cites Goodrich-Clarke's *Black Sun*. In his text, Goodrich-Clarke only discusses Varg Vikernes drawing on these themes in Burzum's music. He does not mention any other musicians or bands that were part of the Norwegian scene when discussing connections between black metal and National Socialism. See Kirsten Dyck, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (Rutgers University Press, 2016), 55-63.

discourses to express their political orientations.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes, however, their fascist leanings became more overt. The second half of this section offers some remarkable examples which suggest that these musicians were not as inconspicuous with their far-right leanings as they are often depicted.

### **2.2.1 A “trve kvlt”: The Black Circle**

One of the bands most central to the development of black metal in Norway in the early 1990s was Mayhem, founded in 1984 by Øystein Aarseth, better known by his stage name, Euronymous. This context is important to keep in mind when considering the actions and rhetoric of members of this band over the years. As one of the most celebrated pioneering black metal bands, they exerted significant influence not only over the genre’s aesthetic conventions, but also over the scene’s values and political ideologies. Metal fans and scholars are in consensus that Euronymous was the main figurehead of the Norwegian scene who single-handedly convinced or pressured his fellow musicians to move away from the more popular death metal style and turn to black metal.

In 1991 he opened a record shop named Helvete (Norwegian for “Hell”), which became a central gathering place for members of the scene, at least for those that Euronymous deemed worthy enough to be part of the “Black Circle” or “Black Metal Inner Circle.” According to Bård

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<sup>39</sup> The first known instance of someone using the term “crypto-fascism” was Theodor Adorno in a letter to Walter Benjamin in 1937. Unlike the modern definition, Adorno used this term to refer to someone who was too ignorant to realize that they were inadvertently supporting or spreading fascism, rather than a conscious concealment of these beliefs. See Theodor W. Adorno to Walter Benjamin, September 22, 1937, in *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Harvard University Press, 1999), 212. The authors of *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* define crypto-fascism as “a label pinned on postwar ultra-nationalist movements that on the one hand commit themselves to the respectable liberal-democratic process, but on the other harbour a hidden fascist agenda and style.” See Peter Davies and Derek Lynch, “Glossary,” *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (Routledge, 2005). The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines a “crypto-fascist” as “one who has secret fascist sympathies but is not an avowed fascist,” which is how antifascists use the term today, particularly those belonging to the Antifascist Black Metal Network discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Guldvik “Faust” Eithun, former drummer for the band Emperor whose members were part of the Black Circle, it was “just a name that was invented for the people who hung around [Helvete]—the people in these bands and some others too... there wasn’t anything like members and membership cards and official meetings... the media made it look lots more organized than it was in reality.”<sup>40</sup> Euronymous also operated his own independent record label, Deathlike Silence Productions. As the owner of the scene’s congregation site and record label, Euronymous put himself in a position of control, acting as the scene’s primary gatekeeper, determining black metal’s generic boundaries and who constituted a true black metal practitioner. Because of his perceived power and authority, his words and actions, as well as those of his bandmates, carried a lot of weight within the scene.

One of the main styles of black metal to come out of the Norwegian scene is often referred to as “raw” black metal, characterized by its lo-fi audio and visual production to give the aesthetics a so-called “primitive” quality. This statement from Gylve Fenris Nagell (stage name Fenriz) of the band Darkthrone, one of the pioneers of this new sound, offers further insight into what musicians in this scene considered “primitive”: “I want[ed] to *de-learn* playing drums, I want[ed] to play primitive and simple, I [didn’t] like a drum solo all the time and mak[ing] these complicated riffs.”<sup>41</sup> Rather than focusing on virtuosic guitar passages, as was the norm in heavy metal in the 1980s, raw black metal artists reverted the music back to the basics, valuing the atmosphere, imagery, or emotions that the music and other aesthetics evoked over the music’s technical difficulty. Unlike other forms of extreme metal, such as death metal, raw black metal

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<sup>40</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 67-68. Eithun is another controversial figure to come out of the Norwegian black metal scene. In 1993 he was convicted of the brutal murder of Magne Andreassen in an apparent hate crime, as Andreassen was a gay man. He was sentenced to fourteen years in prison but released after nine years for good behavior.

<sup>41</sup> Dayal Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult* (Feral House, 2013), 197.

musicians rarely downtune their instruments, instead prioritizing higher registers. The guitars are typically fuzzy and distorted, but in a way that does not seem intentional like one hears in other forms of extreme metal. It is not uncommon for bands to record albums in their homes with lower quality equipment than one would find in a professional recording studio. Because of these circumstances in which their music is recorded, the distortion is part of the lo-fi production, which is not usually the case with other metal genres.

The type of guitar riff most associated with raw black metal grew out of the Norwegian scene; Fenriz credits Euronymous and Snorre “Blackthorn” Ruch of Thorns for being the first to bring this technique into metal.<sup>42</sup> In his words, “the notes cling together so that you have the fucking eerie notes, and they all stream together creating this incredible eerie sound [that] like sends chills down your fucking spine.”<sup>43</sup> Fenriz is referring to their use of layered tremolo picking, also known as double picking, which is a form of alternate picking, a guitar technique that involves a continuous pattern of alternating downward and upward plucks. Tremolo picking is a specific type of alternate picking in which this same technique is performed on a single string at a fast tempo.<sup>44</sup> In his lecture uploaded to YouTube, Fenriz also shares that many raw black metal riffs derive from the opening riff of Black Sabbath’s “Black Sabbath,” which revolves around a tritone.<sup>45</sup> The continuous repetition of a riff centered around a tritone is thought to evoke feelings of unease, chaos, instability, anxiety, and fear. The monotony of the

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<sup>42</sup> Gylve “Fenriz” Nagell, “Black Metal by Fenriz,” December 6, 2016, YouTube video, 45:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQpMIR6RuaA>.

<sup>43</sup> “Black Metal by Fenriz.”

<sup>44</sup> The layered tremolo technique, paired with blast beat drumming, can be heard starting at 1:45 on Mayhem’s “Freezing Moon,” the second track on *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* (On the Mysteries of Lord Satan), or in the opening riff of Darkthrone’s “Transilvanian Hunger.”

<sup>45</sup> Black Sabbath, “Black Sabbath,” track 1 on *Black Sabbath*, Regent Sound, 1970.

riffs in this style of black metal float, suspended in the air, to immerse the listener in the atmosphere created by the music, without any indication of a resolution on the tonic. Songs typically end abruptly or fade off into nothingness, often lacking a final cadence. Characteristic vocal timbres include strained shrieking in a mid to high register and throaty croaking.<sup>46</sup> Some bands also incorporate hollow chanting to evoke some sort of religious ritual, such as a Black Mass or Satanic sacrifice. Vocals are typically treated as another instrument in the wall of sound produced by the instruments; much of the time they sound echoey and distant, as if screaming into the abyss of a dark cave.<sup>47</sup>

Raw black metal is often also referred to as “trve kvlt” (true cult) black metal.<sup>48</sup> Members of the black metal scene more widely use the label “trve kvlt” to refer to bands or music that they deem “real,” “authentic,” or “genuine” black metal. To these black metal purists and elitists, in order to be a true insider of the black metal scene, someone must have an appreciation and respect for raw black metal and know the bands who play in this style—the more obscure, exclusive, and underground, the better. This measuring stick is another way for insiders of the

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<sup>46</sup> Keep in mind that metal shrieking is more guttural than the clear or bright timbre more often associated with shrieking. For examples of shrieking vocals, listen to “Possessed by Satan” on Gorgoroth’s album *Antichrist* or Darkthrone’s “Transilvanian Hunger” on their album of the same name. Notably, the covers of both albums are labeled “True Norwegian Black Metal.” The initial release of *Transilvanian Hunger* was also labeled as “Norwegian Aryan Black Metal.” For even more guttural vocals that I would classify as croaking rather than full out shrieking, listen to the approach taken by Per “Dead” Ohlin on Mayhem’s 1994 album *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas*, starting with the song “Funeral Fog.”

<sup>47</sup> For further analysis on raw black metal and how it compares to another popular style, symphonic black metal, see Eric Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990-2015” (PhD diss., Montréal, Québec, Canada, McGill University, 2015), 135-43. Symphonic black metal incorporates orchestral instruments, keyboards, and clean vocals (singing, rather than screaming), oftentimes in the operatic style. The production value is typically more polished. This style tends to appeal to wider audiences and is, therefore, less exclusive. Well-known bands to perform in this style are Dimmu Borgir and Cradle of Filth. Because of these traits, symphonic black metal is often pitted against raw black metal and considered less authentic by black metal purists.

<sup>48</sup> I cannot find any reliable source that explains why the letter “u” is often replaced with a “v” in black metal. One plausible possibility that I have encountered is because the letter “u” does not exist in Latin, which aligns with black metal’s affinity for the Middle Ages.

black metal scene to assert their power and superiority. Many of the aesthetic choices of raw black metal pioneers in 1980s Norway were a reaction against the commercialization and polished recordings of death metal, which they viewed as inauthentic, believing that death metal bands compromised their musical integrity in order to sell albums.<sup>49</sup> To differentiate themselves as much as possible from death metal acts, raw black metal artists and fans adhere to and value stringent aesthetic boundaries, making it easier to separate the “trve kvlt-ists” from the “posers.”

The musicologist Eric Smialek explains, “lo-fi production in black metal became a floating signifier for authenticity built on the seriousness of purpose... [that] Norwegian black metal musicians came to represent.”<sup>50</sup> Their claims of authenticity were also tied to their Norwegian heritage, which is synonymous with their whiteness.<sup>51</sup> An assertion put forth by literary scholar Benjamin Noys adds perspective to this portrayal of authenticity, of what constitutes “trve kvlt” black metal, and who constitutes a “trve” black metal artist or fan based on aesthetics, ethnicity, and race: “Often, but of course not always, this particular policing function is overlaid or overdetermined in Black Metal by a politico-aesthetic coding from the

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<sup>49</sup> For example, the popular US death metal band Cannibal Corpse had a cameo appearance with a performance of their song “Hammer Smashed Face” in the blockbuster comedy *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* starring Jim Carey.

<sup>50</sup> Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music,” 142.

<sup>51</sup> For a deep dive into the connections between raw black metal authenticity and Norwegian heritage, see Ross Hagen, *Darkthrone’s A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (Bloomsbury, 2020); and Christopher Thompson, ““Sons of Northern Darkness’: Reflections of National Identity in Norway Through Black Metal” (master’s thesis, Uppsala, Sweden, Uppsala University, 2012). To learn more about the construction and performance of whiteness, how it is entwined with Norwegian identity, and how it relates to perceived authenticity or “trve kvlt-ness,” see Karl Spracklen, “True Aryan Black Metal: The Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the Construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music,” in *The Metal Void: First Gatherings*, ed. Niall W. R. Scott and Imke Von Helden (Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), 81–93; and Catherine Hoad, “Norwegian Black Metal and Viking Metal,” in *Heavy Metal Music, Texts, and Nationhood: (Re)Sounding Whiteness* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 59–107.



extreme right.”<sup>52</sup> This reasoning is, perhaps, why artists are drawn to raw black metal as a vehicle to celebrate their (white) heritage and superiority and why it is among the most common styles adopted by NSBM bands. I will now turn my attention to the behaviors and rhetoric of numerous Scandinavian black metal musicians that played a crucial role in opening the scene to fascism and racism, strengthening the scene’s white racial frame. In turn, the visual and sonic aesthetics of black metal developed by these artists can and do index these oppressive ideologies.

### 2.2.2 “Black metal is for white people.”<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the course of my research for this dissertation in both ethnographic and scholarly settings, when reading about or discussing the Norwegian scene and fascism, I have encountered the counterargument that Euronymous was a leftist because he was communist. For example, the long-established far-right metal website Death Metal Underground referred to Euronymous as “antifa” due to his affinity for communism.<sup>54</sup> The authors of the famed Norwegian black metal history book, *Lords of Chaos*, described him as “a long way from the nationalist and often pseudo right wing sentiments that are so prominent in Black Metal today.”<sup>55</sup> But his interest in communism, which he supposedly renounced before he died, does nothing to negate the fascist leanings baked into the fabric of the scene he built. Like Vikernes and his admiration for Hitler, Euronymous gravitated towards communism because he, too, idolized

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<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Noys, “‘Remain True to the Earth!’: Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal,” in *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (Glossator, 2010), 122.

<sup>53</sup> A statement made by Mayhem’s drummer, Jan Axel “Hellhammer” Blomberg. See Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 305.

<sup>54</sup> Brock Dorsey, “Euronymous: Black Metal’s First Hipster,” Death Metal Underground (website), April 29, 2017, <https://www.deathmetal.org/article/euronymous-black-metals-first-hipster/>.

<sup>55</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 73.

genocidal dictators such as Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot. In an interview widely circulated among black metal enthusiasts, he shared,

I've been interested in communism for a while, especially the extreme countries like Albania, Kampuchea, North Korea and so on. I have to say that I have studied so much that I know that real communism would be the best possible system, but as I hate people I don't want them to have a good time, I'd like to see them rot under communist dictatorship. Ceausescu was great, we need more people like him, Stalin, Pol Pot too... I like secret police, cold war and worshiping of dictators. I like bugging and spying on people, torture chambers in police stations and that people suddenly "disappear."<sup>56</sup>

Based on these views, it becomes clear why Euronymous left Norway's *Rød Ungdom* [Red Youth] organization, the youth chapter of the country's Marxist-Leninist Communist Workers Party. To him, they were "just a bunch of humanists."<sup>57</sup> It is difficult to say if these were truly his beliefs or if these types of statements were just part of his "evil" and "extreme" façade he constructed to bolster his authority in the black metal scene. Regardless, his misanthropic and nihilistic worldview is what he is remembered for and what his admirers celebrate and attempt to emulate. These attitudes also became a mainstay in black metal culture.

Mayhem became more open with their political beliefs after Vikernes murdered Euronymous on August 10, 1993, due to a personal dispute. After this shocking event, they began to display signifiers of far-right ideologies on merchandise, clothing, and elsewhere. Although Mayhem did not use their platform to promote any sort of political beliefs when Euronymous was alive, he most likely would not have been surprised with this turn in the band's marketing choices; he once allegedly declared, "[A]lmost ALL Norwegian bands are more or

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<sup>56</sup> Mythic Imagination, "Interview with Euronymous 1992 Unknown Origin," *Black Metal Chronology* (blog), August 2, 2017, <https://blackdeathmetalthistory.wordpress.com/2017/08/02/interview-with-euronymous-1992-unknown-origin/>; Satanic Communist Party, Facebook post, October 13, 2016, 11:32 a.m., <https://www.facebook.com/SatanicCommunistParty/posts/ive-been-very-interested-in-communism-for-a-while-especially-the-extreme-countri/1199126453463724/>.

<sup>57</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 74.

less nazis [sic]. Burzum, Mayhem, Emperor, Arcturus, Enslaved, you name them.”<sup>58</sup> One example of this type of merchandise is a shirt that reads “Pure Norwegian Black Metal” printed over the Nasjonal Samling logo, a far-right political party active in Norway from 1933-1945. Its leader, Vidkun Quisling, was a Nazi collaborator.<sup>59</sup> One participant in the Reddit thread devoted to this shirt cited below noted that earlier versions of this shirt had Totenkopf emblems on the sleeves.<sup>60</sup> Another Mayhem shirt, created to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the release of their first EP *Pure Fucking Armageddon* in 1984, features what appears to be three slightly altered Nazi symbols: the *Totenkopf*, the Nazi War Eagle, and the SS lightning bolts.<sup>61</sup> While it could be purely coincidental that the images on this t-shirt only resemble Nazi symbols, but are entirely innocent otherwise, the *Lords of Chaos* book does feature a photograph of Mayhem’s bassist Jørn “Necrobutcher” Stubberud posing in front of the *Reichskriegsflagge* [National War Flag] for the naval branch of Nazi Germany’s armed forces.<sup>62</sup> Although his head conveniently covers the swastika in the center of the flag, enough of the flag is visible to know what it is, including the bottom half of the Iron Cross.

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<sup>58</sup> Axl Rosenberg, “Editorial: Regarding Euronymous’ Claim That ‘Almost ALL Norwegian Bands Are More or Less Nazis,’” *MetalSucks*, January 5, 2017, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2017/01/05/editorial-regarding-euronymous-claim-that-almost-all-norwegian-bands-are-more-or-less-nazis/>. I use the term “allegedly” because the Facebook page, The True Mayhem Collection, that posted an image of this letter is no longer accessible.

<sup>59</sup> u/Frysken, “This was on the back of old Mayhem stuff, what does the symbol mean? I know it’s probably not bad, but I know Mayhem is kinda sketch, and were even more so back in the day so...,” Reddit post, r/rabm, September 14, 2022, 3:33 p.m. EST, [https://www.reddit.com/r/rabm/comments/xeazze/this\\_was\\_on\\_the\\_back\\_of\\_old\\_mayhem\\_stuff\\_what/](https://www.reddit.com/r/rabm/comments/xeazze/this_was_on_the_back_of_old_mayhem_stuff_what/).

<sup>60</sup> The *Totenkopf* [dead person’s head] is a skull and crossbones symbol. While it is most associated with Nazi Germany, this insignia has been used in German warfare since the early nineteenth century. It was adopted as the official insignia for the Schutzstaffel (SS) and Panzer forces (both army and air force) during the Second World War.

<sup>61</sup> “Mayhem 30 Years 1984-2014 Pure Fucking Armageddon True Norwegian Black Metal,” Heavy Metal Shop, accessed on March 21, 2023, <https://heavymetalshop.com.pl/official-merchandising-/859-mayhem-30-years-1984-2014-pure-fucking-armageddon-true-norwegian-black-metal.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 47.

Some scholars argue that the use of these symbols was for mere shock factor or a way for Mayhem and their peers to reach a new tier of transgression, pushing the envelope beyond Satanism.<sup>63</sup> Such arguments tend to be applied to bands like Mayhem, who are not typically labeled as NSBM by members of the metal scene or scholars, which subsequently downplays the seriousness of black metal bands using symbols associated with white supremacy. Contrary to these arguments, I have found that the meanings attached to these symbols align with sentiments held by some members of the Norwegian scene. For example, when asked in a 1994 interview about accusations of fascism in black metal, Mayhem's drummer, Jan Axel "Hellhammer" Blomberg declared, "I'll put it this way, we don't like black people here. Black Metal is for white people."<sup>64</sup> Hellhammer has also expressed beliefs about race based on the tenets of scientific racism and spoken out against race mixing and immigrants.<sup>65</sup>

Fascist tendencies were not unique to Mayhem. In 1995 members of three other Norwegian black metal bands, Emperor, Satyricon, and Dødheimsgard, formed an *allegedly* apolitical band named Zyklon-B, the chemical agent used in the gas chambers during the Holocaust. Counter to their objections to being labeled as NSBM, the band wrote a song titled "Bloodsoil" released as part of their debut EP *Blood Must Be Shed*. "Bloodsoil" echoes the "blood and soil" Nazi slogan, and it is implausible that this connection is a mere coincidence. In another instance, in a blatant display of antisemitism, when asked his opinion about members of

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<sup>63</sup> For example, see Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Berg Publishers, 2007), 41. Kahn-Harris explains that black metal is the most transgressive genre in all of metal, and therefore, it makes sense that bands in this genre incorporate neo-Nazi symbols into their aesthetics – even ones that do not identify openly as NSBM.

