

Singing for a White ‘City upon a Hill’: White Power Music and the Myth of Regeneration Through Violence

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ABSTRACT: This article examines how the discursive construction of white power identities draws on US American hegemonic narratives and foundational myths. In particular, I analyze the myths at play in the music produced and promoted between the 1990s and 2010s by some members of the American white power movement. Basing my argument on Richard Slotkin’s conceptualization of the myth of regeneration through violence, I observe in white supremacist lyrics the recurring construction of the white power activist as a captive (or oppressed victim) who is turned into a hunter (or ‘racial warrior’), and regenerated after a ‘racial war.’ This analysis of white power lyrics provides insight into not only how the white power discourse legitimizes violence but also how it celebrates it.

KEYWORDS: White Supremacy; White Power Movement; Music; Myth; Violence; Identity

A people unaware of its myths is likely to continue living by them, though the world around that people may change and demand changes in their psychology, their worldview, their ethics, and their institutions.

(Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*)

Introduction

Minutes before the killing of twenty people in a Walmart in El Paso in August 2019, the shooter released a manifesto online. In it, he warned of a “[h]ispanic invasion of Texas,” and claimed more broadly that South American immigrants were replacing white people in the United States. Finally, he equated genocide with sustainability, a regenerative possibility that would lead to the ‘preservation’ of the white race: “if we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can be more sustainable” (Arango et al.). Throughout the text, he reiterates a prominent white supremacist conspiracy theory known as “the great replacement.”¹ Popularized by Renaud Camus, it purports that through mass immigration and demographic growth, nonwhite people are systematically replacing white populations in Europe and in Northern America, and that ultimately the white race will go extinct (Williams). For decades, white power activists have constructed and spread a powerful narrative of ‘white genocide’ that

¹ Alarmingly, this racist theory has recently spilled into more mainstream settings of US American society. *The New York Times* has observed traces of this rhetoric through terms like “invasion” and “replacement” on popular right-wing media platforms as well as in statements of the Trump administration (Peters et al.).

taps into growing fears for the ‘survival’ of a white identity (and a white body) today. This narrative has repeatedly been joined and reinforced by depictions of, and calls to violence against the so-called ‘enemies of the white race’ – calls that have, like in the case of the El Paso shooting, been heard and answered. This article aims to demonstrate how the white power movement strategically cultivates and utilizes certain narratives and myths to advance their racist agendas through their music.

The term ‘white power’² will be used here to describe the mobilization of white individuals who consider themselves a “minority at risk of extinction” in the multicultural societies of North America and Western Europe (Corte and Edwards 5). This American white power movement (WPM) is a highly fragmented network, composed of different extreme far-right and white supremacist groups, such as neo-Nazis, Aryan skinheads, the Ku Klux Klan, Christian Identity sects, white separatists, and more recently, members of the Alt-Right and Alt-Lite (Burriss et al.; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile; Futrell and Simi, “Free Spaces”).³ Together, they compose a “white-racist counterculture” (Gardell 73) that constantly challenges mainstream society’s progressive norms ultimately to trigger dramatic changes that correspond to their white supremacist worldview.⁴ This agenda is made particularly loud and clear in the music that some members of the white power movement produce and promote. Indeed, in her seminal work *Reichsrock* (2016), Kirsten Dyck defines white power music as “music produced and distributed by individuals who are actively trying to advance what they view as a white power and pro-white racist agenda” (2).

In a 2012 report, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) estimated that “at any given time” about one hundred to one hundred and fifty white power bands were active in the United States (“Sounds of Hate” 4). The scene, prominently male (though it has included women), covers a wide range of genres, from Oi!, punk skinhead music, heavy metal, and electronic music to folk and country music, among many others. Although, the genres differ, the themes that pervade the lyrics remain mostly the same. Songs tend to promote white supremacy, ‘racial purity,’ and racist views towards nonwhite, non-Christian (especially Jewish) people as well as

² Scholars studying right-wing extremism and white supremacy have also used the terms “white separatism” (Berbrier “Half the Battle,” “The Victim Ideology”; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile), “white nationalism” (Zeskind; Tenold), or more generally “right-wing extremism” (Marks) and “radical right” (Kaplan and Weinberg; Levitas) to describe the white supremacist movement. I, instead, follow scholars who use the term “white power” (Blee, *Inside Organized Racism*; Futrell and Simi, *American Swastika*; Corte and Edwards; Dyck; Love; Belew), as I think, it better reflects the coming together of many white supremacist groups with different agendas and beliefs under one banner, one slogan. It also reflects the importance placed on notions of ‘power’ and ‘empowerment’ in a movement that seeks to recruit evermore new members. In this article, I use the term interchangeably with ‘white supremacist movement.’

