



**HAL**  
open science

## Hate Music

Claude Chastagner

► **To cite this version:**

Claude Chastagner. Hate Music. *Transatlantica. Revue d'études américaines/American Studies Journal*, 2012, 2, s.p. hal-03062595

**HAL Id: hal-03062595**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03062595>**

Submitted on 14 Jan 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

# Hate Music

Claude Chastagner

Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier 3

[Claude.chastagner@univ-montp3.fr](mailto:Claude.chastagner@univ-montp3.fr)

## Abstract

On August 5, 2012, Wade Michael Page killed six Sikhs outside their temple in Wisconsin. Page was an avowed white supremacist and belonged to several bands playing openly racist music and connected to neo-Nazi organizations. This article explores the connection between “hate music” and racist organizations, and wonders about the potential power of music to generate violence.

## Résumé

Le 5 août 2012, Wade Michael Page tue 6 membres de la communauté Sikh à l'entrée de leur temple, dans le Wisconsin, avant de se suicider. Page appartenait à des mouvements néo-nazis et jouait de la guitare et de la basse dans plusieurs groupes ouvertement racistes. Cet article se penche sur les relations entre la « musique de la haine » et les organisations racistes et d'extrême-droite aux États-Unis et s'interroge sur la capacité potentielle de la musique à déclencher des actes de violence.

## Keywords

Hate Music, Neo-Nazism, White Power Music, White Supremacy, White Supremacist, Wade Michael Page, End Apathy, Definite Hate, Punk Music, Hatecore.

## Mots clés

Musique de la haine, néo-nazisme, suprématie blanche, Wade Michael Page, End Apathy, Definite Hate, musique rock, musique punk, hatecore.

## Outline

Introduction

White Power Music

Organizations

The extreme right in the United States

The impact of hate music

## Hate Music

### Introduction

A recent, extremely interesting issue of *Littératures* devoted to “melophobia” focuses on various forms of aversion to music as expressed in literature, from Rainer Maria Rilke to Milan Kundera, or Bret Easton Ellis (Sounac, 2012). In his exhaustive introduction, Frédéric Sounac recalls Pascal Quignard’s seminal text, *La Haine de la musique* (Quignard, 1996) which itself spawned numerous publications, including a similarly penned collection of essays (Coste, 2011). Quignard’s unusual suggestion is that music is a demanding, colonizing practice, an intrusive, subjugating power, almost a rape. He adds:

I wonder that men wonder that those of them who like the most refined, the most complex music, who can cry when they listen to it, can at the same time be able of ferocity. Art is not the opposite of barbary. Reason is not contradictory to violence. [...] The sideration induced by hearing leads to death (Quignard, 1996, 241).

Quignard’s point is that music can generate violence and trigger ferocity through the very act of listening. In a chapter entitled “Il se trouve que les oreilles n’ont pas de paupières” (“As a matter of fact, ears don’t have lids”), Quignard links the Latin *obaudire* (to hear) to the French *obéir* (to obey) and concludes: “Oùir, c’est obéir”, to hear is to obey (Quignard, 1996, 119).

Much has been written about music’s capacity to literally captivate, penetrate and invade the body, and take possession of the subject, from Homer to Plato. More recently Roland Barthes, Simon Laks, and Primo Levi have expressed their uneasiness with music, or certain forms of music. But Quignard suggests a more disquieting linkage. He connects music to primal violence, the violence of the hord, of the predator; to the sounds generated by the rhythmic trampling and the yells that occur with spontaneous or ritualized killings. To a certain extent, his analysis can be compared to Nietzsche’s Dionysian reading of the tragedy, a musical art form believed to derive from sacrificial rituals.

Though some may consider it paradoxical, perhaps even tasteless, I wish to inaugurate “The Music Box,” *Transatlantica*’s new section devoted to popular music, with a few words on the connection between music and violence, music and hatred. My starting point is a brutal killing that took place on Sunday, August 5, 2012, when Wade Michael Page, a 40-year-old Caucasian, killed six worshippers at a Sikh *gurdwara* (temple) in Oak Creek, Wis. with a 9 mm handgun, and wounded four more, including one of the first Oak Creek police officers on the scene. The murderer, shot in the stomach by the police, eventually committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. Nothing is known of his actual motive for killing Sikhs, except perhaps that he mistook them for Muslims, because of their beards and turbans. What drew my attention to this event, one of many in recent American history, is that Page was a musician. He sang and played bass and guitar in several bands, and even had his own, [End Apathy](#) and [Definite Hate](#) among the most recent. Now, this could be an irrelevant detail, a mere footnote in these tragic events. But Page did not play any music; he played “white power music,” also called “hate music” by the media, monitoring groups, and sometimes the protagonists themselves, a genre with strong ties to white supremacist, extreme-right, and neo-Nazi organizations. By all accounts, the killings, perpetrated for potentially racist reasons, may be directly connected to the music Page played.

To what extent, then, does “hate music” confirm what Quignard suggests, that “musical rhythms fascinate corporal rhythms” (Quignard, 1996, 221)? Should we see, as René Girard hints elsewhere, a link between fascination and fascism? Would music, and particularly loud,

repetitive, electric popular music, be connected to facism?<sup>1</sup> Are music and rhythms, as such, fascist forms? Are they connected to “man’s most primitive and barbaric instincts”, do they “intrinsicly harbor destructive pulsions” (Sounac, 2012, 12)? Or should we examine music only in the light of the way it is used and constructed, as the mere “expression of the determination with which men set out to annihilate others,” as Quignard implies in the context of Nazism (Quignard, 1996, 229)?