<sup>64</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 305.

<sup>65</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 306; Bruder Clé, "Mythen, Mord & Metal," *Ablaze* no. 6 (September/October 1995), 13.

the Norwegian black metal scene burning down churches, Gaahl of Gorgoroth responded, “Church burnings and all these things are, of course, things that I support 100%, and I think it should have been done much more and will be done much more in the future. We have to remove every trace from what Christianity and the Semitic roots have to offer this world.”<sup>66</sup>

Another piece of evidence that shows how engagement with neo-Nazism permeated throughout the Norwegian black metal scene is Darkthrone’s acclaimed *Transilvanian Hunger* (1994) album. The lyrics for half of the songs on this album were written by Vikernes from prison and the back cover originally featured an inscription that read “Norwegian Aryan black metal.” In response to criticisms about these elements, Fenriz, Darkthrone’s founder, defended the band’s choices in a press release: “If any man should attempt to criticize this LP, he should be thoroughly patronized for his obviously jewish [*sic*] behaviour.”<sup>67</sup> In a soon-to-follow apology statement at the behest of their record label, Fenriz proclaimed the band’s innocence and apoliticality and explained that they were not being intentionally antisemitic but were merely following “Norwegian language customs” in which they claimed “Jew” was often used in place of “jerk” or “stupid.”

I have not found any evidence to suggest that “Jew” is or was used in this sense in any widespread Norwegian language customs. To be clear, even if “Jew” was a common derogatory term in Norway in the 1990s, that does not make his use of the word any less antisemitic. In the apology statement, Fenriz also wrote that it is impossible to say why “Jew” was used as an insult so often, because,

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<sup>66</sup> Gaahl (stage name of Kristian Eivind Espedal), quoted in *Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey* (documentary), written by Sam Dunn and Scot McFayden, directed by Sam Dunn, Scot McFayden, and Jessica Joy Wise, produced by Sam Dun, Sam Feldman, and Scot McFayden, featuring Sam Dunn (Seville Pictures, 2005; Warner Home Video, 2006), YouTube video, 1:17:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tozcgBDz6aA&t=4683s>.

<sup>67</sup> Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 304-05.

Norwegians have always liked Jews and racism is not a big issue in Norway. You could actually ask the entire Norwegian nation for an apology, because the ‘Jew’ expression is used negatively in everyday Norway. It is a most unfortunate coincidence and we ask all parties involved to try to understand this accident. Believe us, we were as shocked as anyone else when everyone suddenly called us a Nazi band. It’s so unfair, and we want to stop this A.S.A.P. As the person responsible for the previous press statement doesn’t read newspapers, music press or watch television news, he had no idea of the situation in the rest of Europe. Therefore he couldn’t have had any idea that the word “Jew” would offend anyone. It was more on impulse because it could have been *any other word*, for instance “bad.” “Jew” was ABSOLUTELY NOT intended to hurt or provoke anyone, and we apologize to anyone who has suffered, also to our record label PEACEVILLE who are as innocent as ourselves. This is all a result of Norwegian language customs.<sup>68</sup>

Every aspect of Fenriz’s apology statement is a clear example of erasure. Rather than outright deny that Darkthrone is antisemitic or racist, he claims that they are “*absolutely not* a political band.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, even though their words and actions surrounding *Transilvanian Hunger* read as white supremacist and antisemitic, which contradicts how Darkthrone wishes to present itself, they downplay what these words (“Aryan,” “Jew”) signify and explain away their problematic nature by declaring apoliticality.<sup>70</sup> This is a common tactic taken up by metal musicians accused of bigotry or other problematic behaviors, as was illustrated in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

Situations such as these demonstrate that, through their behaviors and rhetoric, Norwegian musicians established black metal as a white space from the beginning. Accordingly, NSBM bands did not and do not have to adapt black metal into a tool or weapon to express their views, at least not significantly; black metal already provided a platform for this messaging.

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<sup>68</sup> Moynihan and Sørderind, *Lords of Chaos*, 305. Emphasis in the original document.

<sup>69</sup> Moynihan and Sørderind, *Lords of Chaos*, 306. Emphasis in the original document.

<sup>70</sup> Gal and Irvine, *Signs of Difference*, 14.

Consider the perspective of another outspoken white supremacist in the NSBM scene, Rob Darken, founder of the band Graveland, who sees his band and the Polish black metal scene more broadly to be an extension of or modeled after the Norwegian scene. During an interview with *Decibel* in 2006, Darken was asked if he considered Norwegian bands' use of neo-Nazi symbols and rhetoric to be just a façade, and he answered:

[During the 1990s], unholy [black metal] slowly got some traits of extreme right-wing ideologies... Referring to Aryanism and the achievements of the Third Reich made BM more radical and "evil." ... When people got used to Satanism in metal, young generation needed stronger weapon to come out. And extreme right-wing ideologies were perfect weapon. ... It was the ... proof of their authenticity. ... I must mention here church burning and some other war expeditions in order to intimidate competition and spread some Satanist terror. Such publicity resulted in the number of sold albums and money these bands made. It had huge influence on their later convictions. ... Coming back to Dark Throne [*sic*] and Emperor ... I think that they hid their convictions.<sup>71</sup>

Darken clearly believes that the Norwegian bands shared in his extreme right-wing, racist, and antisemitic views, even if such views were presented more covertly in order to avoid dissuading people from purchasing their music.<sup>72</sup> Hendrik Möbus, founder of Absurd, one of the earliest NSBM bands, has expressed the same sentiments: "It is NSBM that marks the logical conclusion of a movement set in motion by 'A Blaze in the Northern Sky' ten years ago... NSBM is the audible quintessence of the born again National Socialism, and as such dramatically opposed to any definition that ignores the archetypal roots of Black Metal."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Rob Darken, "Interview with Rob Darken," interview by J. Bennett, *Decibel*, March 2006, available at <https://vnnforum.com/showthread.php?t=35503>. I am quoting this interview verbatim, including grammatical errors.

<sup>72</sup> For a deeper analysis of Graveland's music and ideologies, as well as that of the German NSBM band Absurd, see Buesnel, "A Case Study in the Longevity of Far-Right Ideologies in Heavy Metal Subcultures."

<sup>73</sup> Hendrik Möbus, "National Socialist Black Metal," *The Pagan Front: The Hammer of National Socialist Black Metal*, January 7, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060107011622/http://www.thepaganfront.com/pf.php?show=articles&article=1>. *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* was the second album released by Darkthrone in 1992. They began as a death metal band, and this album marked their switch to black metal.

Regardless of their intentions or how implicit or explicit they were in their communications, the discursive and visual signs relating to Nazism used by some of these early Norwegian black metal bands to carve out their artistic personas and promote their music index a neo-Nazi and/or white pagan nationalist belief system to those involved in NSBM. Because these visible and invisible connections between black metal and white supremacy were established from the beginning of this genre's development, it resulted in what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino refers to as *semantic snowballing*, a process in which "indices continually take on new layers of meaning while potentially also carrying along former associations."<sup>74</sup> In other words, even though not everyone who participates in the black metal music scene interprets this genre as an explicit expression of white supremacist ideologies, because its earliest practitioners made these beliefs part of the genre's ideological foundations, black metal continues to index these sets of racist beliefs. For this reason, the genre remains a viable vehicle for spreading white supremacist propaganda, even if the messaging is not made explicit in the lyrics.

### **2.3 Metal music is *all-inclusive*, right?**

Musicians are not the only participants in the metal scene who conceal some of their political orientations or downplay or deny problems with National Socialism and other forms of white supremacy, whether they are defending themselves or other bands who stand accused. These types of responses almost always come from white men using language that suggests that those who are decrying racism in the metal scene are overreacting and violating one of the core values of the genre: freedom of expression. According to those with this stance, no topic should be off limits in metal, including National Socialism and other related themes. Recently, the leftist

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircean Semiotic Theory for Music," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2 (Spring - Summer 1999): 235.



online magazine *MetalSucks* published an open letter written by a group of metal musicians calling themselves the Anti-NSBM Working Group addressed to the record label and distribution hub Hells Headbangers, calling for them to stop releasing and distributing the music of neo-Nazi bands such as Satanic Warmaster, Grand Belial's Key, and Intolitarian.<sup>75</sup> This letter prompted a slew of negative responses from members of the metal scene who readily jumped to the defense of the record label, many of which exemplify the typical response to this issue that I have witnessed throughout my research.

For instance, in a feat of pretzeled logic US metal musician Brenocide admonishes those in the metal scene who criticized Hells Headbangers for promoting the music of neo-Nazi bands:

Heavy metal is historically a melting pot of diversity and ideas. Something like rap music is probably not, so this is what makes metal special. We need everyone involved and allowed in heavy metal music; especially the people whose complete reason for being is telling everyone *exactly the opposite*. How can we truly call ourselves an all-inclusive genre when we go out of our way to exclude people whose life mission is to ensure this is *NOT* an all-inclusive genre? Sounds pretty hypocritical if you ask me, guys.<sup>76</sup>

Besides the likely racialized, ignorant stereotype of rap music, Brenocide attempts to gaslight his readers into thinking that, by fighting to exclude white supremacists from the scene, they are stooping to the level of those who hold these beliefs. Endowing himself with trustworthy authority, Brenocide touts himself as a “top-tier S-Rank elite centrist whose status as consistently

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<sup>75</sup> “An Open Letter to Hells Headbangers Records to Stop Releasing and Distributing Metal by White Supremacists,” *MetalSucks*, August 24, 2017, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2017/08/24/an-open-letter-to-hells-headbangers-records-to-stop-releasing-and-distributing-metal-by-white-supremacists/>. Hells Headbangers website can be found at <http://www.hellsheadbangers.com/>. The bands that I have listed are still part of Hells Headbangers catalog.

<sup>76</sup> Brenocide, “Distributing NSBM? I’m NAZI-Ing a Problem,” *Toilet Ov Hell* (blog), September 1, 2017, <https://toiletovhell.com/distributing-nsbm-im-nazi-ing-a-problem/>. Brenocide is the former bassist for the band Druid based in Massachusetts and the creator of the blog *That’s Not Metal*. While *Toilet Ov Hell* is not in the same readership tier as metal magazines like *Decibel* or *Kerrang!*, the authors publish often and consistently and it does receive a significant amount of foot traffic for a blog.

above-it-all allows him to objectively hear out and logically consider every side in any major political or politically charged heavy metal debate.”<sup>77</sup> It is not uncommon for people who share in his views on this matter to present themselves as the voice of reason who has taken it upon himself to enlighten those who speak out against the scene’s white supremacist infrastructure and those who maintain it. Even though he indignantly states three times in his introductory comments that he is not racist, by justifying the presence of creators and supporters of racist music in the scene, Brenocide helps to ensure that these oppressive ideologies will remain a part of the scene’s fabric.

Another example of this attitude, which contributes to the maintenance of the scene’s white racial frame, comes from US musician Matt Harvey. Also in response to the open letter to Hells Headbangers, he published an opinion piece in *Decibel* magazine titled “Why You Can’t Censor NSBM or Those Who Distribute It.” Although it was a guest editorial, the editors of the magazine expressed an atypical show of support, including a written endorsement of his views. Echoing Brenocide’s stance that metal is an unconditionally inclusive genre, Harvey declares,

Metal is an art form with 100% artistic freedom in terms of its lyrical and aesthetic components. It’s a style of music where all lyrical and aesthetic concepts can be explored – whether you want to sing about ancient history, cannibalism, politics, aliens or, unfortunately, white power, you can do it here.<sup>78</sup>

The crux of Harvey’s overall argument relies on a ubiquitous response from those in the metal scene accused of oppressive attitudes: “metal is apolitical.”<sup>79</sup> Harvey’s explanation of what it

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<sup>77</sup> Brenocide, “Distributing NSBM?” The concept of “s-rank” originated in Japan’s school system as a grade above an “A.” The term has now made its way into popular culture, first in the gaming community and eventually became a meme to refer to anything deemed worthy of an A++, 11/10, or three-thumbs up.

<sup>78</sup> Matt Harvey, “Matt Harvey on Why You Can’t Censor NSBM or Those Who Distribute It,” *Decibel*, August 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200523111949/https://www.decibelmagazine.com/2017/08/28/matt-harvey-cant-censor-nsbm-distribute/>.

<sup>79</sup> Harvey, “Why You Can’t Censor NSBM.”

means to be apolitical, however, differs from others who use this excuse. He admits that politics have been a part of metal since the beginning but claims that it does not conform to a specific ideology like other genres do; it is, therefore, unfair to expect it to conform to one's own specific political beliefs. What other genre(s) might he be referencing? Like Brenocide, Harvey also essentializes rap music, pitting it against the "diversity" and "complexity" of metal, stating that "a white-power hip-hop artist is inconceivable."<sup>80</sup> Harvey's biggest (unintentional) indictment of the metal scene is when he insists, "To claim that the socially transgressive nature of NSBM is out of character for metal is simply not true. The specific transgressions of NSBM may be very different from those of earlier metal bands, but the tradition of defying [societal] norms is consistent."<sup>81</sup> To argue that neo-Nazi ideologies are a reasonable characteristic of metal music and, therefore, anyone who speaks out against it is trying to change a foundational belief of the scene sends a clear message, especially to marginalized groups. It communicates that the metal scene is an acceptable platform for oppressive ideologies that treat marginalized groups like sub-humans and lead to violence and genocide perpetrated against them. With that in mind, counter to the claims of Brenocide and Harvey, the metal scene cannot be an all-inclusive space if its

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<sup>80</sup> Harvey, "Why You Can't Censor NSBM." For the record, there are a growing number of white-power hip-hop artists, such as No-Face Nate, most likely based in the United States. He is an artist of Will2Rise, a record label launched in January 2022 by the US neo-Nazi Rise Above Movement. In a blog post, the movement's leader, Robert Rundo, described the importance of "white YouTube rappers" who can help to make young white people "increasingly comfortable identifying as White in a positive way and exploring what that identity means to them." To answer the question as to why neo-Nazis would use a historically Black musical genre to spread their propaganda, the white supremacist group Sons of Appalachia stated, "it's only n\*\*\*er music if a n\*\*\*er made it. If it's pro-white lyrics by a pro-white activist, it's pro-white music." See Center on Extremism, "The Rise Above Movement Plants a Flag in the White Power Music Scene," Anti-Defamation League, May 23, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/rise-above-movement-plants-flag-white-power-music-scene>. Ethnomusicologist Benjamin Teitelbaum has noted an upward trend of white nationalist rappers in Scandinavia beginning in the early 2000s with acts like Zyklon Boom and Juice. See Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, "White Pride/Black Music," in *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61-88.

<sup>81</sup> Harvey, "Why You Can't Censor NSBM."

participants continue to allow the circulation of music and ideologies that harm some of its members.

#### **2.4 For the Record: A database tracking white supremacist metal bands across the world**

Soon after I began my preliminary research on NSBM, I suspected that the most likely source of public information, Wikipedia, with only eighty-one bands listed, underrepresented the global spread of this movement.<sup>82</sup> The scholarly works that I have consulted regarding NSBM typically focus on a small sample of bands as examples of this music; many sources confine their research to a specific geographical region.<sup>83</sup> The lack of urgency among some members to address white supremacy in the metal scene is, perhaps, due to their misconceptions of how many of these bands exist and how widespread this phenomenon has become. To better understand and illustrate the totality of the issue with National Socialism and other fascist and/or white supremacist ideologies in the black metal scene and in metal more broadly, I am compiling a database of bands that espouse these political beliefs or have close ties with bands that do. So far, I have collected data from the past thirty years on a little over 1,200 National Socialist metal bands across six continents, the majority of which are part of the black metal genre. Some are no longer active, but many have formed in the past five to ten years.

Additionally, there are approximately 1,450 metal bands that are not explicitly National Socialist but do espouse other types of white supremacist ideologies, with the most common

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<sup>82</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “List of National Socialist black metal bands,” last modified December 21, 2022, 3:44 p.m. UTC, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_National\\_Socialist\\_black\\_metal\\_bands#cite\\_ref-48](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_National_Socialist_black_metal_bands#cite_ref-48).

<sup>83</sup> For examples, see Benjamin Hedge Olson, “Burzum Shirts, Paramilitarism and National Socialist Black Metal in the Twenty-First Century,” *Metal Music Studies* 7, no. 1 (2021): 27–42; Dimitrios Bormpoudakis and Dimitris Dalakoglou, “‘And Bloodshed Must Be Done’: Heavy Metal and Neo-Nazism in Greece,” *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 7, no. 1 (April 1, 2021): 27–48, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jgmc\\_00026\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jgmc_00026_1); and Benjamin Philip Hillier and Ash Barnes, “Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing: Extreme Right-Wing Ideologies in Australian Black Metal,” *IASPM Journal* 10, no. 2 (December 11, 2020): 38–57.

being white nationalist paganism. While many National Socialist bands also draw on pagan themes, there are many others that incorporate the latter but do not appear to be National Socialist, at least not enough for me to label them as such in my database. Certain white supremacist bands, particularly in the United States, such as Arghoslent, Slave Whipping Blasphemy, and Bloody Bill, incorporate themes relating to the US Civil War, slavery, the Confederacy, the Ku Klux Klan, and anti-Black racism, more so than they do National Socialism and antisemitism. Although the beliefs of these other types of white supremacist bands certainly overlap with National Socialism, it is important to make these distinctions so as not to treat expressions of whiteness and white supremacy as monolithic.

The database includes the following information for each band: name, genre, country, years active, record label, lyrical themes, and notes about topics such as brief biographical information, a translation of a band's name in English, if the band went by a different name previously, connections between bands, any political affiliations or organization memberships, and if a band's proximity to NSBM is not initially obvious, an explanation for why I decided to add it to the database. I have also started a list of metal record labels that distribute white supremacist music. My data collection and analysis are ongoing, but in the following paragraphs, I present my preliminary findings.<sup>84</sup>

Most of the information in my database is collected from the websites Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives and 88NSM.<sup>85</sup> The former is essentially a Wikipedia devoted to metal music worldwide. It currently comprises entries for 174,716 bands and has 1,501,645

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<sup>84</sup> Access to this database will be granted upon request:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SsbMADPdwpygzmOEC9LRKzGV5jGJ\\_f8/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106500263658167214136&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SsbMADPdwpygzmOEC9LRKzGV5jGJ_f8/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106500263658167214136&rtpof=true&sd=true).