³ More recently, several white supremacist groups have embraced notions of a transnational movement, or “Pan-Aryanism” (Blee, *Inside Organized Racism* 59). Pan-Aryanism ties white supremacist groups of different countries together by their shared whiteness, anti-Semitism, and/or so-called ‘Aryan heritage.’

⁴ I adhere to Alison Bailey and Jacquelyn Zita’s concise but precise definition of white supremacy as “the legal, epistemic, political, scientific, and cultural systems in which whites overwhelmingly hold state power and control of material resources, and use this power to exercise control over nonwhites” (xiii).

people minoritized on the grounds of their sexuality or immigrant/residence status. They also emphasize opposition to progressive or liberal political programs, such as communism, socialism, and feminism. Dyck makes clear that the music scene plays a vital role for the WPM, not only in funding activities and sustaining members' engagement but also in reiterating, converting, and spreading the movement's ideas and narratives.

This article examines closely the discursive construction of an "imagined [white] community" (cf. Anderson) on a micro-level found in the American white power music scene.⁵ Through a textual analysis of white power music lyrics, I focus on the construction of a 'heroic' white power identity and its imagined racial agency in the white power movement's dominant narrative, to which notions of violence,⁶ 'racial purity,' and national restoration are interweaved. In his theorization of the myth of regeneration through violence, Richard Slotkin examines such notions in early US American colonial writings. Slotkin offers leads to recognize the broader influence of violence (physical, epistemic, and symbolic) – in the form of settler colonialism, subjugation, enslavement, exploitation, and genocide – in US American nation building processes, from its foundation to contemporary society. As we will see, his analysis of the myth is particularly useful to comprehend further the internal workings of the white power movement, whose "culture of violence" (Blee, *Inside Organized Racism* 156) regulates the movement's identities, social practices, and politics.

I begin this paper with a methodological overview, which includes a brief history of the white power music scene in the United States, a review of the scholarly research that has focused on white power music as well as my own approach to the material, and finally a summary of the myth theorized by Slotkin. In the second part, I move on to trace the different figures that Slotkin analyzed in early American literature in a selection of white power lyrics. The first figure that I will examine is that of the "captive" (Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* 21), found prominently in white power lyrics through depictions of victimized white individuals. Indeed, songs tend to construct white protagonists (and white power activists) as prisoners of

⁵ All the bands mentioned in this article are from the United States (except for The Klansmen, which is a band formed by British singer Ian Stuart Donaldson but founded particularly with a US American audience in mind). Most of the bands were active throughout the 1990s and 2000s, while some still are. I chose these bands because they are or were the most visible in white power literature (newsletters, catalogs, and concert flyers), on online platforms (especially on Stormfront, a leading white supremacist forum online) as well as in the scholarly literature about the music scene. Precise information on the bands' members (names, beliefs, and association with white power groups), their places of origin, and their period of activity is difficult to obtain because of their underground and transient existence.

⁶ Writing about the discursive construction of violence is challenging, as one always risks reproducing the violence that one tries to expose. However, I do think that it is crucial to make this rhetorical violence visible when studying the white power movement. Ignoring it would render the image of those racist groups incomplete, and would neglect the considerable role violence (rhetorical and physical) plays in the American white power movement's organization and culture (i.e. social structures, processes of recruitment and mobilization, political frameworks). As Michael Billig argues in his study on the role of humor in the Ku Klux Klan, "[b]y mitigating the language, one would run the risk of conveying unwittingly that the material is less extreme, both politically and morally, than it actually is" (272).

a society, which is represented as an elusive, unfair ‘System,’ inherently hostile to them. Songs often depict a second figure, the “hunter” (21), which emerges from the “captive” figure and compensates the captive’s passiveness by being an ultra-aggressive, brutal agent of violence. This second white power figure, which I will examine, emphasizes a hypermasculine⁷ identity that enacts violence on nonwhite individuals supposedly to restore an imagined ‘natural order’ and to ensure ‘survival.’ I further argue that white power violence is celebrated and promoted in songs, and therefore becomes a political and social strategy. Songs often imagine a final violent conflict (or so-called ‘racial war’) that supposedly leads to a physical and moral rebirth of the white race. I explore this “regeneration” (5) in detail in the final part of this article.