Exploring the discreet connections between music and extreme-right movements should precisely allow us to raise—raise, not clarify—a number of issues regarding the impact and potency of music, its capacity to generate violence or restore peace, to mobilize dissenters or allay the dissatisfied, issues that are central to many analyses of, and reflections on this art form, particularly in the social and academic contexts of the United States. Perhaps, then, will the reader forgive my faux pas and bad taste?

### **White Power Music**

A British punk singer and guitar player, Ian Stuart Donaldson, founder and leader of the band [Skrewdriver](#), was instrumental in the emergence of hate music. With their second album, [Hail the New Dawn](#) (1984), he began to promote neo-Nazi, racist, and anti-Semitic ideologies, supporting the National Front and the British National Party, and headlining concerts organized by the nebulous far-right Rock Against Communism coalition. Skrewdriver was hastily associated to skinheads, hastily because the skinhead movement encompasses many subgroups, suedeheads, smoothies, bootboys, or redskins, who despite similar outfits and physical appearances, are positioned at extreme ends of the political spectrum. Besides, ironically, much of the music British skinheads, including right-wing ones, listened to, derives from black Jamaican music, mostly ska. What Donaldson did, however, was to provide an outlet and legitimacy for the minority of skinheads with fascist leanings. The movement spread all over Europe, particularly to Germany, Eastern European and Scandinavian countries, and even Latin America. It reached the United States and Canada in the mid-eighties where it has ever since been a regular, albeit discreet, feature of the music scene.

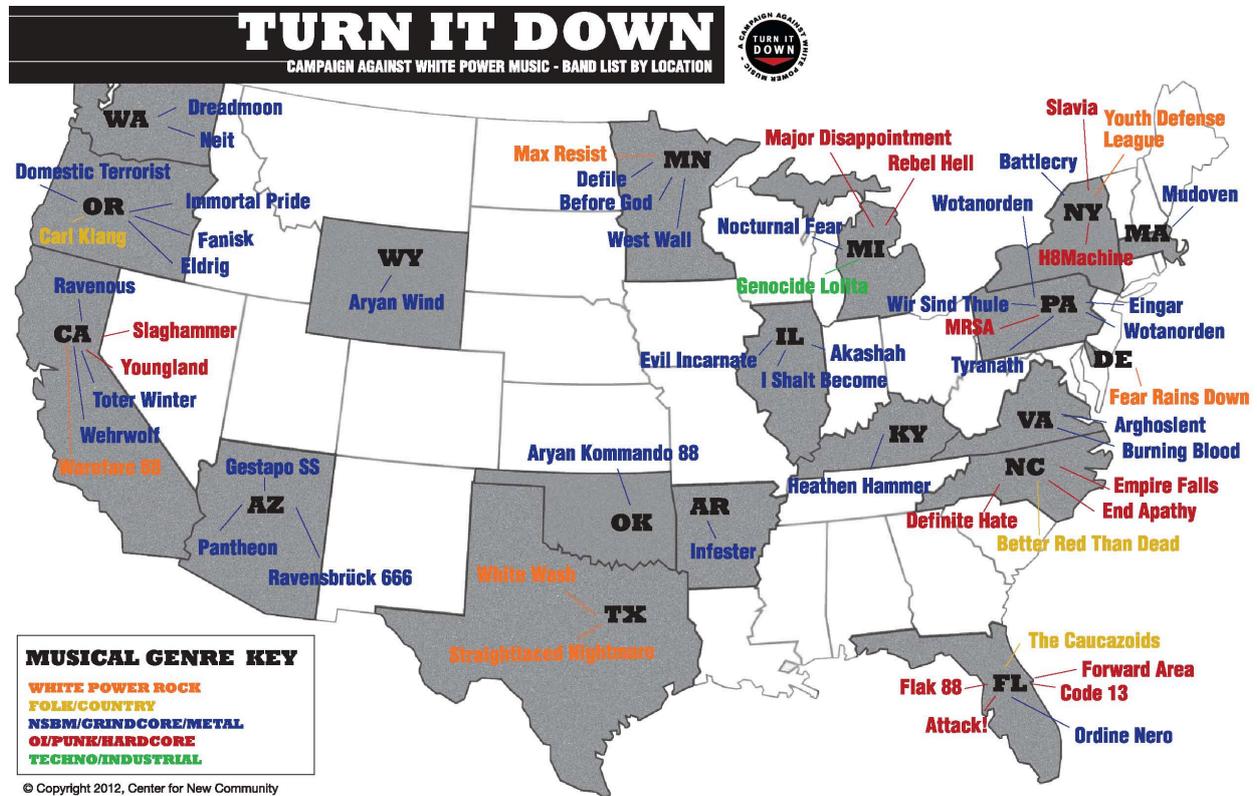
Indeed, as *USA Today* put it, hate music is “off the radar screen of most Americans,” (Welch, 1) an issue compounded by the fact that “since most cultural studies scholars have liberal or radical world views, they have practiced avoidance behavior in ignoring the music of hate” (Weissman, 295). Nevertheless, several organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Turn It Down, and of course the FBI, monitor white power bands’ activities and probe their ties to white supremacist groups.

According to ADL, whose [website](#) hosts a wealth of articles related to the genre, there are currently around 100 to 150 bands performing neo-Nazi hate music in the United States. The names of these bands is in most cases a clear indication of their political orientation: Aggravated Assault, Aggressive Force, Angry Aryans, Aryan Wind, Attack, Children of the Reich, Definite Hate, Ethnic Cleansing, Final Solution, Force Fed Hate, Fueled by Hate, Gestapo SS, Hate Crime, Jew Slaughter, Luftwaffe Raid, Max Resist, RaHoWa (for “racial holy war”), SS Bootboys, Stormtroop 16, White Terror, Youngland, or 13 Knots, a reference to the number of coils in a noose, in which Page himself once played.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice that the term “power,” whose most common meanings are “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others,” or “strength and authority” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*) is also used to describe the degree of loudness, the quantity of sound produced by an instrument or a musical device. Do we semiconsciously connect the latter to the former?