<sup>85</sup> In white supremacist circles, 88 stands for "heil Hitler" because the letter "h" is the eighth letter of the alphabet. "NSM" stands for National Socialist music.

registered users who are all eligible to add new entries, edit existing entries, or write album reviews.<sup>86</sup> There are also entries for individual artists and record labels. Each band's page provides the same basic information: location, genre(s), years active, lyrical themes, record label if signed, discography, and current and former band members. Most pages also show the band's logo, album covers, and, at times, pictures of the band members. Some pages also include album reviews, links to similar bands, and additional biographical information. While Encyclopaedia Metallum covers all types of metal bands from around the world, 88NSM is a website dedicated to neo-Nazi music across several genres. Occasionally, I discover a band on the 88NSM website that was not listed in the Encyclopaedia Metallum. I also sometimes come across artists on 88NSM that are not described as white supremacist bands on Encyclopaedia Metallum because they are not explicit about their racial or political ideologies.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, 88NSM is a useful resource for seeing which bands appeal to neo-Nazis that might not otherwise be classified as white supremacist, and analyzing any recurring signs in lyrics and artwork that may act as covert signifiers of their racial ideologies. Additionally, I occasionally come across bands referred to as racist or neo-Nazi in popular and scholarly sources that I did not uncover in my searches of either of the two websites.

A significant portion of the bands in my database are obviously white supremacist and do not require further investigation in order to evaluate whether or not they subscribe to a form of this racial ideology. The easiest way to ascertain if a band was or is white supremacist is to look at the lyrical themes listed in their Encyclopaedia Metallum profile. Many profiles blatantly state that a band incorporates themes relating to National Socialism, Aryanism, the Holocaust,

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<sup>86</sup> Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives, accessed on January 22, 2024, metal-archives.com.

<sup>87</sup> This discrepancy between the two websites occurred most often with pagan/Viking bands.

antisemitism, racism, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression. Many of the bands that I have evaluated are clear as to whether they endorse or denounce these ideologies. I have, however, encountered numerous instances in which I could not determine if a band belonged in the database with just a cursory glance. I designed a series of questions to follow when examining a band's encyclopedia page to decide if I should include them in the database:

- Does their band logo, album artwork, or merchandise depict any symbols associated with white supremacist movements?
  - o Common symbols include the swastika, Celtic cross, Iron Cross, Thor's Hammer, Wolfsangel, and the pre-Roman runic alphabet, as well as various runic symbols, such as the Algiz rune, Jera rune, Othala rune, and Tyr rune.
- Does their band logo, album artwork, or merchandise depict any symbols associated with the Third Reich?
  - o Besides the swastika, common symbols include the sonnenrad (also referred to as the sunwheel or Black Sun), the Nazi Eagle, SS bolts, the Totenkopf (or Death's Head), and other Nazi insignia.
- Does their band logo, album artwork, or merchandise depict any number symbols associated with white supremacist movements?
  - o The number 14 refers to the "14 sacred words," a white supremacist slogan that reads, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." Other common numbers are alphanumeric, like 88 for "Heil Hitler" and 18 for "Adolf Hitler."
- Are there any images of band members performing any white supremacist hand signals or gestures?
  - o The Hitler salute is the most well-known gesture outside of white supremacist circles, but others include the "Okay" hand gesture (the pinky, ring finger, and middle finger left sticking up form a "W" and the index finger and thumb form the top part of a "P," for "white power"), the SS hand sign, and the Volksfront hand sign.<sup>88</sup>
- Does their band logo, album artwork, or merchandise depict images relating to the Nazi regime or the Holocaust?
  - o Some neo-Nazi bands are drawn to old, grainy black and white photographs from the Second World War era. Common images include those of Adolf Hitler, German Armed Forces in battle, German artillery, tanks, and other weapons of

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<sup>88</sup> For a more comprehensive database of white supremacist symbols, logos, numbers, and hand signs, see "Hate on Display™ Hate Symbols Database," Anti-Defamation League, accessed December 31, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols>.

war. Some of these bands use images of those killed in the Holocaust death camps or incinerators and gas chambers.

- Does the band's name or any of their album titles, song titles, or lyrics make any direct references relating to the Second World War, Nazi Germany, or the Holocaust? Does a band make any references to the coming of the Fourth Reich?
- Does the band's name or any of their album titles, song titles, or lyrics draw on more veiled white supremacist rhetoric?
  - o Rather than expressing overtly National Socialist or otherwise racist views, some bands use white supremacist dog whistles instead, such as blood, bloodline, purity, purification, soil, iron, honor, glory, pride, heritage, inheritance, ancestry, history, war, warriors, fatherland, nationalism, heathenism, paganism, Odinism, Wotan, eagles, and wolves. Some bands will also use coded language that originated with the Nazis to pejoratively refer to Jewish people, such as parasite, alien, degenerate, vermin, rat, and disease.
- Is the band's name German, or do they have album titles, song titles, or lyrics in German? If so, this is especially telling if they are not from a German-speaking region.
- Does the band use the Fraktur typeface anywhere in their artwork?<sup>89</sup>
- Has the band released any split EPs or albums with a confirmed white supremacist band?
- Has the band performed any covers of songs by a confirmed white supremacist band? Or, are songs by this band commonly covered by confirmed white supremacist bands?
  - o In going through the discographies of hundreds of confirmed white supremacist bands, I observed numerous covers of songs by bands from the original Norwegian scene, especially Burzum, Mayhem, and Darkthrone. Regarding Darkthrone, the most popular songs to cover come from their *Transilvanian Hunger* album, the one labeled "Norwegian Aryan Black Metal." Performing cover songs is another way in which NSBM bands point towards their musical and ideological lineage within the black metal genre.
- Is or was the band signed with a record label known for producing and distributing white supremacist music?

For many of these questions, if the answer is "yes," then the band in question is entered into the database. There are a few criteria in this list that, alone, do not support that a band has ties to white supremacy, such as the use of German, Fraktur font, or signing with a questionable record

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<sup>89</sup> Fraktur is a type of font most associated with the Nazi Party because it was once their official typeface for all written communication. It was banned by the Nazis in 1941 because they reclassified it as "Jewish letters." Despite this fact, this font is still used by many neo-Nazi organizations today, as well as some neo-Nazi black metal bands. To learn more about the history of this font, see Roman Mars, "Fraktur," episode 390, February 18, 2020, 99% Invisible, podcast, 42:52, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/fraktur/>.



label. I use these criteria to further support my reasoning that a band belongs in the database if they meet other criteria that have more obvious associations with National Socialism.

This database breaks down how many metal bands incorporate these various signifiers of white supremacy into their artistic output and personae, in effect refuting arguments in which people downplay this issue, such as those presented in the previous section of this chapter. Furthermore, those in the metal scene who defend certain bands accused of being NSBM often rely on the fact that some of these signs do not *always* index or indicate white supremacist beliefs, such as runic symbols, Thor's hammer, references to the Second World War, and pagan themes. These murky relationships and multiple meanings leave room for plausible deniability, another example of erasure. Even though every piece of criteria I listed above has the potential to index white supremacy on its own, and especially in combination, accused musicians who draw on one or more of these signs can and do argue that that is not their intention. For those who believe these artists, such claims reorient what these signs index. Once this web of signification becomes part of the scene's dominant narrative, arguments that these signs do index white supremacy are invalidated, and as a result, the scene's white racial frame becomes further entrenched. By cataloging how many bands with clear ties to National Socialism and other forms of white supremacy draw on these more subtle signs, my database provides substantial evidence that numerous artists use these signs to express or covertly signal their racial ideologies.

As of March 27, 2023, I have collected data on a total of 2,652 bands. The following set of tables provides more specific data points that address how many white supremacist bands have formed each year since 1999 and the top twenty countries with the highest number of white supremacist bands. These statistics have been gathered using the search function in Google

spreadsheets, so a small margin of error is to be expected. More accurate statistics will be generated in the future when I am able to go through each entry manually.

Table 2.1 White supremacist bands formed during 1999 – 2010\*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Bands Formed</b>
1999	119
2000	104
2001	87
2002	108
2003	122
2004	111
2005	127
2006	119
2007	112
2008	89
2009	78
2010	95

Total: 1,271

\*The highest number of white supremacist bands formed during this time period. These statistics include both bands who started during this time period and are no longer active, as well as those who still are active. If the year that a band formed was not listed, I recorded which year they released their first music instead.

Table 2.2 White supremacist bands formed during 2012 – 2022\*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Bands Formed</b>
2012	101
2013	81
2014	86
2015	75
2016	79
2017	75
2018	70
2019	54
2020	60
2021	54
2022	9

Total: 744

\*These statistics include both bands who started during this time period and are no longer active, as well as those who still are active. If the year that a band formed was not listed, I recorded which year they released their first music instead. It is possible that the numbers for the past 2-3 years will eventually increase as more of these bands become known and are added to Encyclopaedia Metallum.

Table 2.3 White supremacist bands per country (Top 20)\*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Bands</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Number of Bands**</b>
Germany	466	17.5%
United States	343	13%
Russia	213	8%
Poland	174	6.5%
France	158	6%
Brazil	120	4.5%
Italy	113	4.3%
Finland	111	4.2%
Canada	95	3.6%
Sweden	91	3.4%
Ukraine	74	2.8%
Australia	62	2.3%
United Kingdom	53	2%
Mexico	50	1.9%
Spain	50	1.9%
Argentina	46	1.7%
Greece	46	1.7%
Norway	45	1.7%
Hungary	38	1.4%
Belarus	37	1.4%

\*These statistics include bands who are still currently active and bands who are no longer active.

\*\*Percentages rounded up to the nearest tenth percent

## 2.5 Conclusion

My database provides evidence against the argument that NSBM and bands with similar white supremacist ideologies exist only in isolated pockets of the scene and do not affect the broader scene in any substantial way. Even though some of the bands I have documented are no longer together, it should be cause for alarm that, at some point over the past thirty-plus years, enough members of the metal scene held white supremacist beliefs that over 2,600 bands were formed to spread these ideologies. The existence of these bands does not just have a negative effect on the metal scene and cause harm to its participants. These bands also help to advance the white supremacist agenda outside of the scene. In addition to the music and messaging of these bands serving as effective recruitment and propaganda tools for the white power movement, sales of the music, live performances, and merchandise can directly finance white supremacist organizations that in turn perpetuate or incite acts of physical, verbal, and legislative violence.<sup>90</sup>

The largest and most popular of such events is the Asgardsrei festival, which used to be held annually in Kyiv, Ukraine, stopping in 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and remaining on hold indefinitely due to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. Vice Media described the festival as the “neo-Nazi networking event of the year,” a gathering place for hundreds of like-minded individuals from around the world, including the United States.<sup>91</sup> Musicologist Thorsten Hindrichs commented, “The organizers have been very clever in connecting almost the complete European neo-Nazi scene” and this festival is a significant site of convergence for hate

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<sup>90</sup> Tim Hume, Tom Bennett, and Henry Langston, “Neo-Nazi Music Festivals Are Funding Violent Extremism in Europe,” *Vice*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wx533x/neo-nazi-music-festivals-are-funding-violent-extremism-in-europe>. Also see “Inside a Neo Nazi Music Festival | Decade of Hate,” *Vice*, September 18, 2021, YouTube video, 7:32, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX9OjNy\\_NI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX9OjNy_NI).

<sup>91</sup> Tim Hume, “A Black Metal Festival in Ukraine This Weekend Is the Neo-Nazi Networking Event of the Year,” *Vice*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dygg9j/a-black-metal-festival-in-ukraine-this-weekend-is-the-neo-nazi-networking-event-of-the-year>.

groups to further their project of “build[ing] a pan-European community of right-wing extremists.”<sup>92</sup> Certain neo-Nazi and white supremacist thought leaders have acknowledged the effectiveness of music as a tool to spread their propaganda, including one of the main originators of white power music, Ian Stuart Donaldson of the punk band Skrewdriver: “A pamphlet is only read once, but a song is learnt by heart and repeated a thousand times.”<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the new insights regarding white supremacy in metal provided by my database, I have also demonstrated in this chapter that NSBM never existed in a realm separate from the remainder of the black metal scene. Many of its participants were (and still are) inspired by and take their cues from members of the original Norwegian black metal scene, both musically and ideologically. These connections should be a foundational aspect of black metal’s historical narrative, as their absence ignores or downplays the seriousness of metal’s problems with neo-Nazism and further solidifies the scene’s white racial frame. The next chapter examines how a growing number of scene members are reacting to these problems, particularly in the black metal scene, through the development of a burgeoning antifascist movement. The points that I have raised in this chapter are intended to shed light on the totality of issues that antifascist activists are confronting.

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<sup>92</sup> Hume, “A Black Metal Festival in Ukraine.”

<sup>93</sup> Dominic Alessio and Robert Wallis, “The Musical Is Political: Black Metal and the Extreme Right,” *Fair Observer*, August 10, 2021, <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/dominic-alessio-robert-wallis-black-metal-extreme-right-music-scene-news-41994/>.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “The World’s on Fire, But We Are Creating Something Beautiful”: The Rise of Antifascist Black Metal

Antifascist metal is the most dangerous kind there is, because it holds the revolutionary potential to enact actual change, to challenge oppressive structures and systems of power, and to provide marginalized people with the support and space they need to become more involved with a scene that desperately needs their perspectives. What could be more dangerous than destroying the status quo? What’s scarier than a peoples’ revolution?<sup>1</sup>

- Kim Kelly

Over the past decade, the metal scene in the United States and other parts of the world has become an increasingly volatile and contested space. Neo-Nazism and other white supremacist ideologies have had a noticeable presence within the scene since the late 1980s, and for the first time a portion of the scene is collectively fighting back and vocally denouncing these oppressive beliefs. There are certain individual actors in the metal scene with a reputation for political activism, mostly regarding social issues outside of the scene, but a few have been known to speak out about issues within the scene, such as racism and fascism, over the course of their careers. One of the most notable of these bands would be the English grindcore pioneers Napalm Death, known for their anarchist, antifascist, and environmentalist politics. In response to the alarming number of racist skinheads they observed attending their shows in the United States in the 1990s, Napalm Death began performing a cover of the song “Nazi Punk’s Fuck

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<sup>1</sup> Shane Burley, “Black Metal for the Oppressed,” *Protean Magazine*, July 21, 2019, <https://proteanmag.com/2019/07/21/black-metal-for-the-oppressed/>. Kim Kelly is a journalist, activist, and author of the book *Fight Like Hell: The Untold Story of American Labor* (New York: One Signal Publishers / Atria, 2022).

Off” by the hardcore band the Dead Kennedys at every show, a tradition that they still continue.<sup>2</sup> In her book *Heavy Metal Music, Texts, and Nationhood: (Re)Sounding Whiteness*, popular music scholar Catherine Hoad observes that scholarship on metal and left-wing politics tends to focus on specific bands, like Napalm Death, who draw inspiration from other genres, such as punk (e.g. grindcore) and rap.<sup>3</sup> She goes on to assert, “it is crucial to acknowledge the ways in which both bands *and scene members* have been able to utilise the communicative and infrastructural frameworks of metal to assert anti-fascist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-misogynistic positions.”<sup>4</sup> Following Hoad’s recommendation, this chapter analyzes how antifascist musicians play with the aesthetic conventions of black metal to convey messages of resistance.

At the time of writing, this chapter is one of the few pieces of scholarly writing on antifascism in the metal scene, at least in the English language. My work offers a new perspective because I focus on antifascism as a shared political orientation among musicians,

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<sup>2</sup> Barney Greenway, “NAPALM DEATH - Barney Greenway on Taking on the Skinheads,” interviewed by *Sense Music Media*, recorded in 2020, YouTube video, 2:40, posted on July 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhQ38JdcNnM>. For more background about Napalm Death’s politics and activism, see Kim Kelly, “Napalm Death’s Barney Greenway Still Hates Fascists and Will Wear a Justin Bieber T-Shirt to Prove It,” *Vice*, January 23, 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/64ydng/napalm-death-barney-greenway-interview>; and Nick Ruskell, “They’ll Always Fight Fascists, but Napalm Death Is About More Than Politics,” *Kerrang!*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.kerrang.com/theyll-always-fight-fascists-but-napalm-death-is-about-more-than-politics/>.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Niall Scott, “Heavy Metal and the Deafening Threat of the Apolitical,” *Popular Music History* 6, no. 1–2 (2012): 224–39; and Gabby Riches, “Use Your Mind? Embodiments of Protest, Transgression, and Grotesque Realism in British Grindcore,” in *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies*, ed. Andy R. Brown et al. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 125–42.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Hoad, *Heavy Metal Music, Texts, and Nationhood: (Re)Sounding Whiteness* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 228–29. Emphasis is my own. That being said, even though the artists and fans I write about are members of the black metal scene, which is significant in and of itself, the influences of and collaborations with members of the hardcore punk scene should not be overlooked. For example, the antifascist music festival, Black Flags Over Brooklyn, in 2019 featured both extreme metal and hardcore bands. Many of the artists collaborated and released a benefit album titled *Riffs for Reproductive Justice* to raise money for abortion access. See Black Flags Over Brooklyn, *Riffs for Reproductive Justice*, Bandcamp, released July 2, 2019, <https://blackflagsoverbrooklyn.bandcamp.com/album/riffs-for-reproductive-justice>. This festival will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

fans, metal media, and other scene participants, and how this growing phenomenon is impacting the scene. I also discuss recent instances in which metal musicians have used their platforms to raise awareness about social justice causes, such as Black Lives Matter and gender inequality, but I also approach this topic from an angle that has not received as much scholarly attention: I analyze ways in which members of the metal scene are confronting and fighting fascism, racism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression *within* the scene.

In this chapter I examine different facets of this growing trend toward anti-racism and antifascism and analyze how these oppositional voices are contesting the scene's white racial frame. I focus primarily on the black metal because the largest percentage of racist and antisemitic metal bands belong to this scene, and it is also where the most resistance is happening. In an interview with *Subterráneo Webzine*, a member of the international Antifascist Black Metal Network (ABM Network) explained,

Even more than other social spheres [black metal] is a culture affected most by fascist entryism, both consciously by political agitators and unconsciously by people who may not even consider themselves fascists but still fall under its ideological influence and help spread its social aspects and aesthetics, who are just as important.<sup>5</sup>

I discuss the growing collaborative efforts and impact of the ABM Network and other like-minded activists as they combat not only the most extreme and overt manifestations of white supremacy in the scene, but also its more insidious and pervasive effects. Much of the information in this chapter regarding the ABM Network I learned from conducting interviews

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<sup>5</sup> "Antifascist Black Metal Network," interview by Irene Lopez, *Subterráneo Webzine*, April 3, 2022, <https://subterraneowebzine.com/abmn/>. The historian Alexander Reid Ross defines *entryism* as a "Trotskyist strategy" that some fascists have "commandeered... entering groups (particularly in the green movement) and either turning them toward their [fascist] ideology or destroying them from within." See Alexander Reid Ross, "A Brief But Very Informative History of How Fascists Infiltrated Punk and Metal," *Vice*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/mbbg9p/a-brief-but-very-informative-history-of-how-fascists-infiltrated-punk-and-metal>.



with two of the network's members. Because I am, to my knowledge, the first scholar to speak directly with the network, my work offers new and valuable insights into how some members of the metal scene are coming together and taking organized action against neo-Nazism and other forms of bigotry and violence.