In doing so, this study aims to shed light on the systems of meaning making out of which white supremacist groups emerge and grow. The American white power movement, and the musicians evoked here, are inherently ‘retrotopian’ in Zygmunt Bauman’s sense (*Retrotopia*), that is, nostalgic for an imagined ‘past-greatness’ and longing for a largely idealized future.⁸ Disseminating these racist narratives necessarily involves the rewriting of history and the dissimulation of centuries of oppression, exploitation, violence, and genocide perpetrated by European colonial powers and empires on colonized, enslaved, and subjugated people around the world. White power activists actively attempt to reconstruct and alter cultural memory through the revision, fabrication, and propagation of fantasized narratives about the history of the United States, its foundational principles, origins, and peoples. Their vision, and version, of the United States is ultimately exclusivist, racist, and anti-democratic as well as powerful and resonant. In examining how the myth of regeneration through violence is entangled in American white power narratives, I thus take up Slotkin’s call to “expose and critique its character and its works” (“Dreams and Genocide” 58).

I. Methodological Background: Connecting American Studies to Studies of the Far-Right

White Power Music in the United States

The American white power music scene has no single origin but multiple roots, and oscillates in and out of popular culture across time. As Richard C. King argues, “it appears in blackface on the minstrelsy stage, later in patriotic songs of the Ku Klux Klan and then in the guise of country and rockabilly” (192) and, like racism, it was part of American public life—especially

⁷ Matt Zaitchik and Donald Mosher argue that hypermasculinity is an exaggerated form of masculinity based on virility and physicality. They identify four characteristics of a hypermasculine personality: (1) the notion of “violence as manly,” (2) the notion of “danger as exciting,” (3) a “callous behavior toward women,” and (4) “toughness as self-control” (227). Ashis Nandy identifies hypermasculinity as a cultural pathology of colonialism, which justified acts of aggression, control, power, and exploitation as supposedly masculine.

⁸ Bauman describes “retrotopias” as “visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future” (*Retrotopia* 5).

in Southern states under Jim Crow laws. Several of the first American white racist musicians, of the like of Johnny Rebel and Happy Fats, indeed emerged as a reaction to the rise of the American civil rights movement and the efforts to dismantle Jim Crow segregation (Dyck 109). Though this “hate country scene” dissolved in the 1970s (111), white supremacist music did not disappear. During the same period in Great Britain, racist lyrics and punk rock (or Oi! music) fused into the earliest form of white power music, which is generally traced to Ian Stuart Donaldson, the singer and leader of the band Skrewdriver. Donaldson is widely considered the ‘founding father’ of white power music as it developed and spread internationally in the 1980s (Corte and Edwards). In the following two decades, white power music grew as a persistent form of racist expression in the United States, in particular with bands like Bully Boys, Bound for Glory, Aggravated Assault, Angry Aryans, Max Resist, Blue Eyed Devils, and Prussian Blue. Its most rapid growth occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to the emergence of several major distributors, such as Resistance Records and Panzerfaust Records (Futrell et al.; Dyck), and the rise of the Internet, which allowed consumers to bypass traditional channels of music distribution to access white power music freely and quickly online. Those two labels are today defunct but white power music is still widely accessible on various white supremacist groups’ websites and has since moved into more mainstream multimedia platforms such as Amazon, YouTube, and Spotify.

Scholarly Studies of White Power Music

The earliest critical accounts of white power music in the United States emerged in the 1990s from anti-racist watchdog groups like the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center. In an almost journalistic manner, they provided information on the emergence of the scene, on major labels, bands, and actors as well as reports of concerts and festivals. They also contemplated the music scene’s potential benefits to the white power movement. When it comes to academic interest, the fields of political science, history, and particularly sociology were precursors in the study of white power music, starting from the late 1990s. Studies either focused on the origins and evolution of neo-Nazi skinhead music (Burghart; Cotter; Brown) or examined the international links and histories of white power music (Shekhovtsov and Jackson; Dyck; Love). Most recently, scholars have focused on the social movement-based aspects of white power music, directing their attention toward mobilization and recruitment processes, the reinforcing of identities, financial and political opportunities, and structures of organization (Blee, *Inside Organized Racism, Understanding Racist Activism*, “Study of White Supremacism”; Eyerman; Futrell et al.; Corte and Edwards; Futrell and Simi, *American Swastika*). In this article, I follow this widespread sociological tradition in studies on the far-right that uses categories related to social movements to discuss the white power movement.⁹