The map below, drawn by [Turn It Down](#), a project of the [Center for New Community](#) that tries to raise public awareness about hate music, identifies some of these bands' geographical locations, and musical genres. If Texas and several southern states are represented, hate music is also very present, perhaps more surprisingly, in California, the North East and the North West.



Defining what is precisely “white power music” from a purely musical perspective is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Most of its performers have adopted hardcore punk, a faster, louder, and more violent form of punk, often called hatecore. They similarly adopted trash or speed metal, a later combination of hardcore punk with heavy metal, and generated their own variant of black metal called National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM). However, from the early racist and white supremacist songs of the forties and sixties down to the present, the genre has encompassed a whole array of styles, from country to punk, from folk to rap, or even techno (some hardbass subgenres).<sup>2</sup>

Country music, for one, though not connected to “white power music,” is widely believed to epitomize right wing, conservative opinions. This is obviously true to a certain extent, but the reality is as usual more complex. Its close relative for instance, the “mountain music”, or “old time music” of the turn of the century, was widely adopted in the late 50s and early 60s by protest singers as the expression of authentic folk people, and as such irreducible to the trappings of consumer, capitalist society. Likewise, the end of the 60s is remarkable for the way rock artists chose to relocate their sonic experimentations and explorations of American counter-cultural ways of life in country styles, starting with Bob Dylan, and followed by the Byrds, Gram

<sup>2</sup> A special issue of *Popular Music and Society* devoted to Hate Rock ([vol. 30, issue 4, 2007](#)) and coordinated by Art Jipson precisely underlines the genre’s long history and numerous facets, with articles on hip-hop, cajun, and country music.

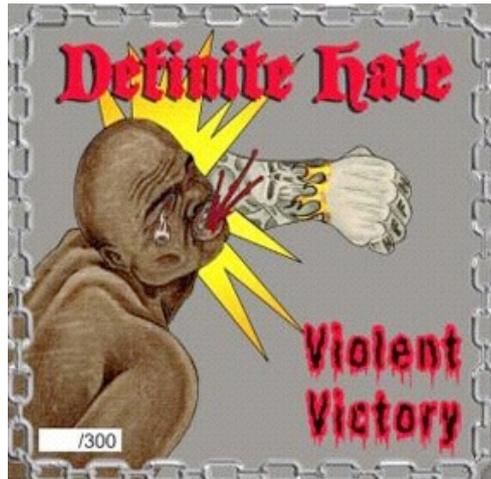
Parsons, Poco, Buffalo Springfield, The Flying Burrito Brothers, or New Riders of the Purple Sage. Conversely, artists more traditionally connected to country music chose in the early 70s to play a different, more “progressive” form of country, which, if it was sometimes labeled “redneck rock”, bore little connection with redneck ideologies. The most famous proponents of the style were either Texans (Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Marcia Ball) or Nashville renegades who settled in Austin, Tx (the “Outlaw Country” of Willie Nelson or Waylon Jennings). In the 80s, other country musicians developed what was later dubbed “alternative country,” a movement with few, if any, leanings towards conservative policies.

Obviously, then, it is difficult to associate a specific musical genre with a specific political orientation. Sounds are neutral. No music as such can be identified as “hate music”. A safer approach to identify the nature of “white power music” should focus on the lyrics, visuals, and attitudes of its protagonists, and on the organizations that connect them. The lyrics, often barely decipherable, seldom connect directly with Nazism, except for an occasional “Sieg Heil.” Rather, they promote a predictable agenda of racism and white nationalism, which includes anti-Semitism, racial separatism, and heterosexism. Their favorite targets are Jews, homosexuals, Muslims, communists, and non-white people. They do not only express their hatred of these categories, but routinely advocate getting rid of them, including by murder. They are calls for action.

However, insists Robert Futrell, a professor of sociology at the University of Nevada, and Pete Simi, an associate professor at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, “The music does more than convey anger, hatred and outrage toward racial enemies; like all music, it is heavy with emotions like power, pride, dignity, love and pleasure, which create a collective bond that strengthens members’ commitment to the cause” (Futrell, 2012). Pete Simi had on several occasions interviewed Wade Michael Page between 2001 and 2004 for the field research he was conducted into domestic hate groups, supremacists and neo-Nazis. In an interview on *Democracy Now*, Simi remembers that Page had told him how being in a band instantly gave him “a bunch of new bros,” that it brought him “a sense of purpose.” Simi concludes: “that’s what the music scene does for a lot of folks, it’s a powerful mechanism for really keeping the movement going” (*Democracy Now*, 2012). Mark Pitcavage, director of investigative research at the ADL, gives a similar analysis: “The message can motivate people to action, cause them to be proud of themselves and their cause. It can aggravate anger levels. It can rouse resentment” (Dao, 2012).

I discussed the issue with Mark Potok, a Senior Fellow at the SPLC, editor-in-chief of the Center’s *The Intelligence Report*, and one of the country’s leading authorities on white supremacy and hate organizations. For him, music can definitely lead to a closer connection with hate groups than other forms of popular culture, such as video games, magazines, or websites; music connects to a complete lifestyle, it allows for a more intense group identification, particularly for young people, at an age when there are prone to challenge all forms of authority, including their parents’, or received wisdom, such as the reality of the Holocaust (Potok, 2013). For Potok, music enables a physical immersion into a subculture which includes women, drugs, and ideology, and serves as a gateway to supremacist groups. Being in a hate music band, he adds, provides the additional excitement of belonging to a secret society, of sharing secret knowledge, a powerful and heady motivation for white, middle-class youth.