In the first part of this chapter, I provide details gleaned from my interviews about how the network formed, its demographics, its day-to-day operations, and future plans that are not available through published media. The interviews I conducted also allow me to expand on already published interviews and social media posts regarding the network's mission and views about how white supremacy became such a significant problem in black metal and the various ways in which it shapes the scene's social dynamics. Even though network members unite under the same general goal to make the metal scene a more inclusive place, my conversations reveal differences in members' political orientations, opinions in their approaches to fighting fascism, and ideal visions for the future of metal. Lastly, drawing on concepts from linguistic anthropology and genre theory, I analyze the myriad ways that antifascist black metal bands manipulate and recontextualize generic conventions as acts of resistance. I focus specifically on the music of Neckbeard Deathcamp and Feminâzgul.

Much of this dissertation thus far has examined how the metal scene's white racial frame has been constructed and the various ways in which it is maintained, a process that continues to marginalize scene participants who do not benefit from the white patriarchal hierarchy. This chapter will show that many of the ways that antifascist activists in metal interpret covert racializing discourses mirror my own analysis discussed in previous chapters. Because resistance can travel through many different pathways and look or sound differently, I will take a semiotic

approach. Doing so allows me to untangle exactly what is being communicated, how it is being communicated, and how people might interpret it.

Ideologies held by the extreme right and antifascists are not monolithic. The previous chapter outlined the various ways that white supremacist bands express their ideologies, and this chapter will show a similar degree of variety of beliefs on the left. The diversity in opinions across the political spectrum needs to be recognized and differentiated, so that we can speak about these political movements as accurately as possible and in order to fight white supremacy more effectively. Additionally, examining leftist opposition within the metal scene can shed light on this same type of political activism taking place in society more broadly. The information that I present in this chapter demonstrates that, contrary to claims by some US media outlets and politicians, not all antifascists resort to violence and property destruction, not all of them are anarchists, and they do not operate as a centralized organization. Because the antifascist movement is such a new phenomenon within the metal scene, it raises important questions as to how this will impact the scene, what it means for the future of metal, and whether these efforts can eventually weaken or even erase black metal's associations with white supremacy.

### **3.1 RABM and the Antifascist Black Metal Network**

Before the Antifascist Black Metal Network formed, there was already a distinct red and anarchist black metal (RABM) scene. RABM is a loose subgenre that represents and promotes the antifascist movement in the black metal scene. Like NSBM, RABM is a category more so defined by its left-wing political orientations than a set of musical conventions. Black metal bands operating under the antifascist banner tend to draw on the conventions of other genres in

addition to black metal, such as symphonic music, neofolk, grindcore, and anarchist crust punk.<sup>6</sup> One of the first known black metal bands to incorporate antifascist themes into their music is Profecium from Argentina. Their views were first apparent in their 1997 album *Socialismo satánico* with track titles such as “Proletarios unidos,” “Terrorismo de estado,” and “Cruz fascista.”<sup>7</sup> Like antifascist black metal bands that would later form in the 2000s, Profecium’s anger is directed at institutionalized oppression, but it does not appear to be a reaction against a National Socialist presence in the scene as we see with later bands. It is also not apparent that they comment on the history of Nazis escaping to Argentina after the Second World War, at least not in their song lyrics. In the decades that followed, hundreds of other antifascist black metal bands formed in various countries.<sup>8</sup>

The number of US-based RABM bands has grown exponentially since 2016 in response to Donald Trump’s presidency, but the RABM label has been around for much longer.<sup>9</sup> It first

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<sup>6</sup> Neofolk is an experimental style that fuses musical features of folk and industrial music. Incorporating abrasive, mechanical sounds and themes, this latter genre is a blend of rock, metal, and electronic music. Like black metal, it, too, has problems with fascism and neo-Nazism and a burgeoning antifascist countermovement. See Karl Spracklen, “Nazi Punks Folk Off: Leisure, Nationalism, Cultural Identity and the Consumption of Metal and Folk Music,” *Leisure Studies* 32, no. 4 (August 1, 2013): 415–28; Benjamin Teitelbaum, “Silence Is Violence: Reactionary Retreat and the Politics of Voicelessness” (AMS-SEM-SMT Joint Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, November 12, 2022); *A Blaze Anszuz: Antifascist Neofolk* (blog), <https://antifascistneofolk.com/>.

Crust punk derives from anarcho-punk, a genre defined more by its anarchist themes and aesthetics than a uniform musical sound. The label “crust” is a description of the genre’s signature timbre characterized by dirty distortion and heavy bass. A style derivative of crust punk, grindcore is a fusion of extreme metal styles like thrash and death metal and hardcore punk. Artists in the latter two genres tend to share in RABM’s leftist and often pessimistic lyrical themes. Besides anarchy and Marxism, other related topics include environmentalism, identity politics, and anti-capitalism.

<sup>7</sup> Rodrigo Barchi, “As ecologias políticas e infernais do Red and Anarchist Black Metal,” *ClimaCom Magazine*, April 2018, <http://climacom.mudancasclimaticas.net.br/as-ecologias-politicas-e-infernais-do-red-and-anarchist-black-metal-2/>. Song titles translate to English as “United Proletarians,” “State Terrorism,” and “Fascist Cross.”

<sup>8</sup> To view an extensive database of RABM artists titled “Do You Hear the People Scream?”, access the link via George Parr, “Curating Resistance: The Ultimate List of Anti-Fascist Bands,” *Astral Noize* (blog), January 31, 2022, <https://astralnoizeuk.com/2022/01/31/curating-resistance-the-ultimate-list-of-anti-fascist-bands/>.

<sup>9</sup> According to the leftist music journalist and activist Kim Kelly, the issue of far-right extremism in the US metal scene was especially scrutinized in 2020 in response to the “fascist rhetoric of Donald Trump” during that year’s election cycle and to the murder of George Floyd, an African American man murdered by a Minneapolis, MN,

appeared as the title of an anonymous blog in 2008; the online community formed through this blog eventually migrated to Reddit in 2019.<sup>10</sup> While this platform is primarily a space for discussing RABM, it also includes posts about artists from across the metal spectrum and closely related heavy music genres, such as blackened crust punk, neofolk, and industrial, as long as they express far-left views like anarchism, Marxism, or libertarian socialism. Authors also post about groups that are sympathetic to the leftist cause but are not public about their views, perhaps to signal to readers that these bands are safe to support because they most likely do not have ties with white supremacy. The blog contains a Q&A section in which the facilitators explain that their general underlying political orientation is anarchist but clarify that the RABM scene is quite ideologically diverse. The bloggers also explain that RABM is not a mere reaction against NSBM, but a “self-sufficient movement.”<sup>11</sup> This assertion was supported in my interview with members of the ABM Network.

The ABM Network came together both as a symptom of the RABM scene and to strengthen it.<sup>12</sup> Their official online presence began in 2021 with platforms on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Bandcamp, and their own website. I was able to learn more about the network’s establishment, goals, and beliefs through an interview that I conducted with two of its

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police officer. See Kim Kelly, “Inside Heavy Metal’s Battle Against White Supremacy,” *Esquire*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a34633291/heavy-metal-nazi-anti-fascist-movement/>.

<sup>10</sup> See *RABM* (blog), [r-a-b-m.blogspot.com](http://r-a-b-m.blogspot.com); and “r/rabm,” <https://www.reddit.com/r/rabm/>. There are also a handful of Facebook groups devoted to discussing RABM bands and vetting bands that may have ties to white supremacy: “Is it fash: the musical,” Facebook page, created on May 2, 2019, 4,757 members, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/430621124361511>; “The People’s Black Metal Necro Posting,” Facebook page, created on March 11, 2018, 4,467 members, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/418170178623002>; “Black Metal Necro Posting,” Facebook page, created on September 15, 2017, 6,009 members, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/172959486604296>. Each of these Facebook pages experiences daily activity.

<sup>11</sup> “FAQ,” *RABM* (blog), [r-a-b-m.blogspot.com](http://r-a-b-m.blogspot.com).

<sup>12</sup> “Antifascist Black Metal Network,” interview by Irene Lopez, *Subterráneo Webzine* (blog), April 3, 2022, <https://subterraneowebzine.com/abmn/>.

members: karol tolstoy from Brazil and Cabal from Cyprus, who was also active in the Athens, Greece, metal scene for quite some time.<sup>13</sup> For clarity's sake, Cabal uses he/him pronouns and tolstoy uses they/them pronouns; when referring to tolstoy using their pronouns, I will use a singular verb when I am able to distinguish from when I am referring to both tolstoy and Cabal.

Cabal and tolstoy were both activists in the labor movements in their respective countries before the network formed. Cabal and tolstoy started listening to metal music when they were teens, but they both separated themselves from the scene at some point. tolstoy admitted they made this decision because there was a mounting problem with neo-Nazism, homophobia, and misogyny in his hometown of Niterói, near Rio de Janeiro, and Cabal became more involved with the anarcho-punk scene because its politics more closely aligned with his own. Soon, however, after reconnecting with some in their local black metal scenes and joining online leftist black metal communities, Cabal and tolstoy realized that there were others that also took issue with neo-Nazism and other oppressive ideologies circulating the scene, so they and other like-minded individuals eventually decided to act. According to tolstoy, the ABM Network officially came together in 2021 when they wrote a petition for metalheads against police brutality in response to an incident that happened in Greece in which a young man, Aris Papazacharoudakis, was beaten and tortured in police captivity.<sup>14</sup> tolstoy shared that a surprising number of bands signed the petition; someone who signed it contacted them and the network formed shortly

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<sup>13</sup> Cabal and karol tolstoy (members, Antifascist Black Metal Network), interview by author, Zoom call, November 6, 2022. The lower case “k” and “t” in “karol tolstoy” are intentional. These names are pseudonyms given to the author by the interviewees.

<sup>14</sup> tolstoy (member, Antifascist Black Metal Network), interview by author, Zoom call, November 6, 2022. For more information on the police brutality case, see “Greece: Authorities Abusing Power to Trample on Right to Protest,” Amnesty International, July 14, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/greece-authorities-abusing-power-to-trample-on-right-to-protest/>.

thereafter.

### **3.1.1 Who are they?**

In an interview with *Subterráneo Webzine*, a member of the ABM Network described it as a collective of artists, fans, producers, journalists, and activists who are “fed up with how the extreme underground, particularly in black metal, is a festering recruitment ground for the far-right.”<sup>15</sup> I learned more about the network’s demographics during my interview with Cabal and tolstoy. Composed of around twenty people in mostly their thirties and forties, the network has always been internationally based with over half of the members living in (mostly southern) Europe, as well as Brazil, the United States, and Israel/occupied Palestine. Cabal and tolstoy explained that they only have one member from an Asian country (Malaysia) due to language barriers and the fact that there is not much interaction between bands in that part of the world and those outside of Asia. They have also had little contact in Africa, with zero members and connections with only one band from that continent.<sup>16</sup> When asked about other ways to describe the network’s demographics, tolstoy responded, “Metal in general is a very male dominated genre, but we’ve made a conscious effort to try to balance that feel a bit more in this case. So, I say we have not necessarily in number, but the most active people are either [*sic*] women – trans or cis. I’m non-binary.”<sup>17</sup> They also estimated that most of the network’s members are white, or at least they are perceived as white in their home country, but they were careful to point out to me that they might not be considered as such in the United States.

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<sup>15</sup> “Antifascist Black Metal Network” interview by Irene Lopez.

<sup>16</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview by author.

<sup>17</sup> tolstoy, interview by author.

### **3.1.2 On recruiting**

Members of the ABM Network consider themselves to be more of a collective rather than an organization because they are not unified under one political ideology, even though they are all dedicated to fighting fascism in black metal. Most of the network members are anarchists, but some identify with political parties, such as tolstoy, who is a Trotskyist.<sup>18</sup> They are always open to new members, but current members do consider differences in political orientation before inviting someone into the group to determine whether these differences will hinder progress towards the network's goals. While there is no such thing as being an official "member" of the network, essentially, if someone is granted access to the network's private server and participates in network efforts and activities, they are considered a member.<sup>19</sup>

The network does not actively recruit members; rather, people who are interested in joining or know someone who wants to join are encouraged to approach the network to ask about membership. tolstoy told me that the network tries to remain as anonymous as possible due to the dangerous nature of fighting fascists and exposing other abusive behaviors perpetrated by scene members (and active recruiting would draw too much attention).<sup>20</sup> Besides Cabal and tolstoy, who participate in the network as activists and fans, the only other person who I have confirmed

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<sup>18</sup> tolstoy, interview with author. There are two Trotskyist political parties in Brazil: Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado [United Socialist Workers' Party] and Partido de Causa Operária [Workers' Cause Party]. There are also three active Trotskyist organizations: Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução [Freedom, Socialism and Revolution], Democracia Socialista [Socialist Democracy], and Corrente Socialista dos Trabalhadores [Socialist Workers' Current]. I do not know to which party tolstoy belongs.

<sup>19</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview with author.

<sup>20</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview with author.

to be part of the network is Wolf Boy of the one-man band Anarchist Wolves based in Albuquerque, New Mexico.<sup>21</sup> Although neither Cabal nor tolstoy have personally experienced physical violence because of their work with the network, the network as a whole was recently physically threatened. They did not wish to elaborate on the details in our interview. Additionally, because members of the network are frequently harassed online, anonymity is designed to prevent them from being doxed.<sup>22</sup> Cabal further explained to me that the need for anonymity as a network member can vary based on where one lives; while he was not too concerned for his safety in his home country, he told me that if he lived in the United States he would have taken more precautions to hide his identity in our interview, such as wearing a mask.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.1.3 Liberating black metal: the mission**

The ABM Network's Facebook bio describes them as an "extreme musical vessel standing against racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism or any oppression."<sup>24</sup> The network promotes antifascist artists to spread their messages and attract fans with similar political stances, and they come to the aid of artists and fans under attack by fascists, whether it is online, verbally, or physically. Because the network members are spread out across several

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<sup>21</sup> Anarchist Wolves, "We are now (appropriately) a member of the Antifascist Black Metal Network. They were kind enough to share our song GAZA on their youtube page (A)," Facebook, February 8, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/anarchistwolves/>.

<sup>22</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview with author. Doxing is a form of targeted harassment. It is the act of posting someone's personal identifying information on the internet, such as their real name, home or work address, or phone number to incite others to join the doxer's harassment campaign.

<sup>23</sup> Cabal, interview with author.

<sup>24</sup> "Antifascist Black Metal Network," Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/antifascistbmnetwork>. As of March 11, 2023, this page has approximately 7,100 followers.



countries, the most effective way for them to help their comrades is through financial support and providing them with an online platform where they can safely speak their minds. In certain cases, however, the network knows of some antifascist factions in local metal scenes that they can coordinate with if someone needs physical protection.<sup>25</sup> They especially aim to support and favor minoritized artists, such as women, people of color, and those in the LGBTQIA+ community. Black metal has never had any organized resistance against oppression in all its various forms, even though a strongly established fascist web has existed since almost the beginning of the genre's creation. The scene and its music are an effective recruiting tool and breeding ground for fascism, so the ABM Network finds it especially vital to promote oppositional voices in this type of space.

The ABM Network's Instagram page explains their mission in more detail, clarifying that they came together not only as a reaction against National Socialist black metal, but also to expose "problematic behaviors" within the scene that have become "normalized and accepted for the sake of so-called subversion, provocation, nihilism or whatever edgy argument is used to obscure the fact that such attitudes work in favor of maintaining the status quo."<sup>26</sup> The network does not focus their energies on fighting only National Socialism and facism, but also the abusive behaviors in the scene such as violence against women, homophobia, and transphobia, some of which can be direct consequences of these oppressive ideologies.<sup>27</sup> In this same Instagram post, the network argues puts forth an argument that mirrors my own assertions in the previous chapter of this dissertation about how the Norwegian scene in the early 1990s created a

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<sup>25</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview with author.

<sup>26</sup> antifascist\_bm\_network, Instagram, May 13, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CO0cr13HM59/>.

<sup>27</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview with author.

space that tolerates and even welcomes white supremacy: “There’s no doubt that [these problematic behaviors have] a lot to do with Black Metal’s genesis and history, mainly in the Scandinavian scene, built upon the fantasies of male and white european [sic] superiority.”<sup>28</sup>

Cabal elaborated on this idea in our interview when I asked him why and how he thinks the black metal scene became a haven for neo-Nazi activity:

It didn’t start as a Nazi genre, but it was the most welcoming one, the most vulnerable one to what we like to call the crypto-fascist creep. The cultural fascist creep because fascism doesn’t just spread with pure political work. It spreads also through culture, through displays, through aesthetics, through people glorifying militarism or Riefenstahl-like aesthetics or rhetoric and so on, and insisting it’s apolitical and it’s just aesthetics, but it’s not. And this thinking is so prevalent in metal and it’s so much more prevalent in black metal. It was like rolling a red carpet and calling out to actual Nazis... ‘Hey, here we are, we’re ready for the picking, come get us.’ And they did.<sup>29</sup>

An unnamed member of the network in a separate interview with a media outlet echoed Cabal’s concerns: “Even more than other social spheres [black metal] is a culture affected most by fascist entryism, both consciously by political agitators and unconsciously by people who may not even consider themselves fascists but still fall under its ideological influence and help spread its social aspects and aesthetics, who are just as important.”<sup>30</sup>

These comments highlight that fascist ideologies did not take root in the black metal scene only because of explicit racist and antisemitic rhetoric and distribution of neo-Nazi propaganda. Because some members of the early Norwegian scene glorified Hitler and the Third

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<sup>28</sup> antifascist\_bm\_network, Instagram, May 13, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Cabal, interview with author. For a detailed definition of crypto-fascism, see fn. 39 of Chapter Two. Leni Riefenstahl was a German film director, photographer, and actress who gained international acclaim for directing the Nazi propaganda films *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) and *Olympia*, released in 1935 and 1938, respectively.

<sup>30</sup> “Antifascist Black Metal Network,” interview with Irene Lopez.

Reich or expressed white supremacist views more generally, even if the argument could be made that they were only doing it to add another layer to their transgressive behaviors, they “roll[ed] a red carpet, calling out to actual Nazis.” Those who continue traditions such as displaying neo-Nazi icons for shock value or the more subtle pagan symbols that index white nationalism ensure that the scene will continue to operate as a space where NSBM can thrive.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the ABM Network has no intention of cutting ties with these thorny Scandinavian roots. Instead, they present themselves as a group fighting to emancipate the musical genre that they love from fascist influences, and who will no longer tolerate sharing a space with people who hold these oppressive ideologies. Their Instagram post that I referenced previously concludes with a definitive statement as to what this network stands for and what their goals are for the black metal scene:

We’re here to claim back and liberate a powerful and passionate musical style, to express anger towards an oppressive system, to scream about the need of social change. The Antifascist Black Metal Network is a platform for Black Metal enthusiasts who do not wish to be promoted among sketchy and ambiguous bands at best, at worst openly fascist ones. It’s a resource for people who wish to discover and enjoy new Black Metal without having to double-check for its histories and positions.<sup>32</sup>

### **3.2 Antifascist action**

Within the past three to four years, the ABM Network and other activists in the metal scene have taken concrete action to begin to realize their vision for a more inclusive space (with the exception of fascists). Some have organized concerts and small festivals to reclaim or

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<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion about the various neo-Nazi and pagan signs that I have come across in my research on white supremacy in metal, refer to Chapter Two.