⁹ Thus, I use the terms ‘movement,’ ‘mobilization,’ and ‘activists’ to refer to white supremacist political action and the people involved in it. By doing so, I do not intend to cast a positive light on white power advocates nor the actions they undertake or call for.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which the movement uses music as a framing device that propagates the movement's dominant narratives and goals.

In focusing on music as a cultural product and ideological text, I want to approach the white power movement from a cultural studies—and especially American studies—perspective. I agree with Kathleen Blee who argues that “racist culture and sociability, as much as politics” are “at the heart of organized racism today,” and “any explanation of organized racism that attends only to the attitudes of its members or to the political ideologies of its groups will be flawed” (*Inside Organized Racism* 160). Thus, this article zooms in on the cultural representation (and construction) of white identities in white supremacist culture, and in particular music. My examination of selected lyrics is an ideological analysis that aims to reveal the “cultural work” (cf. Tompkins) musicians perform for their audiences, i.e. the powerful ways in which their songs articulate, propose, and fantasize solutions to their perceived problems. I also want to argue that the white power movement in the United States leans particularly on a repertoire of national myths¹⁰—i.e. narratives of US national beginnings, individual deeds, or collective belongings. Heike Paul has effectively argued that myths are “part of a discursive formation and constitute a semiotic system that includes an intersubjective dimension” which “works to establish the nation as an imagined community and extends to all those interpellated as members” (27). The American white power movement, through the integration—conscious or not—of some of the US nation's foundational myths, also constructs a white “imagined community” and reproduces an “exceptional” identity for its members as supposedly racially superior, culturally enlightened, and predestined to an exceptional fate.

The Myth of Regeneration Through Violence

Published in 1973, *Regeneration Through Violence* traces the myth of regeneration through violence from its origins in seventeenth-century Puritan captivity narratives and narratives of the New England “Indian Wars” (181) to the rise of the figure of the frontier/hunter-hero exemplified by fictional characters, such as James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking, and mythologized historical figures like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. Slotkin worked within the tradition of American Studies by offering a critical approach to the so-called Myth and Symbol school and its tendency to focus on the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant experience in analyzing national beginnings to the detriment of Native Americans, Africans, African Americans, and other nonwhites as well as women. Part of the so-called Critical Myth and Symbol School, Slotkin thus re-inscribed notions of violence in the form of genocide, expropriation, displacement, and enslavement as foundational to US American identity formation and nation building. He argues in *Regeneration Through Violence* that the early colonists saw America as

¹⁰ Myth is here understood as an intellectual construct that manifests itself in “narratives, icons and rituals” (Paul 31) and that has powerful social functions and ideological imperatives, from forging collective and self-representations to creating bonds within a nation's members.

an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience. (5)

For Slotkin, the myth of regeneration through violence consists of a hero's ascension to a higher state of being through the violence he encounters in the wilderness or at the frontier and which he performs in the "Indian wars" (181) and other violent conflicts with Native Americans. The hero rises morally, psychologically, spiritually, and materially to a 'purer' state of being, predicated and contingent on violence. Thus, the violent act is valorized as a necessity for the telos of the mythical American character and American history. Recent studies have investigated how the myth of regeneration through violence has been used and re-used in twentieth- and twenty-first century popular culture, and continues to be relevant today (Keeler; Mazur; Purse; Slotkin, "Thinking Mythologically"). White power music—as a popular discourse within white power culture—reflects similar patterns of imagery and dramatic structure to the myth Slotkin theorized, constructing a white identity that is both victim and aggressor, and prone to desire the extermination of its perceived enemies for its own regeneration. The violence at the core of the myth is central to the white power movement and its music "provides the ideological 'ammunition' for brutal violence and genocidal fantasies" (Burghart 15).