What is perhaps the most striking feature of these bands are the visuals symbols and the imagery they have adopted. The cover of *Violent Victory* by Definite Hate, one of Page’s bands, is in that respect representative of the whole genre:



Apart from violence, white power bands also rely heavily on Nazi imagery, as exemplified in the pictures below of Wade Michael Page and his band. In the United States, the public display of Nazi imagery is protected, in most cases, under the First Amendment.<sup>3</sup> The first British punks of the seventies had scandalized almost everyone by wearing the swastika, but most had done it deliberately to provoke outrage, cause shock, and attract attention; it did not imply that they condoned fascism or Nazism. On the contrary, the fascist symbols were often meant as attacks against, and denunciations of the current political system. However, as racist skinheads adopted punk music (a subgenre called “Oi!”), the swastika and Nazi imagery began to spread and became the visual symbols of white power music.




---

<sup>3</sup> To the extent, for instance, that an organization like the ACLU (the American Civil Liberties Union), whose main fight is to protect freedom of speech, has at times found itself defending the right of neo-Nazi groups or Ku Klux Klan officers to express publicly their opinion. The paradox was never so strong as in the Skokie case, when in 1976, against the will of many of its members, the ACLU supported a neo-Nazi organization’s claim to organize a demonstration in the streets of the Jewish district of Chicago.



## Organizations

Despite its powerful sound, lyrics and visuals, hate music would not survive without an efficient network of record companies and organizations. There is a handful of small, independent labels which specialize in recording and/or distributing American and European hate music: Final Stand, Tighrope, Diehard, Micetrap, MSR Productions, Vinland Winds, White Power, and Label 56, which was Page's label for his End Apathy band. On the days after the murders, one of Label 56's owners, Clemie Richard Haught Jr., issued a warning on the company's website, which read:

Please do not take what Wade did as honorable or respectable and please do not think we are all like that. We have worked hard over the years to promote a positive image and have posted many articles encouraging people to take a positive path in life, to abstain from drugs, alcohol, and just general behavior that can affect one's life negatively.

To what effect? For what purpose? One can obviously question the sincerity of the message.

The most important record labels are Resistance Records and Panzerfaust Records. [Resistance](#), whose logo reads: "magazine, record label, ideology," was founded in Michigan in 1993 by George Burdi. Four years later, the company experienced tax problems and was eventually bought by Dr. William Pierce, head of the [National Alliance](#), a racist, pro-Nazi American organization, who moved it to West Virginia. For a while, the company brought in 1 million dollars a year, according to the SPLC (*SPLC Report*, 2003). On February 18, 2002, VH1 aired a documentary called *Inside Hate Rock* featuring a clean-cut, suit-wearing William Pierce explaining that Resistance was not just a lucrative enterprise, but an efficient way to advance his agenda. Erich Gliebe, a former leader of the National Alliance's Ohio branch, was appointed by Pierce to run the label. When Pierce died in 2002, Gliebe, on the wake of his success as head of Resistance, succeeded him at the head of the National Alliance. But after it was revealed he had insulted skinheads, the company's main customers, Gliebe had to resign in 2005, and both the record company and the organization lost their momentum. Gliebe is still running Resistance Records though and is still chief editor of the label's magazine, *Resistance*.

This opened the way for competitors, particularly Panzerfaust Records, started in 1998 in Minneapolis by Anthony Pierpont, Ed Wolbank, and former Resistance employee Eric Davidson. In 2004, Panzerfaust launched a project clearly demonstrating the connection between hate music and white supremacist organizations. "Project Schoolyard" consisted in manufacturing a compilation CD with songs by bands on Panzerfaust's roster. They sold it at a very cheap price to white supremacist groups that would in turn give it away to middle and high school students, hoping the music would seduce youngsters into joining their organizations. The label is now defunct.

Record companies do not only market CDs, they also sell clothing and accessories, even tattoo designs or bumper stickers: hate makes for striking fashion. Thus, it is possible to purchase through Resistance clothes manufactured by [Aryan Wear](#) that Page is often seen wearing. Resistance also markets a video game called “Ethnic Cleansing,” whose presentation on its website reads: “The Race War has begun. Your skin is your uniform in this battle for the survival of your kind. The White Race depends on you to secure its existence. Your people’s enemies surround you in a sea of decay and filth that they have brought to your once clean and White nation”. The player must kill all non-whites to ensure “the survival of your kind.” The Internet has obviously played a central role in the recent development of hate groups and hate music. Not only do most of these record companies exist only online, but the Internet allows for fast and discreet connections between like-minded white supremacists. For the ADL, “Where a generation ago many white supremacists felt alone and isolated, knowing no-one else who shared their extreme beliefs, today such people are simply a mouse-click away from thousands of other like-minded people around the world” (Anti-Defamation League, 2004).

Record companies also organize concerts and festivals which usually attract between 200 and 300 people, not such a negligible number when the audience is determined and committed, often travelling long distances for shows held in warehouses or music clubs booked under false pretense and whose owners, most of the time, are not aware of the kind of music that is going to be played. Increasingly, bands and record companies also organize festivals, particularly of the hatecore subgenre, such as the 2010 Independent Artists Uprise Fest held in Baltimore and the annual Hammerfests, two events in which Page performed, the latter being described by Heidi Beirich, Intelligence Project Director for the SPLC, as “the Lollapalooza or the Ozzfest of hate” (Lee, 2012). As Futrell and Simi explain:

Many white power music events are tightly controlled in ways that limit attendance to neo-Nazi sympathizers and keep them mostly hidden from public view. Organizing the events as “white-only, members-only” spaces is a calculated effort to create collective experiences where, at least momentarily, adherents can experience the world they idealize: where enemies of whites are vanquished and Aryans rule (Futrell, 2012).