<sup>32</sup> antifascist\_bm\_network, Instagram, May 13, 2021.

reimagine the metal scene as a space that will not stand for racism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression. The network and several other activists have also recently released compilation albums to show solidarity and spread their antifascist messages, as well as to raise funds for social justice causes outside of the scene. Especially in the United States, antifascists have also had some success with protesting the shows of bands with ties to National Socialism, causing owners of venues to cancel their performances to protect both their property and reputations. These types of actions, combined with the antifascist push to take up space vocally and visibly on various online social media platforms frequented by metalheads like Facebook and Twitter, have slowly begun to redetermine who finds belonging in this space, to redefine what black metal sounds like, and to reconstitute the black metal scene as a more inclusive space.

One of the first events in the spirit of this burgeoning leftist movement was the anti-fascist, anti-racist Black Flags Over Brooklyn Festival in 2019, organized by Kim Kelly, who was quoted in this chapter's epigraph. With a lineup of fifteen bands from the U.S., Canada, and the UK, this was a chance for like-minded people to come together and loudly reassert ownership over the scene and openly commit to a zero-tolerance stance for fascism and racism.<sup>33</sup> Several of the bands were fronted by women, transgender, and non-binary people. In addition to the musical acts, the festival also hosted a vendor market with free public admission featuring several antifascist publishers, local activist organizations, and artists. One moment that perfectly encapsulated the spirit of the festival was the performance of punk band's Aus-Rotten's "Fuck Nazi Sympathy" by the Denver-based metal band Glacial Tomb, with lyrics like "Don't respect something that has no respect. Don't give them their freedom because they're not going to give

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<sup>33</sup> Colin Moynihan, "Heavy Metal Confronts Its Nazi Problem," *New Yorker*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/heavy-metal-confronts-its-nazi-problem>.

you yours.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the lyrics tell listeners not to respect neo-Nazis’ rights to free speech, because they do not respect the rights of others. Aligning with the mission of the ABM Network, this festival was not just taking aim at fascism and National Socialism, but also at any type of marginalization or violence that might make someone feel unwelcome in the metal scene. For example, Glacial Tomb also performed one of their songs, “Drowned,” which they dedicated to survivors of sexual assault. The lead singer of Cloud Rat, Madison Marshall, explained that one of their songs was about her struggle with body image. One member of the duo Vile Creature performed tracks from their album *A Steady Descent Into the Soil*, which they have shared is about “the hatred and violence that queer persons, female-identified persons, and non-cis-gendered persons are subjected to on a regular basis, and [their] experiences with that.”<sup>35</sup>

According to Kelly, this event was meant to show that “metal is for everyone (except Nazis).”<sup>36</sup> Kelly further explains, “Zero tolerance is the only approach that makes sense when it comes to cleaning up the scene, and it’s been incredible to witness more and more metalheads standing up to say as much, online and in a song.”<sup>37</sup> The Black Flags Over Brooklyn Festival created an offline, physical space where artists and fans who have adopted this zero-tolerance stance could connect and celebrate the music that they love without having to worry that they

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<sup>34</sup> Moynihan, “Heavy Metal Confronts Its Nazi Problem.” There is no video or audio recording available of Glacial Tomb performing this song. To hear a recording of this song by Aus-Rotten, see Aus-Rotten, “Aus-Rotten // Fuck Nazi Sympathy,” 1994, YouTube video, 1:47, posted in 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_mju7LAvqjU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mju7LAvqjU). To read the full lyrics, see “Fuck Nazi Sympathy – Aus-Rotten,” Genius, accessed on December 17, 2022, <https://genius.com/Aus-rotten-fuck-nazi-sympathy-lyrics>.

<sup>35</sup> Hank Shteamer, “Brooklyn Anti-Fascist Metal Fest Was a Beacon for a Troubled Scene,” *Rolling Stone*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-live-reviews/black-flags-over-brooklyn-kim-kelly-anti-fascist-metal-fest-785088/>.

<sup>36</sup> Kim Kelly, “Why I Booked an Anti-Fascist Metal Festival,” *Vice*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/a3bd7b/why-i-booked-an-anti-fascist-metal-festival>.

<sup>37</sup> Kelly, “Why I Booked an Anti-Fascist Metal Festival.”

were supporting a band who promotes messaging antithetical to their political and moral values. This type of gathering also serves to invigorate the movement and to make it more visible to the metal scene as a whole. Bands that participated in Black Flags Over Brooklyn also released an album titled *Riffs for Reproductive Justice*, donating 100% of proceeds to the National Network of Abortion Funds and the Yellowhammer Fund.<sup>38</sup> As of 2022, the compilation is available for free, but the artists still encourage listeners to donate to an abortion fund.

This album and festival showcase collaborations between antifascist artists across genres. Even though the purpose of this festival was to call attention to and take up arms against fascism and white supremacy in the metal scene specifically, some of the bands on the roster are categorized as other distinct styles of heavy music, such as hardcore punk, power electronics, and noise. This phenomenon of cross-genre participation to promote a unified political message is also taking place in far-right circles of heavy music. When gathering information for my database discussed earlier in this chapter, I observed a significant number of white supremacist metal bands releasing split EPs and albums with artists from these other heavy music genres. These collaborations demonstrate that far-right extremism is not a problem unique to the metal scene alone; rather, it is one that permeates heavy music on a much larger scale. Members of the far right and left in metal have most likely realized that there is strength in numbers and networking with artists of the same political persuasion in adjacent music scenes can further propel their respective movements forward.

The ABM Network also released the first of many promised compilation albums in January of 2022 called *Black Metal ist Klassenkrieg* [*Black Metal is Class War*] to financially

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<sup>38</sup> *Riffs for Reproductive Justice*, Bandcamp.

support two activist groups currently facing persecution by their governments, primarily with their legal fees. The title of the album satirizes the oppressive “black metal ist krieg,” a phrase popularized by an album of the band Nargaroth released through No Colours Records, a label notorious for working with National Socialist bands. On the network’s Bandcamp page, they promise that this benefit album is the first of many: “We have come to take fire and frostbitten hell to fascism, capitalism and oppression of any kind. Beware, o Nazis north and south, for our maces shall soon find thine skulls!”<sup>39</sup> The first group that they donated funds to was Mexicali Resiste, a movement that originated in 2018 in Mexicali, the capital of Baja California, Mexico. This group of activists came together to protest the opening of a major brewery by Constellation Brands, known for beers like Corona and Modelo, because their production was estimated to rely on nearly 2 billion gallons of water annually, even though there were already water shortage issues in the region. Furthermore, this new brewery would serve mostly consumers in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Mass protests eventually led to President López Obrador to rescind Constellation Brands’s construction permits and water rights for this project in 2020. Soon after this victory, the Baja California state congress decided to reopen a case charging the activists with criminal conduct. In addition to financially assisting the Mexican activists in fighting their criminal charges, *Black Metal ist Klassenkrieg* also raised funds to cover legal fees for three anarchists in Italy who, as part of the police’s “Operation Prometeo,” were accused of terrorism and

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<sup>39</sup> Antifascist Black Metal Network, “Black Metal Ist Klassenkrieg!!!,” Bandcamp, January 7, 2022, <https://antifascistblackmetalnetwork.bandcamp.com/album/black-metal-ist-klassenkrieg>. A number of bands also collaborated on several benefit compilation albums in response to the murder of George Floyd in 2020, donating funds to Black Lives Matter and other anti-racism activist organizations. Examples of such albums include *Overgrow to Overthrow*, *Shut It Down*, *19 Notes on a Broken System*, and the *BLM Collective Vol. 1* by the We Stand collective.

<sup>40</sup> For more information about this movement, see Alex Zaragoza, “As Big Beer Moves in, Activists in Mexicali Fight To Keep Their Water,” *NPR*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2018/03/26/596448290/as-big-beer-moves-in-activists-in-mexicali-fight-to-keep-their-water>.

imprisoned for years without being officially convicted of any crime.<sup>41</sup> They were eventually acquitted but have a staggering amount of debt from legal fees.

### **3.3 “Nobody’s a Nazi here”: Crypto-fascists and “cancel culture”**

In addition to benefit albums and concerts, the ABM Network and other leftist activists have had significant success in recent years in forcing venues and festivals to cancel performances by bands with neo-Nazi ties and those they determine to be crypto-fascists. In this section I present three such instances as case studies: Marduk, Taake, and Horna, all esteemed Scandinavian black metal bands, were forced to cancel shows and tours in the United States during the past six years due to protest and potential for violence from local antifa activists. I chose these three incidents because these bands have never been labeled as outright NSBM, but there are still plenty of examples in their lyrics, album cover artwork, merchandise, and rhetoric that at least index white supremacist views. At the very least, there is enough about these bands’ aesthetics and public statements that signal covert sympathies with or indifference to neo-Nazism.

This section will highlight how antifascist activists are interpreting these signs circulating within the black metal scene and treating bands that use indices and covert discourse relating to white supremacy as just as problematic and intolerable as openly neo-Nazi bands. The criteria that antifascists use to evaluate whether a band is problematic often aligns with my own criteria that I drew on when determining whether to add a band to my database of white supremacist bands (outlined in Chapter Two of this dissertation), such as their affiliations with known neo-

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<sup>41</sup> For more information about this case, see InNero, “Italy: Prometeo Operation – Updates On the Ongoing Trial in Genoa,” mpalothia: antireport, July 13, 2021, <https://mpalothia.net/italy-prometeo-operation-updates-on-the-ongoing-trial-in-geoa/>.



Nazi groups, constant references to the Third Reich, and expressions of white nationalist slogans (e.g. “blood and honor”). I will also dissect some of the tactics used by these bands who exist in the “in-between” space to deny their affiliation with this ideology. These three case studies provide ample evidence that reflects the ABM Network’s mission to take aim at the hundreds of black metal bands that exist in this ambiguous space that grants them room for plausible deniability. Taake, Horna, and many other bands sew fascism into the cultural fabric of the black metal scene; regardless of their intentions, their artistic choices help to “spread [fascism’s] social aspects and aesthetics.”<sup>42</sup>

### **3.3.1 Case study #1: Marduk**

In 2017, the Oakland Metro Operahouse in Oakland, California, canceled the concert of Swedish black metal band Marduk at the behest of police who were concerned that the protests from the Anti-Fascist Action Bay Area group may turn violent.<sup>43</sup> This controversy highlights the conflicting opinions among members of the metal scene and the general public as to when a band’s artistic output and behaviors become problematic enough for them to be labeled as white supremacists. In a now deleted Facebook post, the Anti-Fascist Action group stated that they

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<sup>42</sup> “Antifascist Black Metal Network,” interview by Irene Lopez.

<sup>43</sup> Oakland police were on high alert when it came to leftist protests because shortly before the Marduk show was scheduled, a protest erupted on the UC Berkeley campus in response to an invited guest speaker, the right-wing pundit Milo Yiannopoulos, the then-editor of right-wing news organization *Breitbart*. See Madison Park and Kyung Lah, “Berkeley Protests of Yiannopoulos Caused \$100,000 in Damage,” *CNN*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/01/us/milo-yiannopoulos-berkeley/>.

According to historian Mark Bray, “Despite the media portrayal of a deranged, bloodthirsty antifa, or the alt-right petition that developed after the anti-Milo Yiannopoulos protest to have ‘antifa’ declared a terrorist organization (as if ‘antifa’ were even an organization, let alone terrorist), the vast majority of anti-fascist tactics *involve no physical violence whatsoever*.” When antifascists do engage in physical violence, Bray explains their three main justifications: 1) “rational debate” has never been an effective deterrent to the rise of fascism; 2) violence has successfully prevented or slowed fascist activities on numerous occasions since the end of the Second World War; and 3) self-defense. See Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* (Melville House, 2017), 168-69. Emphasis is my own.

objected to Marduk performing in their city: “[They are] a black metal band with known white supremacist ties... that profits off of glorifying Nazi imagery and songs about Nazi SS officers and anti-semitism.”<sup>44</sup> I will now outline and further contextualize the examples cited in the post.

Several of the band’s songs, album titles, and visuals reference the Third Reich and events relating to the Second World War. For instance, in their lyrics they often refer to the panzer, one of the German armored tank divisions in WWII, most famously in the title of their 1999 release *Panzer Division Marduk*.<sup>45</sup> By adding their band’s name to the album title, they imply that they are like a Panzer division. Their song “The Blond Beast” refers to a metaphor in *On the Genealogy of Morality* by Friedrich Nietzsche and the nickname of Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking SS officer who was one of the principal architects of the Holocaust.<sup>46</sup> The title of the album to which this song belongs, *Frontschwein*, is a German military slang term meaning “front pig,” or front-line soldier. The letter “o” of “Frontschwein” on the album’s cover has been replaced with an iron cross, a symbol commonly associated with the Nazi regime.<sup>47</sup> Marduk’s 2017 North American tour, which included this canceled Oakland show, was named after this album.<sup>48</sup>

According to Marduk’s founding member, Morgan Håkansson, the Third Reich and the

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<sup>44</sup> To read the full statement, see Joseph Schafer, “On Marduk & Antifa: The Heavy Metal Balkans,” *Invisible Oranges* (blog), March 1, 2017, <https://www.invisibleoranges.com/exclusive-interview-marduk-antifa-balkans/>.

<sup>45</sup> Schafer, “On Marduk & Antifa.”

<sup>46</sup> “Reinhard Heydrich: In Depth,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last modified May 17, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/reinhard-heydrich-in-depth>. Marduk also pays homage to Heydrich in their song “The Hangman of Prague” on their 2004 album *Plague Angel*.

<sup>47</sup> For further analysis for Marduk’s affinity for the Third Reich relating to their most recent album, see Rich Lowe, “Marduk’s *Viktoria* is the Latest Landmark in a Long-Standing Pattern of Far-Right Sympathy,” *Astral Noize* (blog), June 22, 2018, <https://astralnoizeuk.com/2018/06/22/marduks-viktoria-is-the-latest-landmark-in-a-long-standing-pattern-of-far-right-sympathy/>.

<sup>48</sup> Schafer, “On Marduk & Antifa.”

Second World War are “just another part of history” and Marduk is “better at writing soundtracks to those stories more than other stories in history.”<sup>49</sup> Even a mainstream media source, NBC Bay Area, weighed in on the concert cancellation, furthering the narrative that antifa protesters were overreacting. According to their report, the venue did investigate Marduk by reading several of their past interviews and found no evidence supporting accusations of white supremacy or nationalism, but still decided to call off the show under police advisement. NBC Bay Area also provided statements from upset fans decrying the canceled show, all of whom declared some version of claims that Marduk is not a racist band and “Nobody’s a Nazi here.”<sup>50</sup>

The band can argue that they are writing about these topics with a neutral voice, but many of the lyrics and imagery in Marduk’s albums still appear to index endorsements of white supremacy, antisemitism, and a genocide that took place in the not-so-distant past. Because their lyrics do not seem to express sympathy or respect for victims of the Holocaust, the antifascist protesters most likely interpret this approach as glorifying this event. Håkansson’s denials of Nazi sympathies are arguably a form of erasure as defined by Gal and Irvine.<sup>51</sup> In this case, Håkansson explains his band’s references to Nazism as neutral explorations of a dark historical topic, downplaying the more problematic interpretations of their artistic output by those protesting their show.

In their post decrying Marduk’s scheduled show, the Bay Area antifascists refer to their

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<sup>49</sup> Schafer, “On Marduk & Antifa.”

<sup>50</sup> Brendan Weber and Marianne Favro, “‘Nobody’s a Nazi Here’: Heavy Metal Fans Decry Cancellation of Band’s Oakland Gig,” *NBC Bay Area*, February 19, 2017, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/metal-band-marduk-oakland-metro-operahouse-canceled-threats/42807/>.

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed definition of erasure, see Chapter 1, 32.

live album *Warschau*, released in 2005 and named after a concentration camp that was located in Warsaw, Poland.<sup>52</sup> Its album artwork displays images of Nazi tanks plowing over war-torn Poland and an eagle that resembles the Nazi War Eagle developed by the party in the 1920s.<sup>53</sup> This album was preceded by a song of the same name on their 2004 album *Plague Angel*. The song's lyrics graphically depict the violence and destruction perpetrated by the Third Reich against marginalized populations, describing "Overkill supreme, bloodletting, sacrifice," and "annihilation, obliteration, cremation... genocide triumphant."<sup>54</sup> These lyrics are undoubtedly disturbing, but the lines that seemingly extol the strength and power of the Third Reich more likely call the band's neutrality to the subject into question: "Iron claws descent, ruling with supremacy" and "Panzerclaw retaliate, blood and dust."<sup>55</sup> Iron is a common association with the Third Reich, in reference to the famous Blut und Eisen (Blood and Iron) speech delivered by Otto von Bismark in 1862. The speech was a plea to the Prussian House of Representatives' Budget Committee to allocate more funds to the military to fight for a unified Germany, which could only be achieved through brute force (iron) and bloodshed. This mindset was adopted by Hitler and the Nazi regime.

*Plague Angel* also contains several other references that could index Nazi Germany and antisemitism. In addition to containing the track "The Hangman of Prague" about SS officer Reinhard Heydrich, it also contains a song titled "Blutrache," which translates as "blood

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<sup>52</sup> Schafer, "On Marduk & Antifa."

<sup>53</sup> Marduk, *Warschau*, Blooddawn Productions, 2005, <https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Marduk/Warschau/100486>.

<sup>54</sup> Marduk, "Warschau," track 8 on *Plague Angel*, Blooddawn Productions, 2004, [https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Marduk/Plague\\_Angel/58922](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Marduk/Plague_Angel/58922).

<sup>55</sup> Von Bismark was eventually crowned the first Imperial Emperor of the German Empire in 1871.

revenge.” *Blutrache* is an ancient Germanic form of punishment in which the entire family of a person suspected or convicted of a crime would be tortured, imprisoned, and/or executed. It was one of the many draconian tactics adopted by the Third Reich to terrorize people into submission.<sup>56</sup> Again, the lyrics to this song reference Panzer tanks, iron, and this time, the “black twelve-armed holy sun,” which is another sign that originated in Nazi Germany and has since been adopted by the neo-Nazi movement.<sup>57</sup>

### **3.3.2 Case study #2: Taake**

A year after the Marduk controversy, the Norwegian black metal band Taake was forced to abandon their North American tour in 2018 because all but two venues canceled their scheduled performances due to protests led by antifa activists. The most cited offense by both activists and media outlets covering these protests is the time that their frontman Hoest painted a swastika on his chest during a 2007 concert in Essen, Germany.<sup>58</sup> The ABM Network posted a Twitter thread in 2022 on behalf of the Anti-NSBM Paris Collective, who were also protesting a Taake performance in their city, which listed this offense as well as many others to support their condemnations of this band.<sup>59</sup> In defense of his swastika body art, Hoest maintained that Taake is

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<sup>56</sup> Carl Müller Frøland, *Understanding Nazi Ideology: The Genesis and Impact of a Political Faith* (McFarland, 2020), 263.