II. Violence

1) The Captive

The first figure that Slotkin addresses in his theorization of the myth of regeneration through violence is that of "the captive," manifested in seventeenth-century Puritan captivity narratives. A captivity narrative tells the story of a white Christian settler whose faith is put to the test when he/she is captured and persecuted by Native Americans. In the narrative, the captivity represents an obstacle, a hardship that allows the main protagonist to return spiritually stronger to his white community. As Slotkin argues, the literary tradition of captivity narratives reflected New England Puritan settlers' "anxieties" and fantasies around their survival on a 'new' continent and their encounters with Native Americans (*Regeneration Through Violence* 146). Though Slotkin only hints at the white supremacist regime perpetuated by European white settlers in *Regeneration Through Violence*, he renders them explicit in *The Fatal Environment*. In this second volume, Slotkin addresses the ways Native Americans were "dehumanized" in Puritan colonial discourse (53), constructed by a Eurocentric gaze as worthless and inferior to white settlers, and how this racist rhetoric ultimately came to justify the displacement and massacre of Indigenous people. White power lyrics utilize a similar ethnocentric and racist frame that Slotkin found in Puritan captivity narratives in order to construct a white identity in opposition to a threatening racialized 'Other.'

Race is a social and political category, not a natural or biological one (Omi and Winant). Yet, white supremacist discourse adamantly supports the century-old European colonial notion that race is a biological essence, a primary determinant of an individual's personality, cultural traits, and intellectual capacities. It also assumes a hierarchization of 'races,' in which the white race is assumed the dominant group and nonwhites are considered inferior. This white supremacist frame is deeply embedded in notions of 'racial purity' and the continual fear of its potential loss.¹¹ White power ideology then constructs a white identity that is supposedly always at risk of falling victim to a racialized 'enemy.' Indeed, white power propaganda rests heavily on the vilification, denigration, and stereotyping of non-Christian—in particular Jewish—people, African American, Latinx, and Asian American people as well as people minoritized on the grounds of their sexuality or immigrant/residence status, and so-called 'race traitors' (i.e. whites who do not subscribe to a white supremacist worldview). Through manageable dualisms of 'us versus them' and 'good versus evil,' white power activists rest on a Manichean conception of the world which envisions 'othered' groups as threatening oppressors and whites as their potential victims. This framework then generates narratives of white moral and ethnic superiority and seems to justify violence on imagined enemies of the white race.

Captivity as Cultural and Socio-Economic Oppression

Much has been written on how white supremacist organizations have historically exploited themes of victimization and captivity to suggest that whites have become a "maligned and persecuted minority" (Beck 154; see also Adams and Roscigno; Corte and Edwards; Taylor and Rambo). American sociologist Mitch Berbrier in particular has written on "The Victim Ideology" found in American white supremacist groups in an article of the same title. According to him, white supremacists use five main narratives as they portray themselves as part of a victimized minority. Firstly, they argue that whites are "oppressed victims of discrimination" (175), secondly that "white rights" are being abrogated (180), thirdly that they are "stigmatized and shamed" for being white (181), fourthly that this results in "deflated self-esteem," and fifthly that the survival of the white race is "threatened" (184). Finally, they lament the seeming existence of a "double standard" (181) that supposedly prevents whites from being treated fairly and equally by American society. White power activists see in policies like affirmative action (reframed increasingly as 'reverse racism'), welfare programs, and pro-immigration laws direct attacks against their economic, social, and cultural status. The band Hated and Proud reproduces this claim in "Double Standard" (2001), as it envisions whites as captives of an unjust, corrupted, "liberal" society:

Our rights are slowly being taken away
The rules have all been re-written
For what we can and cannot say

¹¹ More recently, several white supremacist groups have embraced notions of a transnational movement, or "Pan-Aryanism" (Blee, *Inside Organized Racism* 59). Pan-Aryanism ties white supremacist groups of different countries together by their shared 'whiteness,' anti-Semitism, and/or so-called 'Aryan heritage.'