Hate music is for many white supremacist movements a significant source of income. If most musicians reap little financial reward from their musical involvement, their record labels, distributors, and the organizations they are connected with, do. According to the ADL, “several prominent white supremacist groups in the U.S. receive a substantial amount or even a majority of their funding from distributing hate music, promoting hate music concerts, and selling accessories and clothing” (Anti-Defamation League, 2004).

Hate music bands are not just groups of people who happen to have the same opinion making music together. They are closely connected to white supremacist organizations and hate groups such as Volksfront or the Vinlanders Social Club. Among them, the [Hammerskins](#), to which Page was directly related through three of the bands he played with, stand out. They have close links with the white power music scene, mainly through the Hammerfests, the large, visible, and successful events they organize. Other groups also organize festivals, such as the Imperial Klans of America, and their Nordicfest, Volksfront with Aryanfest, and the National Alliance with its “Volk the System.” These events freely mix music and speeches by white supremacist leaders. Conversely, extreme right political rallies now also feature white power bands. On its site, the SPLC says it has documented 1,018 hate groups in 2011, as compared to 602 in 2000, a 69 % increase often attributed to Barack Obama’s election and the current recession (SPLC, 2013). However, these numbers can be misleading since according to Devin Burghart, who has been monitoring white supremacist organizations for twenty years, the movement is increasingly disorganized (Condon, 2012). Scott Martelle, a journalist specializing in covering the hate movement, recently wrote about interviewing in the eighties Robert E. Miles, a.k.a. “Pastor Bob,” a former Klansman and “one of the conceptual forces behind the modern white-

supremacist movement” (Martelle, 2012). Miles was convinced that “the white race would be preserved through ‘leaderless resistance’—by lone wolves primed to strike on their own, leaving no conspiratorial trails for prosecutors to follow. And the most fertile grounds, Miles believed, were prisons and the military.” Interestingly, this is precisely how Devin Burghart describes Page, a lone wolf, whose isolation is a direct consequence of the increasingly disorganized and decentralized white supremacist movement, a fact which encourages isolated actors to strike: “When there are not large organizations, you are more likely to see lone wolves like Wade Page, we are seeing a movement full of white-hot rage and frustration because they feel they have lost the battle to make America a white country” (Condon, 2012). At the same time, if Mark Potok confirms that Page must have acted independently from any white supremacist organization, he adds that his attack has to be recontextualized: if 9/11 had not triggered a significant increase of hate crimes against Muslims, 2010 saw the beginning of a marked increase, in connection with the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque” controversy (in fact, an Islamic community center), and the spurious threat of “creeping Sharia” in the United States, both issues expertly stirred up by Pamela Geller (Potok, 2013). The FBI national hate crimes statistics show anti Muslims hate crimes between 2009 and 2010 went up by 50 %. Even if Page was not directly instructed by any movement to kill Sikhs, his actions must be inscribed within the context of a countrywide disparagement campaign of Muslims. Potok adds: “Words have consequences.”

To provide some perspective, let us remember that since 9/11, 29 people have been killed by right-wing extremists, while 17 have been killed by radical Muslims, most of whom in a single incident, the 2009 massacre at Fort Hood, Texas. Right-wing hate crimes are indeed a permanent fixture of American society, even if most media choose to downplay them. According to the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), a center of the U.S. department of homeland security based at the University of Maryland, between 1990-2005, domestic terrorist attacks in the United States outnumbered international ones by a ratio of 7 to 1. The far-right extremist crimes they reference include hate crimes, attacks on abortion providers, and foiled terrorist plots, as well as financial crimes and cases involving illegal firearms and other weapons. In the period under review, there were 275 homicide incidents committed by at least one far-rightist, 120 of which (44%) ideologically motivated, and 13 suicide missions, leading to a total of 522 homicide victims (354 excluding the 1995 attack in Oklahoma City). 462 of the 628 suspects for these homicide incidents (74%) were identified as far-right, while the remainder were acting in concert with far-right. 82% of far-right suspects were white, 22 were killed by law enforcement, and 38 committed suicide.

### **The extreme right in the United States**

Hate music bands, and the organizations they are connected to, are thus part of a vast network of activists that can loosely be tied to extreme right-wing organizations. The very concept of “extreme right” in the United States is problematic, for definitional and conceptual reasons, all the more so as many of its protagonists do not accept the extremist label. Michi Abata underlines the variety of situations to which the concept of “extremism” can be applied: an ideology, of course, but also behaviors, political activities, personal attitudes, etc. (Abata, 35) Besides, various factors, such as period and circumstances, impact the notion of extremism. Several movements considered as extremist at the beginning gradually became part of mainstream political life. Furthermore, academics, as much as politicians or journalists, hesitate between various denominations such as “radical,” “ultra right,” or “far right”.

A conceptual framework for the analysis of the extreme-right was developed by Richard Hofstadter, first in an essay entitled “The Pseudo-conservative Revolt”, published in 1955 in a collection of seminal texts on the new American right edited by Daniel Bell (an updated and expanded version of the collection was published under the title *The Radical Right* in 1963), and

in his famous 1965 essay, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.” For Hofstadter, the extreme right encompasses those “not susceptible to the normal political process of bargain and compromise,” (Hofstadter, 1965, 29) who refuse coalition and consensusbuilding. He adds: “The paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a ‘vast’ or ‘gigantic’ conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events. History *is* a conspiracy” (Hofstadter, 1965, 30). More recently, John George and Laird Wilcox have suggested a less political and historical approach to extremism, preferring to statistical or social definitions, a behavioral one: a set of behaviors toward other human beings (1996, 11).