<sup>57</sup> Marduk, “Blutrache,” track 11 on *Plague Angel*, Blood Dawn Productions, 2004, [https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Marduk/Plague\\_Angel/58922](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Marduk/Plague_Angel/58922).

<sup>58</sup> “Taake Show Cancelled Following Antifa Protests; More Cancellations May Follow,” *MetalSucks*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2018/02/16/taake-show-cancelled-following-antifa-protests-more-cancellations-may-follow/>. Hoest is the only continuous member of Taake; he writes and records all their music.

<sup>59</sup> Antifascist Black Metal Network (@ABMNetwork), “Thread: Anti-NSBM Paris Collective. The French comrades would like us to pass on this communique about Taake’s upcoming shows. Please, read.,” first tweet in Twitter thread, August 20, 2022, 7:08 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ABMNetwork/status/1560946956519837703>. See this thread for several more examples of Taake’s problematic behaviors not referenced in this text.

not a political band, just transgressive: “everyone should know by now that our whole concept is built upon provocation and anything evil... we truly apologize to all of our collaborators who might get problems because of the Essen swastika scandal (except for the untermensch [*sic*] owner of that club; you can go suck a Muslim!)”<sup>60</sup> In addition to the obvious Islamophobia, as much as Hoest protests accusations of Nazism, he contradicts himself when he uses the word “Untermensch,” a derogatory term used by the Nazis to refer to populations they deemed racially or socially inferior. This is not the first time that Taake had expressed anti-Islam sentiments. In a song titled “Orkan” from the band’s 2011 album *Noregs vaapen (Norway’s Weapon)*, one line reads “Til Helvete med Muhammed og Muhammedanerne, utilgivelige skikker,” which translates to “To hell with Muhammad and Muhammadans, unforgivable customs.”<sup>61</sup> Hoest also wore a t-shirt during a 2013 show in Glasgow, Scotland, with the Islamic star and crescent symbol crossed out, along with an iron cross necklace.<sup>62</sup> The band also sold t-shirts as part of their merchandise that read “Anti-Islam” on the back.<sup>63</sup>

Similar to what happened when Marduk’s concert was canceled, some in the metal scene were outraged because they do not believe that Taake is as explicit or consistent with voicing their political agenda as bands they perceive to be actually NSBM. In the words of one journalist, “There’s *actual* Nazi rallies in [the United States] now. I think that’s more of a threat than a

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<sup>60</sup> “Taake Show Cancelled Following Antifa Protests.”

<sup>61</sup> Taake, “Orkan,” track 2 on *Noregs vaapen*, Svartekunst Produksjoner, 2011, [https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Taake/Noregs\\_vaapen/313967](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Taake/Noregs_vaapen/313967).

<sup>62</sup> Vince Neilstein, “The Problem with Taake Isn’t Just the Swastika Chest Paint Incident,” *MetalSucks*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2018/02/28/the-problem-with-taake-isnt-just-the-swastika-chest-paint-incident/>.

<sup>63</sup> antifascist\_bm\_network, “We won’t allow a Taake concert to take place. We gathered the following elements about the band,” Instagram [photo], August 20, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CheqO0BuwjZ/>.

mediocre band that did something stupid to be provocative years ago.”<sup>64</sup> Those in the antifascist movement feel differently: “As metal enjoyers and antifascists, we label Taake as an NSBM band because we understand how it is involved in spreading and promoting National Socialist Black Metal within our scenes. We believe this dynamic must be stopped.”<sup>65</sup> Although they do not elaborate on this claim in the Twitter thread, I interpret their argument to mean that, even though Hoest and his defenders continually deny that he is a neo-Nazi, his band’s lyrics, merchandise, rhetoric, and other behaviors all index this ideology. By classifying Taake as NSBM, antifa is expanding the meaning of what qualifies as NSBM in order to account for the hundreds of bands like Taake whose actions indicate neo-Nazi beliefs, but, like Marduk, who attempt to erase these associations with various denials and deflections.

### **3.3.3 Case study #3: Horna**

Following the cancellations of Marduk and Taake, Horna, a black metal band from Finland, had several US shows canceled in 2019 due to their ties to NSBM.<sup>66</sup> Even though their ties to NSBM and white supremacy are, to some in the metal scene at least, more out in the open

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<sup>64</sup> Neill Jameson, “Opinion: Cancelling Taake Shows Isn’t Helping Anyone,” *Decibel*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.decibelmagazine.com/2018/02/19/opinion-cancelling-taake-shows-isnt-helping-anyone/>. A blogger points out that Jameson’s centrist stance on this matter could be self-serving. His band Krieg once released a split EP with the Finnish NSBM band Satanic Warmaster that included racist language on the packaging. By excusing what he considers to be Taake’s isolated incidents of bigoted behaviors and rhetoric, he could also be defending his past actions. To read this entire counterargument against Jameson, see George Parr, “Cancelling Shows is a Necessity – Neo-Nazism Has No Place In Metal In 2018,” *Astral Noize* (blog), February 21, 2018, <https://astralnoizeuk.com/2018/02/21/cancelling-taake-shows-is-a-necessity/>.

<sup>65</sup> Antifascist Black Metal Network, “Thread: Anti-NSBM Paris Collective.”

<sup>66</sup> George Parr, “Nazi Ties and Cancelled Tours: The Problem with Horna’s Political Neutrality,” *Astral Noize* (blog), March 27, 2019, <https://astralnoizeuk.com/2019/03/27/nazi-ties-and-cancelled-tours-the-problem-with-hornas-political-neutrality/>; Jef Rouner, “Horna Gig Cancelled After Anti-Fascist Campaign,” *Houston Press*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.houstonpress.com/music/horna-gig-cancelled-after-anti-fascist-campaign-11267864>; Tarpley Hitt, “Antifa and Proud Boys Clash Over Black Metal Band With Alleged Nazi Ties,” *Daily Beast*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/horna-chaos-antifa-and-proud-boys-clash-over-black-metal-band-with-alleged-nazi-ties>.

when compared to Taake and Marduk, Horna denied these accusations in the same manner: “Regarding recent publicity, HORNA has never been and never will be anything but Satanic Black Metal. We judge every man and woman only by their demeanor, not by their race or sexual preferences. We have *zero interest in politics*, left or right.”<sup>67</sup> Without looking at the wider context surrounding the band, this statement could appear plausible. When considering the other projects and collaborations that band members have been involved in, their white supremacist ideologies come into focus. It is highly improbable that these men shed their racist views when performing with one band and then proudly proclaim them when performing with another.

For example, Horna’s guitarist Shatraug also belonged to the band Blutschrei (German for “blood scream”) who released an album in 2006 titled *The Voice of Forbidden Pride*, with songs like “White Agony” and “Fight to Win” preaching white nationalism. The latter song begins with the lyrics “Mother Europe, here I stand. A proud son today and a white father tomorrow.”<sup>68</sup> One of Shatraug’s solo projects, Finentum, is a continuation of Blutschrei, which disbanded in 2008. His most recent album, *Vapauden laulu* (2019), translates to “a song of freedom,” which could seem innocuous on the surface, but when read as an extension of Blutschrei’s ideologies, it echoes the former band’s cries for a “better world” and the “rising of a better Reich,” free from the “Rats” in power. All of these references are deeply antisemitic.<sup>69</sup> Not

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<sup>67</sup> Horna Official, Facebook, March 24, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/HornaOfficial/photos/a.194785967219632/2339514232746784/>. This post was in response to an exposé published by *MetalSucks*; see Axl Rosenberg, “Horna, Band with NSBM Ties, Scheduled to Begin U.S. Tour Next Week,” *MetalSucks*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2019/03/22/horna-band-with-nsbm-ties-scheduled-to-begin-u-s-tour-next-week/>. Emphasis is my own.

<sup>68</sup> Blutschrei, “Fight to Win,” track 4 on *The Voice of Forbidden Pride*, Hammerbund, 2006, [https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Blutschrei/The\\_Voice\\_of\\_Forbidden\\_Pride/117424](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Blutschrei/The_Voice_of_Forbidden_Pride/117424).

<sup>69</sup> Blutschrei, “Battle for Survival,” track 2 on *The Voice of Forbidden Pride*.



surprisingly, Shatraug was also the owner of Grievantee Productions, a label known for releasing albums by NSBM bands such as Kristallnacht and Hammer.

Horna's vocalist, Spellgoth, has played keyboards for the infamous French white supremacist band Peste Noire ("Black Plague"). Horna also released a split EP with Peste Noire through Debemur Morti Productions in 2007. Although the Peste Noire's founder, Famine, insists that they are "right-wing" anarchists, not National Socialist, the band's first demo tape is titled *Aryan Supremacy*, and they have performed at Asgardsrei, one of the largest and most popular NSBM festivals in the world.<sup>70</sup> In an interview with the NSBM label Militant Zone, a member of Peste Noire (most likely Famine) took a similar approach to many other bands accused of being neo-Nazis, splitting hairs over semantics:

To be specific, honest, and 100% accurate, PESTE NOIRE draws on the German Conservative Revolution discourse, the French New Right or say the Italian fascism in the spirit of Casa Pound. I am a racialist, an ethno-pluralist, absolutely against race mixing, but not a supremacist. Clearly, it is this last point that sets PESTE NOIRE apart from purely NS bands. Once this is made clear, my primary goal, no doubt is the defense of the white race and the expulsion (peaceful if possible) of non-Europeans from our lands. And on this essential point, NS bands are my first allies.<sup>71</sup>

Because Peste Noire's political and racial ideologies supposedly do not fully align with National Socialism, they portray themselves as victims of antifa's "witch hunt" through which they have been unfairly labeled NSBM, and, therefore, should not face the same repercussions as actual NSBM bands.

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<sup>70</sup> Asgardsrei was founded and organized annually by Militant Zone, a record label owned by Alexey Levkin of the Russian NSBM band M8J8TX. For a deeper look into what this festival entails and its impact on the international white power movement, see Vice, "Inside a Neo Nazi Music Festival," 2022, YouTube video, 7:32, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX9OjNy\\_NI&t=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX9OjNy_NI&t=6s).

<sup>71</sup> "Peste Noire – Interview and Collaboration," interview by Militant Zone, November 6, 2017, <http://militant.zone/kpn2017/>.

In examining the cases of these three bands, it becomes clear that combating white supremacy in the metal scene is not as simple as labeling all these bands as Nazis and shunning them. While it is promising that these long-established, influential bands are finally experiencing consequences for their political beliefs and sympathies, as expressed through various semiotic modalities, such outcry is not yet enough to oust bands like these from the scene because they still have a large pool of defenders, and their careers are still intact today. For many metal musicians and fans, even those who do not subscribe to far-right ideologies, the criteria for labeling a band as NSBM or racist is quite narrow. Unless a band explicitly expresses their racial ideologies, such by naming itself Aryan Blood or Final Solution or plastering swastikas and sun wheels across their albums and merchandise, much of the scene hesitates or outright refuses to classify them as racist. Bands like Marduk, Taake, and Horna exist in this so-called in-between space where their National Socialist ideologies are not as explicit as a group like Aryan Blood, but there is a significant amount of overlap. These three cases illustrate that the lines between white supremacy, National Socialism, and other forms of racism and bigotry can be murky. In order to come to reasonable conclusions about a band's intentions or how they might contribute to maintaining the scene's white racial frame, it is necessary to account for the totality of signs that they use across semiotic modalities relating to these oppressive ideologies, especially because of the covert nature in which much of white supremacy operates.

The continued support for and tolerance of bands like the ones presented here ensure the maintenance of the scene's white racial frame. Justifications of their behavior and expressions of white supremacist beliefs draw on the central frames of color-blind racism outlined by Eduardo

Bonilla-Silva, primarily through abstract liberalism and the minimization of racism.<sup>72</sup> Those in the metal scene who defend or associate with white supremacists and neo-Nazis typically abstract the liberal values of “equal treatment” (i.e. inclusivity) and “freedom of speech” to support their arguments. Furthermore, if someone does not appreciate this type of “artistry,” supporters argue that they have the freedom to not listen. The unwillingness of some participants in the metal scene to categorize a band as white supremacist or neo-Nazi, unless they appear to be the reincarnation of Adolf Hitler, minimizes the widespread and deep-seated issue of racism in metal. Issues of racism are further minimized and, therefore, more difficult to combat when these same scene members accuse those involved with antifa or who belong to marginalized populations of overreacting or exaggerating. The musicologist Benjamin Hillier offers perspective as to why it is just as dangerous to accept bands like Taake in the metal scene as it is to accept NSBM bands: “Arguing over whether or not Taake are ‘really an NSBM band’ is immaterial; Hoest’s actions contribute to an environment where even more extreme acts are safe to proselytize and recruit.”<sup>73</sup> All of these reactions align with the core tenet of color-blind racism, that racism only manifests in overt forms, which overlooks the more pervasive and concealed acts of racism that maintain the white racial frame.

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<sup>72</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 40-41. Abstract liberalism takes place when a broad idea from political or economic liberalism is recontextualized in an abstract fashion to explain racial issues. The minimization of racism is the idea that discrimination is no longer a main force that shapes the lives of minoritized populations.

<sup>73</sup> Ben Hillier, “Why Are Fascist, Nazi and Racist Bands Still Being Booked to Tour Australia in 2023?,” *Blunt Magazine*, January 9, 2023, <https://www.bluntmag.com.au/music/why-are-fascist-nazi-and-racist-bands-still-being-booked-to-tour-australia-in-2023/>.

### **3.5 Sonic resistance and recontextualization**

Antifascist black metal artists adopt a multitude of aesthetic approaches to expand the sonic possibilities for this genre and create a more inclusive space. The classification of raw black metal by black metal purists and elitists as “real” or “authentic” black metal establishes its musical conventions as the norm, or the genre’s register. In linguistic anthropology, *register* refers to a specific language style or linguistic norms associated with a type of person, stock character, or group.<sup>74</sup> I am applying the concept of linguistic register using a broader semiotic approach that accounts for different types of communicative acts, including musical sound. With their different approaches to and realizations of black metal, such as incorporating sounds that fall outside of its generic parameters, RABM bands are *troping*, or playing with the genre’s register.<sup>75</sup> Through troping, these bands draw attention to and provide implicit commentary on the musical, lyrical, and visual conventions of raw black metal, which may result in the listener reflecting upon what they take for granted as the norm. Furthermore, by using sounds both conventional and unconventional in raw black metal to promote leftist values and political movements, such as anti-racism, eco-anarchism, and reproductive justice, RABM bands reorient this genre from being one that indexes right-wing extremism and white supremacy to one that can also serve as a weapon in the fight for various social justice causes, both within and outside of the scene.

I will be analyzing the music of two RABM bands in this section—Neckbeard Deathcamp and Feminazgûl—and discussing how they play with the norms of raw black metal. I

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<sup>74</sup> Nikolas Coupland and Adam Jaworski, “Discourse,” in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, ed. Paul Cobley (Psychology Press, 2001), 137.

<sup>75</sup> Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 295.

will primarily examine the intertextual relationships between the aesthetics of these two bands and raw black metal conventions. The indices generated by intertextuality are powerful tools to draw on when setting genre boundaries, deeming who has the authority to determine a genre's boundaries and fundamental characteristics, and who is allowed to or worthy of participating in this type of music making.<sup>76</sup> To contest the seemingly impermeable boundaries of the black metal scene and to resist its white racial order, many RABM bands recontextualize the genre through the manipulation of its central characteristics in order to create new intertextual associations. Rather than guarding the gates to keep the scene white and male, adhering to generic conventions as homogenous as the scene's dominant demographic, antifascist bands often incorporate a wide array of sounds, styles, imagery, and thematic content in their music. By even referring to themselves as black metal bands in the first place within a genre that requires its artists to obey strict sonic standards to be considered "authentic," RABM bands are performing an act of resistance and undermining the authority bestowed upon raw black metal and its followers.

### **3.5.1 Case study #1: Neckbeard Deathcamp**

One method that some antifascist bands adopt to disrupt the boundaries of black metal and speak out against NSBM and white supremacy is the use of parody and dark humor. Taking the metal world by storm in 2018 with their debut album *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers*, US-based Neckbeard Deathcamp is the most (in)famous black metal parody band. While they do not officially affiliate with the antifascist movement, their work still aligns

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, "Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1992): 148.

with its political values, and according to one of their members who uses the alias Hatestürm, the bandmates participate in the antifascist movement as individuals through protesting, working with antifa-affiliated organizations, and “punch[ing] a shitload of racists in the head.”<sup>77</sup> Considering the acts of violence against white supremacists expressed in Neckbeard Deathcamp’s music, this last comment may or may not be hyperbole.

Neckbeard Deathcamp actually started out as a joke side project, and they were surprised when they actually gained notice, both through notoriety and popularity. Everything about their aesthetics is meant as a “satirical jab at the far-right,” both within and outside of the metal scene.<sup>78</sup> There are multiple visual, lyrical, and sonic layers to Neckbeard Deathcamp’s parody tactics, starting with the band’s name, which refers to a fictitious concentration camp for neckbeards, and the bandmates’ assumed aliases. “Neckbeard” is a pejorative term for socially inept adult or teen males with facial hair covering their neck and chin. Frequent participants on chatroom-style websites such as Reddit and 4chan, they are stereotyped as overweight, misogynistic internet fiends with poor hygiene, many of whom associate with geek culture, gamer culture, and/or the incel community. Neckbeard Deathcamp dubs their style as “fedora-crushing militant black metal,” referring to the fact that fedora felt hats are commonly associated with the neckbeard archetype.<sup>79</sup> The bandmates’ stage names ridicule neo-Nazi metal’s

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<sup>77</sup> Kim Kelly, “Neckbeard Deathcamp Are a Nazi-Stomping Black Metal Phenomenon,” *Vice*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/kz5wp3/neckbeard-deathcamp-antifascist-black-metal-interview-gaylord-split>.

<sup>78</sup> “Neckbeard Deathcamp,” *Encyclopaedia Metallum*, last modified November 28, 2022, [https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Neckbeard\\_Deathcamp/3540443043](https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Neckbeard_Deathcamp/3540443043).

<sup>79</sup> Kelly, “Neckbeard Deathcamp Are a Nazi-Stomping Black Metal Phenomenon.” For more information about the neckbeard internet slang term and meme, see “Neckbeard,” *Know Your Meme*, last modified 2 years ago, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/neckbeard>. Know Your Meme is a website that operates like Wikipedia and is dedicated solely to internet memes and slang terms. The term “incel” is a portmanteau of “involuntary celibate.” This community operates primarily online and attracts men who find themselves unable to get a romantic or sexual partner, despite their efforts. Incel rhetoric is highly misogynistic, teeming with hatred and resentment towards all women. Incel doctrine fuels rape culture, as these men hold a sense of entitlement to sex, and they support and

widespread use of names, titles, and weaponry associated with the Third Reich or the German language in general: Kriegmeister Hatestürm, Sturmkommandant Heinreich Dorner, Superkommando Uberweinerschnitzel, and Kaiser Wehrwulf VonTolerance.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's declaration of sonic warfare against white supremacy revolves around an abundance of intertextual references to the alt-right's online meme culture, essentially weaponizing this culture against them to belittle and taunt them. In an interview, Hatestürm once explained that "the band's modus operandi for waging war is turning the logic of the alt fight, with its logic that its targets are 'too' sensitive (i.e. snowflakes), on its head."<sup>80</sup> He continues:

You have women and femmes and people of color who trust you to put them in spaces in which they're not going to be directly harmed, and you have all these losers like [NSBM bands] Goatmoon and Absurd who go out and end up doing it—all that shit translates to violence. All the language translates to violence, all the jokes translate to violence; rape jokes translate to violence, racial slurs translate to violence. All these guys are like, 'Lol, fuck you and your feelings,' until you start picking at something that's actually hurt them. Clearly in our regard, making fun of people for being a bunch of fucking basement weebz has worked... It's all 'lol funny' when it doesn't hurt you.<sup>81</sup>

The band's songs follow this logic, with some combining obscure references to meme culture with descriptions of extreme acts of violence against neo-Nazis, crypto-fascists, and others who perpetrate or inspire violence as described in the above quotation. For example, their song "Zyklon /b/" demonstrates this approach just with the title. Zyklon B was the chemical used by

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sometimes perpetrate violence against women and sexually active people more generally. Especially in the last decade, individual incels have perpetrated numerous mass shootings, such as Elliot Rodger in Isla Vista, California, in 2014 and Chris Harper-Mercer on the Umpqua Community College Campus in Roseburg, Oregon, in 2015. Nikolas Cruz who carried out the mass murder at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018 is said to have been inspired by other extremists, particularly Elliot Rodger. There is significant overlap and interactions between this male supremacist community and white supremacist hate groups.

<sup>80</sup> Kelly, "Neckbeard Deathcamp Are a Nazi-Stomping Black Metal Phenomenon."

<sup>81</sup> Kelly, "Neckbeard Deathcamp Are a Nazi-Stomping Black Metal Phenomenon."

the Nazis in the gas chambers during the Holocaust. Neo-Nazi sometimes reference this chemical to express their antisemitism and glorify the Holocaust; I have gathered data on five bands that reference Zyklon in their band names. The /b/ refers to one of the most notorious boards on the 4chan platform. A magnet for incels and other members of the alt-right, the /b/ board is dedicated to miscellaneous content and is the one place on 4chan where members are allowed to post hate speech and other violent topics. The opening lyrics for “Zyklon /b/” rail against a neckbeard-type character: “Bathe your bones in Baja Blast, greasy flesh stripped with solvent, mass grave for angry losers, bulldozed over shred fedoras, take your swastikas and shove them up your ass.”<sup>82</sup> These lyrics illustrate a common tactic adopted by the band’s songwriters: a juxtaposition between a humorous or satirical picture of the persons they are targeting, like the Baja Blast-guzzling, fedora-donning, greasy neckbeard described here, and graphic violence perpetrated against them. Depending on the audience, the violence described here could also be perceived as entertaining. The closing lyrics of “Zyklon /b/” take on a more serious tone, indicating that the band is not just about joke memes and sarcasm: “May every coward who takes power in finding edge on fascist razors be crushed under the very boots they sought to wear. Die without hope, die without mercy, die without forgiveness. May every last second of the end of your life be a thousand years in agony, you spineless, worthless sacks of shit. Grind your corpses to dust and piss in the urns. Fuck you forever.”<sup>83</sup>

The band’s album artwork also makes numerous references to alt-right and neo-Nazi memes and symbols, but with some alterations to further ridicule their targets. For instance, the

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<sup>82</sup> Baja Blast is a tropical lime-flavored soda created by Mountain Dew exclusively for Taco Bell.

<sup>83</sup> Neckbeard Deathcamp, “Zyklon /b/,” track 3 on *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers*, 2018, [https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Neckbeard\\_Deathcamp/White\\_Nationalism\\_Is\\_for\\_Basement\\_Dwelling\\_Losers/725226](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Neckbeard_Deathcamp/White_Nationalism_Is_for_Basement_Dwelling_Losers/725226).



cover of *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers* depicts the Nazi War Eagle symbol but replaces the bird's head with the head of a penis. The Nazi War Eagle often holds a laurel wreath in its claws with a swastika in the center. Neckbeard Deathcamp chose to replace the swastika with Pepe the Frog, a cartoon appropriated and turned into a racist and antisemitic meme by the alt-right. Their band's name is written using the fraktur typeface, which was used by Nazis in their official communications. Because of this history, it is popular within the neo-Nazi movement and used by many NSBM bands. Their second album, with the tongue-in-cheek title *So Much For the Tolerant Left*, features an image of the neo-Nazi Richard Spencer getting a wedgie; he is most notorious as an instigator of the deadly white supremacist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017.

According to their original guitarist, Superkommando Uberweinerschnitzel, the music is also intended as satire:

This was originally supposed to just be a one and done joke side project release, so the fact that anyone takes it seriously is both cool and weird to me. I think many people overlook that the music itself is also a parody, and not just the imagery. I agree with the people that say it's shitty generic black metal, because I purposely played sloppy, E-standard tuning, generic guitar riffs to parody how terrible NSBM bands sound.<sup>84</sup>

When Uberweinerschnitzel refers to "shitty generic black metal," he means to say that Neckbeard Deathcamp's music is supposed to be a parody of a traditional raw black metal band, a style of black metal that was pioneered mainly by the Norwegian scene in the 1990s with bands like Darkthrone and Mayhem. Many NSBM bands play in this style. A central characteristic of raw black metal is their preference for lo-fi recording techniques, in order to create a more

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<sup>84</sup> Kelly, "Neckbeard Deathcamp Are a Nazi-Stomping Black Metal Phenomenon."

“primitive” quality to their sound.<sup>85</sup> Neckbeard Deathcamp takes this lo-fi approach to recording to the extreme. The hollow reverb and muffled distortion sounds like they made their album in an unfinished, concrete basement with a cheap tape recorder. The guitar riffs and harmonic progressions in raw black metal are often simple and repetitive because these artists care more about evoking a dark or hellish atmosphere or specific emotion, such as unease, chaos, instability, anxiety, and fear, as opposed to showcasing their technical abilities as musicians. To parody raw black metal’s simple and “primitive” techniques, members of Neckbeard Deathcamp purposely play their instruments sloppily, giving their music an unrefined and amateurish sound.<sup>86</sup>

By demeaning and belittling neo-Nazis, especially those in the black metal scene, using their own violent rhetorical devices against them, Neckbeard Deathcamp undermines their agenda and ideologically reorients black metal, a genre shaped by white hegemony with ties to neo-Nazism, as a fascist-fighting machine. Additionally, by appropriating the stereotypical music conventions of black metal to promote antifascist messaging, Neckbeard Deathcamp and other antifascist metal bands decontextualize this music from its original form with its white supremacist and nationalist overtones.

### **3.5.2 Feminazgûl**

Not all antifascist bands are as militant and conspicuous with promoting their values and

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<sup>85</sup> A detailed discussion of the central components of raw black metal can be found in Chapter Two. Gylve Fenris Nagell (stage name Fenriz) of the band Darkthrone, one of the pioneers of this new sound, offers further insight into what musicians in this scene considered “primitive”: “I want[ed] to de-learn playing drums, I want[ed] to play primitive and simple, I [didn’t] like a drum solo all the time and mak[ing] these complicated riffs.” See “Black Metal by Fenriz,” December 6, 2016, YouTube video, 45:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQpMIR6RuaA>.

<sup>86</sup> Neckbeard Deathcamp are proficient musicians, as most of them have maintained careers as musicians over the years, belonging to several other bands.

goals. Rather than mocking through mimicry and meme subversion like Neckbeard Deathcamp, some bands draw on musical elements that are antithetical to the genre's aesthetic values and norms, an act that I argue is a form of sonic resistance. By incorporating extreme sonic and thematic deviations from raw black metal conventions, bands like Feminazgûl weaken its generic boundaries and challenge the scene's elitist gatekeepers. The women of Feminazgûl, Margaret Killjoy, Laura Beach, and Mer Yayanos, intentionally present themselves as a "feminist band, first and foremost. It's women pushing for a space within the remarkably male-dominated world of black metal."<sup>87</sup> Killjoy, who started the band as a one-woman project, considers Feminazgûl songs to be "spells against the patriarchal domination of the world."<sup>88</sup> When asked why she thinks there is so much resistance to progressive politics in the black metal scene, Killjoy responded:

My cheap and easy answer is "patriarchy." Despite black metal presenting itself as outsiders and misfits, it still somehow manages to have a lot of hyper-masculine aspects. Progressive politics, multiculturalism, the left, etc. are seen by hyper-masculine elements of the right to be weak and effeminate. This is, of course, absurd for a bunch of guys running around in makeup and long hair.<sup>89</sup>

Feminazgûl is one of several RABM bands composed of women, both transgendered and cisgendered, and non-gender conforming individuals. As a transgender woman, Killjoy's growing prominence in the scene brings much needed representation for this marginalized population subjected to the scene's problems with transphobia and trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

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<sup>87</sup> Burley, "Black Metal for the Oppressed."

<sup>88</sup> Margaret Killjoy, "Music Is Magic and Nazis Are Shitty Musicians," *Astral Noize* (blog), December 11, 2020, <https://astralnoizeuk.com/2020/12/11/margaret-killjoy-music-is-magic-and-nazis-are-shitty-musicians/>.

<sup>89</sup> John Tron Davidson, "Smashing Nazism Through Tolkienist Thematics with Feminazgul," *Astral Noize* (blog), July 23, 2018, <https://astralnoizeuk.com/2018/07/23/smashing-nazism-through-tolkienist-thematics-with-feminazgul/>.

The band's name is a portmanteau of "feminazi" and "Nazgûl," the creatures in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* who are under the complete control of Sauron, the saga's main antagonist, and bound to the power of the One Ring. The Nazgûl are commanded by Sauron to recover the One Ring, and they spend much of the story pursuing the hobbit, Frodo, and his companions who are on a mission to destroy the ring. Killjoy describes *Lord of the Rings* as "the perfect anarchist parable," but also acknowledges that it could be interpreted in different ways, hence why this tale is popular with white supremacists as well:

Power cannot be wielded, it must be destroyed. Okay, on the other hand, Tolkien was unconsciously—I hope unconsciously—pretty racist and all the villains in the books are either non-human or people of colour. Like a lot of really powerful myths, LOTR can easily be read in multiple directions. A critique of fascism is plain to see, since Sauron is basically Hitler, but with the appeal to the simpler times, and a certain sort of nationalism amongst the various groups fighting against Mordor, I can see how it plays into right-wing ideology as well.<sup>90</sup>

So how does a character who serves the equivalent of Hitler become a vehicle for a feminist message? Well, according to Killjoy, the Nazgûl's main purpose is to "find men who have power (the ring) and take that power away from them."<sup>91</sup> And while the Nazgûl would give the power back to Sauron/Hitler, their counterparts, the Feminazgûl, are not beholden to the patriarchy. They simply hunt men who hold power and take it away from them. The band's first two album titles, *The Age of Men is Over* (2018) and *No Dawn for Men* (2020), are also lines from *Lord of the Rings*.

An example that demonstrates Feminazgûl's aesthetics is their song, "Illa, Mother of Death," the opening track of *No Dawn for Men*. According to their Bandcamp page, this song is meant to "invoke Illa, an aspect of death, to remind us of our own fragility so that we may learn

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<sup>90</sup> Davidson, "Smashing Nazism Through Tolkienist Thematics with Feminazgul."

<sup>91</sup> Davidson, "Smashing Nazism Through Tolkienist Thematics with Feminazgul."

to be strong.”<sup>92</sup> For those familiar with the musical conventions of black metal, the sounds heard in “Illa, Mother of Death,” most likely defy their expectations, a common tactic in Feminazgûl songs. Rather than drawing on sonic signifiers typical of black metal, listeners’ ears are immediately filled with the pleasant sound of birds chirping and an accordion, soon accompanied by an ominous slow-beating drum and tinging triangle, reminiscent of a funeral dirge to welcome Illa. I also interpret these sounds as signaling the impending demise of the patriarchy. Other elements of this song that reject black metal standards include the crawling tempo, especially in the vocals, which are much slower and in a deeper register than typically heard in this genre. Furthermore, there is the lack of breakneck blast beat percussion, and the continuous centrality of the accordion rather than the electric guitar, all of which add extra layers of mourning, despair, longing, and hollow rage to the music. By appropriating musical elements atypical of black metal to communicate their feminist, antifascist messages, Feminazgûl and bands who take similar approaches reimagine the exclusionary, elitist black metal scene, disrupting it as a site for the construction, performance, and reinforcement of heteronormative, patriarchal whiteness. Instead, the diversity of the sounds that they incorporate into their music reflects the vision that they have for a more inclusive and accessible scene, especially for those with marginalized identities.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Simon Barr, co-founder of Dawn Ray’d, one of the most successful RABM bands, once commented, “A lot of things have gone unchallenged in this scene for too long, but as soon as a few people start to speak out, then it becomes a lot safer for more and more people to challenge

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<sup>92</sup> Feminazgûl, “Illa, Mother of Death,” Bandcamp, March 17, 2020, <https://feminazgul.bandcamp.com/track/illa-mother-of-death>.

ideas that have no place anywhere, including this music scene.”<sup>93</sup> Significantly, this shift coincides with the growing acceptance of far-right politics and rhetoric by the mainstream with the elections of Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and the Golden Dawn party in Greece, among other examples. American Studies scholar Benjamin Hedge Olson described how these changes are reflected in the context of NSBM, particularly in North America:

Proponents of National Socialist Black Metal are marching in [the Unite the Right rally in] the streets of Charlottesville, VA, infiltrating supposedly non-political music festivals such as the Messe des Morts Festival in Montreal, and burning down African American churches in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana. In the last ten years, the racist occult milieu surrounding the black metal scene has ceased to be just a form of rhetorical and artistic expression; it has become manifest in the real world in the form of paramilitary groups, occult organizations, and acts of racially motivated violence.<sup>94</sup>

The growing visibility and subsequent concerns about right-wing extremism and fascism have led some in the metal scene to reflect on and recognize how these oppressive ideologies affect the scene and its participants. It has also instilled a sense of urgency among leftist factions to address white supremacy in the scene swiftly and directly. The independent researcher Shane Burley observes, “It’s no longer enough just to tacitly disavow fascists. The shifting political

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<sup>93</sup> Burley, “Black Metal for the Oppressed.”

<sup>94</sup> Benjamin Hedge Olson, “Burzum Shirts, Paramilitarism and National Socialist Black Metal in the Twenty-First Century,” *Metal Music Studies* 7, no. 1 (2021): 28. Antifascist protests successfully shut down the Messe des Morts festival in 2016 when it was learned that organizers had booked the notorious NSBM band Graveland to perform. See Vince Neilstein, “Antifa Protest Against NSBM Band Graveland Causes Black Metal Fest in Montreal to Be Canceled,” *MetalSucks*, November 29, 2016, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2016/11/29/antifa-protest-against-nsbm-band-graveland-causes-black-metal-fest-in-montreal-to-be-canceled/>. In 2021, twenty-one-year-old Holden Matthews committed arson against three historically African American churches; he was subsequently arrested and sentenced to 300 months in prison, three years on probation, and ordered to pay restitution to the churches that he burned. During his sentencing, Matthews admitted that he committed these crimes to boost his reputation as a black metal musician and was inspired by the church burnings committed by members of the Norwegian black metal scene in the early 1990s. See Office of Public Affairs, “Louisiana Man Sentenced for Arson of Three African-American Churches,” United States Department of Justice, November 2, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/louisiana-man-sentenced-arson-three-african-american-churches>.

contours of the scene now encourage participants to take a stand.”<sup>95</sup>

With the rise of racially motivated acts of terrorism in the United States and elsewhere, it is more important than ever for metal scene participants to join the antifascist movement and strengthen its local, national, and global networks if there is any hope for it to effectively combat the international web of neo-Nazi bands and followers, which has been steadily building for over thirty years. Not only does National Socialist metal serve as an effective recruitment and propaganda tool for the white power movement, but sales of the music, live performances, and merchandise directly finance white supremacist organizations that in turn perpetuate or incite acts of physical, verbal, and legislative violence.<sup>96</sup> Due to the material effects of this musical propaganda machine, the work of antifascist activists in the metal scene is absolutely crucial. While the ABM Network is small in numbers, there are still dozens, if not hundreds, of antifascist bands and a growing portion of fans outside of the official network that support and benefit from their work.

In my interview with network members, I asked them if they had any sort of utopian vision for the metal scene, what that would entail, and what needs to happen in order to make the scene a more inclusive space for everyone. I learned that there is no clear consensus among network members, just like there is no unifying political orientation dictating their agenda. Some believe that RABM bands need to be more systematic in spreading their message as widely as possible, such as performing for bigger audiences at festivals. Others, like Cabal, believe that

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<sup>95</sup> Burley, “Black Metal for the Oppressed.”

<sup>96</sup> Tim Hume, Tom Bennett, and Henry Langston, “Neo-Nazi Music Festivals Are Funding Violent Extremism in Europe,” *Vice*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wx533x/neo-nazi-music-festivals-are-funding-violent-extremism-in-europe>. Also see “Inside a Neo Nazi Music Festival | Decade of Hate,” *Vice*, September 18, 2021, YouTube video, 7:32, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX9OjNy\\_NI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX9OjNy_NI).

because all the issues the network fights against are systemic, and not just caused by a handful of neo-Nazis, the antifascist movement needs to operate within their own infrastructure because they can only create change from a “position of power.” He does not believe that they can be as effective within a capitalist system, dependent on financial backing from the music industry. Instead of siding with those who believe that change can come from within the metal scene (especially the black metal scene), Cabal declares that the scene needs to die first, and the network needs to build “parallel structures,” such as their own networks of distribution, record labels, distros for merchandise, and events. Artists with this type of support would not depend on the rest of the metal scene, so they would be able to express their political views in a much more aggressive and uncompromising fashion, rather than having to self-censor in order to maintain a career.<sup>97</sup>

While the network does not feel it can claim credit for any significant shifts in the metal scene yet in terms of attitudes toward progressive politics and social justice issues, Cabal and tolstoy did note that, at least in their respective scenes, the younger generations are more likely to vocally confront problems like racism and misogyny in the scene, and there are more bands forming that are openly antifascist. tolstoy noted that, in Brazil specifically, this tendency increased significantly during Bolsonaro’s presidency. They also remarked that to realize much of the network’s goals, the movement needs to take root in local scenes across the world, because the ABM Network can only achieve so much at the international level. But tolstoy and Cabal reported that they are both cautiously optimistic that their efforts are gaining momentum.<sup>98</sup> As one hopeful fan put it, actions taken by antifascist activists discussed throughout this chapter

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<sup>97</sup> Cabal, interview with the author.