Other criteria have been provided to define right-wing extremism, including antistatism (or limited government coupled with anti-parliamentarianism), antielitism and individualism (Talcott Parsons), the resort to violence (Lipset and Raab), exacerbated forms of nationalism and ethnocentrism, and of course, anti-communism. Far-right organizations have also been characterized as often promoting nativist, racist and/or anti-immigration, anti-integration views, going as far as promoting actual purges or genocides.

However, if academics generally agree on the fact that extremism means “going beyond the limits of the normative procedures which define the democratic political process” (Lipset and Raab, 5), most challenge too rigid and systematic analyses, and suggest looser approaches. James Aho for instance underlines the extent to which extremists are also “political animals and they do not seem reluctant to employ any vehicle of influence that promises an end to America’s problems. This includes canvassing for candidates and holding political office themselves” (Aho, 155). For him, the actualization of extremist ideologies can be read as an Hegelian resolution of a contradiction between what ideally society “should be”, and what it actually “is”. Likewise, Tore Bjørgo underscores the difference between a rhetoric of violence, and actual violence. Many researchers have also stressed the personal reasons that can lead individuals to right-wing extremism, essentially feelings of loss of status and power, and the absence of prestige resulting from social changes that some (Lipset and Raab) have identified as a “quondam complex”: more is at stake in the past than in the present.

Similar reasons are at the roots of the militia movement that has marked American political life since the end of the 80s, and whose impact on hate music is paramount, both in terms of ideologies and organization. Modern-day militias are predominantly rooted in rural, white, male, Christian communities affected by the economic crisis that started to hit American farmers in the 80s. They are particularly strong in the West, Midwest, and South, areas that roughly match the spread of hate music, and are officially classified by the FBI as potential domestic terror threats. Two main waves can be identified. The first one peaked during the mid-1990s around the loose Sovereign Citizen Movement, whose members claim that they do not consider themselves subject to federal or state laws, and are thus free of legal constraints, including taxation. These claims found a ready audience among the various hate music organizations, which contributed to strengthening the bonds between these organizations and extreme-right militias. However, the bombing in 1995 of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh, which killed 165 people, and the several clashes between militia groups and federal law enforcement authorities that followed, brought the temporary downfall of the militia movement, except for anti-immigrant border patrol organizations like the Minuteman Project. The spark for the second wave is the same that triggered a rise of hate crimes against Muslims: the election of a black president. Militias acquired in the process a strong racial element that did not exist before, which, combined with the influence of the Patriot and the Tea Party movements, rekindled and legitimized white supremacy ideology.

### **The impact of hate music**

Page's murderous act has prompted numerous comments on the web, most condemning it, but a few conservative organizations seized the opportunity to express their disapproval not only of white power music but also of rap, underlining the hypocrisy with which, in their eyes, liberals justify heinous rap lyrics. The [American Renaissance](#), in a comment posted on their blog on August 9, 2012 and entitled "The Corrupt Liberal Media Discover Hate Music," stated:

The cowardly racist murder of 6 people at the Sikh temple by the thug, Wade Page, has given the Corrupt Liberal Media an opportunity to condemn White Hate Music while completely ignoring the Black Hate Music that is all around them. Yet, hate music by black rappers has been broadcast nationwide for over 30 years without being recognized as such by the Corrupt Liberal Media. And the death toll of innocent whites murdered as a result of young black males imitating and being incensed by this hate music, many of these white victims documented on this blog, is in the hundreds if not in the thousands (The American Renaissance, 2012).

In a similar vein, the [Council of Conservative Citizens](#) wrote:

The media is talking about the threat of 'racist hate music' again. By this they mean obscure garage bands, who have never sold more than a few hundred albums. This is another made up threat by the SPLC and ADL. You can walk into any major chain record store in the US and buy albums by black artists that advocate race war and violence against white people (Council of Conservative Citizen, 2012).

And even if the conservative weblog Sweetness and Light admits:

Though Page's most popular song, 'Self Destruct,' carried no overtly racial message, other songs he played on, such as 'Backbone,' openly preached white supremacy with messages such as, 'It's 2010 and here we are to get rid of them, the enemies of the white race. [...] Gather your guns, the time is now' (Sweetness and Light, 2012)

it immediately adds: "Again, you can find imagery and lyrics like that in any number of popular rap songs. It's safe to say that most Americans have never heard one note of 'white power' music. Whereas rap music is everywhere, and celebrated. Why the double standard?" In their subtle, seemingly "fair and balanced" tone, such criticisms are not really far from more brutal statements found on the forum of [Stormfront](#),<sup>4</sup> a white nationalist organization, that explain hate music's appeal by the fact that its followers are "tired of multiculturalism being shoved down their throats. They're tired of the forced guilt trip about slavery. They're tired of black people making money singing about beating up white hos" (Stormfront, 2012). When Pete Simi interviewed Wade Michael Page, the gunman told him about his stay in the army, from 1992 to 1998, and how he felt that "the deck is stacked against whites," "that African-Americans in the military are coddled," and that "there was a small effort, a small conspiracy of Jews who were out to dominate world affairs" (Democracy Now, 2012).

It is easy to see the potential benefits white supremacist leaders may derive from their close links with hate music. It could be an attractive tool to seduce young people into their organizations and expand their membership. Through the pleasure and excitement generated by the music, the young recruits would be able to establish links with other members of the community, furthering their initiation into, and understanding of its main themes, and establishing a tiny, but thriving and committed subculture, connected not only by shared ideas, but also shared musical and sartorial tastes. Former white supremacist Arno Michaels, founder of [Life After Hate](#), an advocacy group that stands for racial, religious, and gender equality, says: "If you are playing white power music [...] you are learning how to hate people and you are practicing emotional violence against them" (Sweetness and Light, 2012). For him, the killing in Oak Creek can

---

<sup>4</sup> Stormfront was the first hate site to be created on the Internet in 1995 by Don Black, a former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard, and is regularly used by musicians like Page to express their opinions and advertise their music, a fact which highlights the strong links between the Klan, on-line hate groups, and white power music.

directly be attributed to the impact of music and Page's involvement in the hate music community: "Tragically, what happened Sunday was the logical conclusion of this hate and violence" (Sweetness and Light, 2012).

However, one should be cautious about drawing this kind of conclusions too fast. To return to my initial questions, what do we know of the impact of cultural forms on social behaviors? To what extent is it possible to attribute murderous acts to being a musician in a band? More realistically, would there really be a connection between certain sounds and rhythms, and fascist, racist convictions? What part did music and music playing, specifically the hate music Wade Michael Page favored, have in reinforcing, or comforting his convictions? What about the connections I mentioned to "man's most primitive and barbaric instincts," and "destructive pulsions" (Sounac, 2012, 12)? Is not music rather just a reflection of the heinous and violent feelings white supremacists and neo-Nazis have already developed and more a pretext to get together, than a motivation to act? What should we make of overly confident statements by David Gletty, who worked as an undercover informant on extremist groups for the FBI, that "The music is a very creative tool and a very important tool for bringing in the youth. [...] They brainwash them into believing that hate is the way to go and following them is the only way to go," or again, by Jack Levin, a Professor of sociology and criminology at Northeastern University in Boston, that "There are many teenagers who commit what I would call thrill hate crimes. Often, they're inspired by the white power rock lyrics and the literature of white power groups" (CNN, 2012)? I believe things are slightly more complex.

It seems many listeners are shocked or at least made uneasy by violence and hatred in music. Whether in rap, reggae or hardcore, explicitly misogynistic, homophobic, and racist lyrics and performances repel as much as they fascinate. Keith Kahn-Harris suggests that the origin of such uneasiness is because violent music seems to undermine the perfection that music is supposed to represent, and that we do not consider hate music as music, but simply as hate. We consequently wonder to what extent violent music leads to real life violence (Kahn-Harris, 2003). The issue is at the core of many debates about popular culture artifacts, not so much books, but films, video games, television, and of course, music. Hence the numerous calls, from different sides, for warning stickers, rating labels, or even downright censorship to ban sex, violence, misogyny, homophobia, or racism from music, whether it is played by African-Americans, Latinos, or white supremacists. However, studies on the subject are at best inconclusive. Hate and violence is as often analysed as a safety valve as it is decried as a direct inspiration for effective hate and violence (the same goes for pornography). There is currently no evidence of a direct, causal link, and no consensus on the issue. Besides, much of this hate may also be labelled as play, provocation, or publicity, with, consequently, potentially different impacts. And as Kahn-Harris reminds us, "it is not only hate music that is implicated in the politics of oppression. All kinds of music can potentially be used in oppressive acts" (Kahn-Harris, 2003).

The case of hate music is thus not an easy one, despite the definite positions of some commentators. While white supremacists may try to use it to spread their ideas and recruit new members, one could easily argue that it cathartically frees them from their anger rather than pushes them to violence. However, what the dense network of bands and organization reveals, is the strong, disquieting, though barely visible presence of supremacists throughout the country. Unfortunately, beyond a superficial media effervescence triggered by the shooting, little investigation on the real threats posed by hate music and white supremacist movements is carried out, except for the long term tracking and monitoring by the likes of the ADL or the SPLC. As Mark Potok wrote, "The introspection didn't last long" (Potok, 2012). And this is perhaps the most disheartening fact. Potok confirmed, "there was a lot of attention, but for about two days" (Potok, 2013), and most of the focus was anyway on the details of the crimes, not on the larger picture. He adds that the congressional hearings on hate crimes organized in the wake of the

murders by Sen. Dick Durbin attracted perhaps as many as 700 people, but hardly anyone in the press mentioned them, except C-Span. At the same time, he concludes, Republican politicians try to minimize the impact and influence of a radical right in the United States, and are quick to accuse organizations such as the SPLC of exaggerating, or even inventing the threat to further their own agenda and use it as a fund-raising argument.

More modestly and cautiously, opening “The Music Box” with hate music may serve as a reminder that the anti-authoritarian, rebellious and subversive sounds, attitudes and lyrics of rock music, so easily, and systematically associated with leftist positions, can also be generated by extreme-right individuals and organizations, with a quite different agenda. We hope that the following issues of “The Music Box”, as much as this one, will continue to present the contrasted, multifarious, and exciting facets of American popular music.

## References

AHO, James, *This Thing of Darkness: A Sociology of the Enemy*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

—. *The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1995.

ALLEN, Conway, *The American Militia Phenomenon: A Psychological Profile of Militant Theocracies*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE, “Hate Music in the 21st century”, 2004, [http://archive.adl.org/main/Extremism/hate\\_music\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_century.htm?Multi\\_page\\_sections=sHeading\\_7](http://archive.adl.org/main/Extremism/hate_music_in_the_21st_century.htm?Multi_page_sections=sHeading_7) (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

—. “Neo-Nazi Hate Music: A Guide”, 2005, <http://archive.adl.org/NR/exeres/32BE45EA-7300-477D-BF3E-D01C0C56B809,DB7611A2-02CD-43AF-8147-649E26813571,frameless.htm> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

BARTHES, Roland, *L’Obvie et l’obtus*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1982.

BELL, Daniel, ed., *The Radical Right: The New American Right, Expanded and Updated*, New York, Doubleday & Co., 1963.

BJØRGO, Tore, “Introduction: Terror from the Extreme Right,” in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no. 1, Spring 1995.

BUNZEL, John, *Anti-Politics in America: Reflections on the Anti-Political Temper and Its Distortions of the Democratic Process*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1967.