<sup>98</sup> Cabal and tolstoy, interview with author.



could be “the slow tumbling of the first rocks that start an avalanche of positive social change in metal.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Parr, “Cancelling Shows is a Necessity.”

## CONCLUSION

### Metal vs. Racism: Liberation or Lip Service?

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, some members of the US metal scene reacted with others throughout the world with a scathing indictment of racism and police brutality. This was a pivotal moment in my research because it was rare to have these types of conversations so publicly in the metal scene up until that point. Within the month after Floyd's death, Luca Indrio of the band Necrot and Eric Wagner of Gatecreeper organized a video series titled "Metal vs. Racism," which features several high-profile metal musicians speaking out against racism.<sup>1</sup> The first of four episodes begins with an opening statement and a middle finger from Indrio, in which he declares:

Welcome to "Metal versus Racism." Metal musicians are tired of metal being associated with racism. That can happen, and we're fucking tired of it. Us, the metal community, we're gonna show you that we don't stand for that shit. Fuck racism.<sup>2</sup>

In this video series, each musician delivers their own version of the same general message:

"Fuck racism. Fuck white supremacy. Black Lives Matter." Many of the artists adhere to this concise script, but a few add a personal touch, such as Igor Cavalera, formerly of the renowned Brazilian metal band, Sepultura. Before he condemns racism, he identifies himself as Latino.<sup>3</sup>

Alex Skolnick of the pioneering thrash metal band, Testament, expresses the following stance:

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<sup>1</sup> "Members of Necrot, High on Fire, Sepultura Call Out Racism in 'Metal vs. Racism' Video," *Treble*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.treblezine.com/members-of-necrot-high-on-fire-sepultura-call-out-racism-in-metal-vs-racism-video/>.

<sup>2</sup> METALvsRACISM (@metalvsracism7180), "Metal VS Racism Episode 1," posted June 29, 2020, <https://youtube.com/shorts/GEiS29OlxAA?si=2DR-IKSkqAyAPshI>.

<sup>3</sup> "Metal VS Racism Episode 1."

“Racism, whether it’s systematic or personal, is *bad*. Respect and equality are good. By the way, without Black people and other people of color, music would suck!”<sup>4</sup> Karl Willets of the British death metal band, Bolt Thrower, condemns the rise of right-wing extremism worldwide, ending his denunciation singling out the former President of the United States: “I need to make a simple [final] statement: Fuck racism. Fuck the Nazis. Fuck Trump.”<sup>5</sup> The plain and obvious nature of the declarations in these videos, along with the playful nature of some of the deliveries, could come off as patronizing or ingenuine. Of course, racism is bad, equality is good, and Nazis should “get fucked.” Skolnick, Willets, and others’ positions here are not all that radical by today’s standards. But in the context of metal scene politics, taking a public stand against racism was and is still controversial and, for artists, a career risk.

In this dissertation, I have presented various examples of how the metal scene’s white racial frame is upheld and contested. Some of these examples, such as Phil Anselmo’s 2016 Nazi salute, National Socialist black metal, and Taake’s Islamophobic rhetoric are overt displays of white supremacy, but as a consequence of color-blind racism and covert racializing discourses like erasure, the problematic nature of these and similar instances are downplayed or denied. Color-blind racism and erasure are also effective tools for indexically reorienting certain signs, song lyrics, and other rhetoric that, based on context, most likely signify white supremacist ideology, but their ambiguous meaning leaves room for plausible deniability. This phenomenon was illustrated in analyses of Pantera’s song lyrics, the criteria I designed for my database of white supremacist bands, and discourse surrounding Euronymous’s affinity for communism.

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<sup>4</sup> METALvsRACISM (@metalvsracism7180), “Metal VS Racism Episode 2,” posted June 29, 2020, <https://youtube.com/shorts/NTUC1la9IEQ?si=zMmPrjDbPOPP0THm>.

<sup>5</sup> METALvsRACISM (@metalvsracism7180), “Metal VS Racism Episode 3,” posted June 29, 2020, <https://youtube.com/shorts/Yoz-HlleBPE?si=dBMP5u-q6nWHA1gh>.

Recently, antifascist activists have begun a campaign to expose overt and covert manifestations of white supremacy and other forms of oppression plaguing the metal scene. The killing of George Floyd brought to light many aspects of both the white racial frame and antiracist efforts within the scene. While Floyd's murder and the widespread reactions to it offered a moment to create real change, it did not really happen as many antiracists had hoped.

The "Metal vs. Racism" video series is but one of several examples of people in the scene taking a stand against racism and showing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. The metal media began amplifying the voices of people of color, Black people specifically, in the metal scene. While this was undoubtedly a positive and important change, most of the publications focus on testimonies of what it is like to be a person of color in the U.S. in general, rather than opening up a platform to discuss their experiences with racism in the metal scene specifically. One notable exception to this trend is the work of one of my interlocutors, a pillar of the DC metal scene who goes by the name of Metal Chris. Using his blog *DCHavyMetal* as a platform, he curated a series of posts in 2020 titled "Black Voices" that featured different current and former Black members of the DC-Maryland-Northern Virginia scene (referred to by locals as the DMV).<sup>6</sup>

I would like to close this dissertation by highlighting the testimonial featured on Metal Chris's blog by metal guitarist Kevin Rucker, who was once actively involved in the Baltimore metal scene. His experiences exemplify the main themes discussed throughout this dissertation and show how the white racial frame has shaped the experience of an individual member of the metal scene. Rucker shares that he had always felt that the metal scene was an inclusive space,

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<sup>6</sup> "Black Voices," *DCHavyMetal* (blog), June 4 - August 14, 2020, <https://dcheavymetal.com/tag/black-voices/>.

for the most part, up until recently, alluding to his story as the only Black member of the otherwise all-White band, Bestial Evil. During 2016 their drummer, Evan Phillips, was fired due his associations with the White supremacist organization, Wolves of Vinland, based in Lynchburg, VA.<sup>7</sup> Especially as a Black man, Rucker was uneasy with the crowd that this association drew to Bestial Evil's shows, as many members of the Wolves would attend. Rucker recalled a show that they played in Virginia in which every person in attendance was White, except for him and one other Black man in one of the other bands performing that night.<sup>8</sup> Phillips's ties to white nationalism had always been a point of contention in the band, and Rucker reached his breaking point in 2016 after Bestial Evil performed at Maryland Deathfest. Rucker posted on Facebook, expressing his horror over seeing so many fans in the audience with neo-Nazi and other white supremacist tattoos. In a separate Facebook exchange around the same time, Rucker condemned Phillips for being friends with neo-Nazis (whom he could see "liking" Phillips's posted replies in their back-and-forth argument), to which Phillips responded, "Why are you even in this [band]?" In response to Phillips's retort, Rucker quit the band.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Metal Band's Drummer's Longtime Associations With Hate Group Threaten Its Future," *IdaVox*, last modified June 22, 2016, <https://idavox.com/index.php/2016/06/21/metal-bands-drummers-longtime-associations-with-hate-group-threaten-the-group/>. The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled the Wolves of Vinland as a hate group, a white nationalist group, and a neo-*völkisch* group.

<sup>8</sup> "Drummer's Longtime Associations With Hate Group."

<sup>9</sup> "Drummer's Longtime Associations With Hate Group." This was not the only time that Rucker had encountered individuals with ties to neo-Nazism at the Maryland Deathfest. In 2011 the band Deströyer 666 performed at the festival; although they are not typically labeled as an NSBM band, they are infamous for making racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and Islamophobic comments during their concerts. More recently, in 2019 Rucker was working security at the pre-festival party, which featured the band Dumal, who have used signs that index white supremacy on at least one of their album covers and released music with a known NSBM label. Rucker further contextualizes just how problematic this is: "When we're talking about Deathfest it needs to be known that Maryland... has the highest rate of black male youth incarceration of the entire country. And Baltimore specifically has very, very serious issues with police accountability and the way the police interact with citizens here. So it is especially disturbing to me, the cavalier attitude, that booking has done with, in regards to Maryland Deathfest and some of the bands that they allow to play or promote." See Kevin Rucker, "Black Voices – Kevin Rucker," *DCHeavyMetal* (blog), July 15, 2020, <https://dcheavymetal.com/2020/07/15/black-voices-kevin-rucker/>.

Phillips was ousted from the band two weeks after Rucker quit, but this was only temporary; it was announced that he was back in the band a mere five days after he was fired, supposedly having cut ties with the Wolves. Another reason that Rucker may have left the band was because Phillips's actions were tolerated by their other bandmates and, after Phillips rejoined the band, defended. In an interview with *IdaVox*, Bestial Evil's lead singer Shawn Wright asserted: "Evan's not a White Nationalist, not a racist, and he's not a Nazi. I know that for certain... He's not into sketchy shit at all." Wright further explained that Phillips only joined because of his mutual interest in Norse/Viking mythology and neopaganism, and "it is something that... [Phillips] regrets wholeheartedly *now because of what is going on.*"<sup>10</sup> The last phrase of this statement raises the question as to whether Phillips was truly sorry, or if he was only apologizing in that specific moment because he was experiencing public backlash and attempting to salvage his career.

Wright's comments, along with Phillips's excuses for joining this group, are apt examples of Gal and Irvine's concept of *erasure* because, even though Wolves of Vinland is undeniably a white supremacist organization, the assumption that, as a member, Phillips, too, is a white supremacist is "explained away" because it "does not fit" into their "ideological schema...

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According to statistics provided by the Prison Policy Initiative, the state of Maryland's population is 29% Black (non-Hispanic), while its state prison population is 71% Black (non-Hispanic) and its statewide jail population is 59% Black (non-Hispanic). Maryland imprisons Black people at 5.7 times the rate of White people, which is slightly below the national average of 6x. See Leah Wang, "Updated Data and Charts: Incarceration Stats by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender for All 50 States and D.C.," Prison Policy Initiative, September 27, 2023, [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/09/27/updated\\_race\\_data/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/09/27/updated_race_data/).

<sup>10</sup> "Drummer's Longtime Associations With Hate Group." Emphasis is my own. *IdaVox*, a news site run by the antifascist One People's Project, pointed out that Phillips has been intricately involved with the Wolves of Vinland for at least three years, and on St. Patrick's Day of 2016, Phillips and his Irish folk band, ShamRouges, performed at an event hosted by members of the White Power group Maryland Skinheads. He has also performed at the Wolves of Vinland compound with another metal band of his, Vørgum. Of the Wolves of Vinland, Phillips stated to One People's Project that they "had an impact on [him]."

[or] vision of the world.”<sup>11</sup> I have also provided examples of erasure in the discourses surrounding Phil Anselmo’s 1995 White Pride speeches and 2016 Nazi salute, as well as the debates regarding various bands and musicians’ ties to neo-Nazism. Even though the actions, rhetoric, and aesthetics of these artists show the signs of white supremacy, they, their fans, and certain critics and fellow musicians continuously defend them and provide alternative explanations. Through erasure, these artists and their supporters obscure how prevalent white supremacy is within the metal scene and to what extent these oppressive ideologies impact the scene and its participants. They “render invisible” the more subtle manifestations of white supremacy through covert racializing discourses and by reorienting what certain signs index, such as runic symbols, which may or may not signify white supremacy.<sup>12</sup> This ambiguous meaning allows for plausible deniability (“Just because I have a tattoo of a Wolfsangel does not make me a white nationalist! I simply have an appreciation for Medieval German history and culture.”). Those who perform erasure work also downplay the serious and problematic nature of its more overt displays (“There is no way that he is a Nazi! He was just drunk and has a dark sense of humor.”).

The more the process of erasure plays out, the more that the phenomena being erased disappear from the dominant narrative. And the more that issues like racism, white supremacy, neo-Nazism, and other forms of oppression are denied, downplayed, and ignored within the metal scene, the more difficult it will be for people like Robb Flynn, Kim Kelly, Kevin Rucker, Metal Chris, Laina Dawes, members of the Antifascist Black Metal Network, and other like-minded individuals to challenge this dominant narrative and counter the scene’s white racial

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Gal and Irvine, 20.

frame. The process of erasure has had such a profound effect on the metal scene's power structures that, when these activists expose and resist racism and other abuses, they are often met with varying degrees and forms of resistance, which is a testament to how deeply entrenched the white racial frame is in the metal scene.

Rucker contends that, in order to effectively combat white supremacy in the metal scene, participants need to be more aware and critical of it, because currently white supremacy is “being allowed to float out there in the ether... [and] for a very long time the sentiment was that if you just ignore [issues of white supremacy] it will go away, which is not the case at all. If you give these people an inch they take a mile.”<sup>13</sup> Without naming names, he references the pedantic opinion piece titled “Why You Can't Censor NSBM or Those Who Distribute It” by Matt Harvey of the band Exhumed, which I presented as an example of discourse that passively supports National Socialism in the metal scene and reinforces the scene's white racial frame. Harvey's main proposal for dealing with neo-Nazis in the metal scene was to “let [them] slink over in [their] own unlit corner of the genre.”<sup>14</sup>

Rucker points out the irony that Harvey, who referred to *Campo de Exterminio* by the band Holocausto as a “killer record musically,” participated in the “Metal vs. Racism” video series, contending that he only did that after the murder of George Floyd, “now that the Black Lives Matter movement is fashionable and we're having all these global conversations about anti-blackness.”<sup>15</sup> Rucker's comments, although aimed only at Harvey in this instance, raise an

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<sup>13</sup> Rucker, “Black Voices.”

<sup>14</sup> Matt Harvey, “Matt Harvey on Why You Can't Censor NSBM or Those Who Distribute It,” *Decibel Magazine*, August 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200523111949/https://www.decibelmagazine.com/2017/08/28/matt-harvey-cant-censor-nsbm-distribute/>.

<sup>15</sup> Rucker, “Black Voices.” Matt Harvey is featured in Episode 3 of the “Metal vs. Racism” series, with “a simple message: Racism sucks! Death metal rules! That's it! Learn it, love it, live it.”



important criticism of the “Metal vs. Racism” videos and other actions that members of the scene took in the brief months following Floyd’s death. The “Metal vs. Racism” videos might seem radical given the backlash received by others who have spoken out against racism in the scene, but these musicians are not actually calling for radical *change*. While some of the artists involved in the videos may be genuinely dedicated to consistently promoting anti-racist attitudes and actions, others may be only riding the tide and doing what was/is “fashionable,” much like the #BlackoutTuesday social media movement.<sup>16</sup> When considering the goal of these videos—to dissuade society of their apparent misguided associations between metal and racism—this framing makes it read more like a public relations stunt for the metal scene rather than a catalyst for real change.

Laina Dawes, one of the few journalists to explicitly discuss systemic racism’s effects on the metal scene, wrote an op-ed after Floyd’s death with the headline “Fighting Against Racism in Metal is More Important Than Ever.”<sup>17</sup> During an episode of *Last Words: The Weekly Heavy-Metal Podcast* hosted by The Pit’s director Cat Jones, Dawes shared that her article received many negative responses, several of which declared that “there’s no politics in metal,” with

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<sup>16</sup> Joe Coscarelli, “#BlackoutTuesday: A Music Industry Protest Becomes a Social Media Moment,” *New York Times*, June 2, 2020, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/arts/music/what-blackout-tuesday.html>. This was a movement originally organized in the music industry, in which individuals, organizations, businesses, and other institutions posted or replaced their profile picture with a black square in remembrance of George Floyd (and other Black people murdered at the hands of the police) in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. #BlackoutTuesday received criticism because the movement became so widespread that its meaning was diminished and messages of substance relating to Black Lives Matter were silenced.

<sup>17</sup> Laina Dawes, “Fighting against Racism in Metal Is More Important than Ever,” *Metal Hammer*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.loudersound.com/features/fighting-against-racism-in-metal-is-more-important-than-ever>. Dawes is also an ethnomusicologist, but in this instance, she was acting more so in her capacity as a member of the metal press and scene.

which Dawes vehemently disagrees.<sup>18</sup> One of her co-panelists, Ethan McCarthy of Primitive Man, adds “The thing is for us (non-White people), waking up every day and living in this world and trying to exist within an alternative music genre is a political act in itself.” He continues with the critique that not only do White people not understand what it is like to be a Black person in the metal scene, they do not want to confront that reality.<sup>19</sup> These observations of Dawes, McCarthy, and others demonstrate that the Phil Anselmo Nazi Salute incident was not as big of a catalyst for change in the metal scene as it should have been, nor was the murder of George Floyd.

In a 2016 interview, Dawes aptly explained why so many in the metal scene are hellbent on the separation of metal and politics, and likely ignorant to how racism negatively impacts the experiences of its non-White participants: “When you have white men saying, ‘I don’t understand why people have a problem separating the music from the beliefs,’ it’s because they’ve never been in a situation where they’ve been physically threatened or assaulted, or made to feel like they don’t belong.”<sup>20</sup> They have also most likely never experienced verbal violence, such as slurs or other forms of prejudiced language in reference to their identity. In other words, it is a privilege of being a white cisgendered, heterosexual male to be able to ignore and reject discourse about identity politics because it does not affect them. But having the choice to remain neutral or vehemently opposed to discussing the scene’s identity politics *is* political, because one

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<sup>18</sup> Cat Jones, “Racism in The Metal Scene: A Discussion with Jason Aalon Butler, Laina Dawes, & Ethan McCarthy,” June 18, 2020, produced by *The Pit*, podcast, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yVxQe56FUA&t=1456s>.

<sup>19</sup> “Racism in The Metal Scene.”

<sup>20</sup> Dave Everley, “Does Metal Have A Problem With Race?,” *Metal Hammer*, March 27, 2016, <https://www.loudersound.com/features/does-metal-have-a-problem-with-race>.

is able to make this decision because they are not marginalized by the scene's social order. Rather, they benefit from the scene's white racial frame remaining intact.

The metal scene's white racial frame will continue to be reinforced unless more members of the scene heed Rucker's call: "The anti-racist sentiment is absolutely not something that can just be a flavor of the month, spur of the moment type of thing. It's a[n] attitude that must be a constant if we're going to have a scene that is actually inclusive."<sup>21</sup> Like my database in which I am compiling a list of metal bands and record labels with ties to white supremacy, the battle against racism and fascism in the metal scene must be ongoing and fastidious in order to effect real change. Perhaps more importantly, I want to stress that these fascist and racist ideologies are only a consequence of the white racial frame, not the foundational problem. Those in the metal scene who remain indifferent to or defend people like Anselmo and neo-Nazi bands' right to freedom of expression, regardless of the harm it may cause, reinforce the scene's white racial frame, allowing its consequences to multiply. In order to reconstitute the metal scene as a more inclusive space, blame for metal's issues with racism and other forms of oppression cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of Anselmo, neo-Nazi bands, or their ilk. Rather, anyone who belongs to the metal scene or speaks about it from the periphery should look inward and reflect on how they are complicit in maintaining the scene's white racial frame and upholding the white patriarchal status quo. Perhaps, then, with further concrete action, self-reflexivity, and semiotic recontextualization, metal music will one day represent, for *everyone*, a liberating force that punches up rather than an oppressive power that punches down.

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<sup>21</sup> Rucker, "Black Voices."

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