BURGHART, Devin, *Soundtracks to the White Revolution: White Supremacist Assaults on Youth Music*, Chicago, Center for New Community, 1999.

CLOONAN, Martin, “Killing Me Softly With His Song: An Initial Investigation into the Use of Popular Music as a Tool of Oppression”, *Popular Music*, 21 (1), 2002, 27-40.

CNN Wire Staff, “‘Swimming Upstream’, white supremacist groups still strong”, *CNN*, August 7, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/07/us/white-supremacist-groups> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

CONDON, Patrick and Todd Richmond, "Hate music is part of white supremacist circles", *MPR News*, August 8, 2012, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2012/08/08/crime/hate-music> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

COSTE, Claude et Bertrand Vibert, eds., *La Haine de la musique*, collection « Recherches & Travaux » n° 78, Grenoble, Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3 (ELLUG), 2011.

COUNCIL OF CONSERVATIVE CITIZENS, <http://cofcc.org/2012/08/the-truth-about-hate-music/> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

DAO, James and Serge F. Kovaleski, "Music Style is Called Supremacist Recruiting Tool", *The New York Times*, August 7, 2012.

DEMOCRACY NOW, Thursday, August 9, 2012, [http://www.democracynow.org/2012/8/9/academic\\_who\\_knew\\_sikh\\_shooter\\_wade](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/8/9/academic_who_knew_sikh_shooter_wade) (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

DURHAM, Martin, *White Rage: The Extreme Right and American Politics*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

EATWELL, Roger and NOËL O'Sullivan, *The Nature of the Right: American and European Politics since 1789*, London, Pinter, 1989.

EBATA, Michi, "Right-Wing Extremism: In Search of a Definition," in *The Extreme Right: Freedom and Security at Risk*, Aurel Braun, ed., Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1997.

FUTRELL, Robert and Pete Simi, "The Sound of Hate", *The New York Times*, August 8, 2012.

GEORGE, John, and Laird WILCOX, *American Extremists: Militias, Supremacists, Klansmen, Communists, and Others*, Amherst, New York, Prometheus Books, 1996.

HAINSWORTH, Paul, *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, London, Pinter, 2000.

HILLIARD, Robert L., and Michael C. KEITH, *Waves of Rancor: Tuning in the Radical Right*, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1999.

HOFSTADTER, Richard, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt in *The Radical Right: The New American Right, Expanded and Updated*, Daniel Bell, ed., New York, Doubleday & Co., 1963.

—, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1965.

KAHN-HARRIS, Keith, "The Aesthetics of 'Hate Music'", Institute for Jewish Policy Research 2003, <http://www.axt.org.uk/HateMusic/KahnHarris.htm> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

LAKS, Simon, *Musiques d'un autre monde*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1948.

LEE, Chris, "Inside the Creepy World of 'Hate Music'", *USA Today*, Aug 6, 2012.

LEVI, Primo, *Si c'est un homme*, [1947] Paris, Julliard, 1987.

LEVITAS, Daniel, *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right*, New York, St Martin Press, 2002.

LIPSET, Seymour Martin and Earl RAAB, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970*, London, Heinemann, 1971.

MARTELLE, Scott, “Music to Murder By”, *Coast Magazine*, January 2013, <http://www.orangecoast.com/hatemusic.aspx>. (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).  
“Racist Music: Publication, Merchandising and Recruitment”, *Cyber racism*, Race Discrimination Unit, HREOC, October 2002.

MERKL, Peter H., and Leonard WEINBERG, *Right-wing Extremism in the Twenty-first Century*, London, Frank Cass Publishers, 2003

MULLOY, Darren J., *American Extremism: History, Politics and the Militia Movement*, New York, Routledge, 2005.

PARSONS, Talcott, “Social Strains in America,” in *The Radical Right: The New American Right, Expanded and Updated*, Daniel Bell, ed., New York, Doubleday & Co., 1963.

POTOK, Mark, “The Lessons of Wisconsin”, *Intelligence Report*, Winter 2012, Issue # 148.

—, Phone interview, February 22, 2013.

QUIGNARD, Pascal, *La Haine de la musique*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1996.

SHEKHOVTSOV, Anton and Paul Jackson (eds), *White Power Music: Scenes of Extreme-Right Cultural Resistance*, Ilford: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2012.

SIMI, Pete and Robert Futrell, *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement’s Hidden Spaces of Hate*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010.

SOUNAC, Frédéric (ed), “La Mélophobie littéraire”, *Littératures*, 66 / 2012, Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail.

SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER, *REPORT 2003*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070714031446/http://www.splcenter.org/center/splcreport/article.jsp?aid=60> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

—, “Stand Strong Against Hate”, 2013, <http://www.splcenter.org/stand-strong-against-hate> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

STERN, Kenneth S., *A Force upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

STORMFRONT, <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t904985-74/> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

SWEETNESS AND LIGHT, “Sikh Shooting Puts ‘Hate Music’ Under Scrutiny”, 2012, <http://sweetness-light.com/archive/sikh-shooting-puts-hate-music-under-scrutiny#.URbZW81WHgU> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE, “The Corrupt Liberal Media Discovers Hate Music”, 2012, <http://www.amren.com/news/2012/08/the-corrupt-liberal-media-discovers-hate-music/> (last accessed on February 12th, 2013).

WEISSMAN, Dick, *Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution: Music and Social Change in America*, New York, Backbeat, 2010.

WELCH, William and Judy Keen, “Gunman thrived as neo-Nazi musician”, *USA Today*, August 7, 2012.

### **Bibliographical information**

Claude Chastagner is Professor of American Studies at Montpellier University, France. He specializes in British and American popular music, from rock to the sounds of ethnic communities (bhangra, zydeco, conjunto...).