You just cant [sic] speak whats [sic] on your mind
 [...]
 Theres [sic] a special interest watchdog group
 To defend each and every one of them
 But what about the people like us
 Our beliefs are mocked and ridiculed
 Misunderstood and labeled scum
 Cause were [sic] the ones not so easily fooled.
 [...]
 Theres [sic] a double standard goin on [sic] (line 1-14)

The lyrics above portray white power activists as victims of a social, political and legal “double standard,” according to which they feel discriminated against and thus, silenced and shamed for their racist worldview. The repetition of the negative form of “can” as well as the accumulation of clauses in the passive voice construct whites as incapacitated, deprived of their freedom, while others seem to be able to flourish. In an era in which the “rules have been re-written,” whites are depicted as stripped of their “rights” while other minority groups are perceived to be free to celebrate their ‘heritage’ in that they are under institutional protection. Song lyrics, in fact, almost constantly refer to the US government and its different institutions as main agents of this persecution. In “Free the Order” (1994), the band Midtown Bootboys reiterates anti-Semitic stereotypes and frames white people as held in bondage, victims of “the greedy Jewish plan / Locked up like an animal in such a wicked place / But God will cut his shackles when he frees his chosen race” (11-13). This rhetoric echoes directly the white power movement’s anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that sees the US government under the control of Jewish individuals whose ultimate goal is supposedly to eradicate the ‘white race.’¹²

Importantly, both songs analyzed here operate a “reversal” (Berbrier, “Half the Battle” 439) in appropriating a discourse of racial injustice, oppression, and insurgency that can be attributed to social justice movements like the women’s movement and the civil rights movement. Metaphors of captivity and enslavement (“locked up,” “shackles”) as well as of injustices (“rules changed,” “rights taken away,” “double standard”) directly connote past and enduring racial oppression of and violence against nonwhite and Jewish people (from colonization, genocide, expropriation, displacement, enslavement, institutional discrimination, and segregation to expressions of systemic racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia). The appropriation of such discourse by white power activists works not only to trivialize and dismiss the above-mentioned injustices, it also legitimizes racism and white supremacy as ‘valid’ political and social systems. Indeed, both songs quoted above imagine white individuals as part of a discriminated ‘ethnic minority’ and tap into familiar discourses

¹² The US government and its institutions are often referred to as the ‘System,’ or the “Zionist Occupied Government” (ZOG) in white power discourse (Corte and Edwards 8).

of social and racial justice to reframe the white power movement as a minority movement, focused solely on racial pride and cultural heritage. Such discourse normalizes the white power movement's worldview and its activism, and could attract and recruit less extreme white individuals in the movement.

Captivity as 'Biological' Peril

Finally, white power lyrics depict a world where the future of the white race itself is in captivity—constantly threatened to be extinguished by 'impurity.' Because white supremacist ideology is primarily concerned with constructing white identity as 'pure,' and with maintaining white hegemony and privilege, white power songs are obsessed with interracial relationships. Lyrics often depict a world where white women and girls are potential 'prey' to nonwhite people, threatened to be abducted or/and sexually assaulted. In the song "Aryan Man Awake" (2004), for instance, the band Prussian Blue paints a scene where unknown Black men threaten the sexual safety of white women and their children, imagining a moment "[w]hen a mother's very children belong to her no more / and black masked men with guns come bashing down the doors" (3-4). The song reiterates the white supremacist "myth of the black rapist," debunked by Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* (173), who penetrates and taints the sanctity of the white home (and the white body).

Prussian Blue, composed of the twin sisters Lamb and Lynx Gaede and managed by their mother April Gaede, represents one of the rare examples of women's interventions in the white power music scene, and more broadly in the movement. In the song quoted above, the band reproduces both white supremacists' patriarchal and racial hierarchies and offers glimpses of the sexual politics of the movement in which white men's control and regulation of white women's sexuality is considered vital for the survival of the white race. In *Bring the War Home*, Kathleen Belew casts light on the patriarchal workings of the white supremacist regime as well as on the perceived threat of interracial relationships against an imagined 'racial purity':

While white men's sexual relationships with nonwhite women mattered less to white supremacists, especially if such activity was secretive, profitable, or part of systematic violence against communities of color, for a white woman to bear nonwhite children was tantamount to racial annihilation. (59)

Whiteness itself then is depicted in a state of captivity – constantly in danger of subjugation or "annihilation" (59). In the song "Aryan Man 2099" (2006), the band Grinded Nig imagines a "dark new world" in which the last "[p]ure white Aryan" with "blond hair" and "blue eyes" is held hostage ("no refuge, no where to run") in a place where "[a]ll inhabitants are of muddy, dark complexion" and "[g]enerations of race mixing" have left cities in "ruins" (8, 6, 13, 10, 16, 9). The white character in the song is also depicted as endangered, as "cannibal Negroid ghouls" want "his Aryan blood" (15, 14). This song (over)signifies whiteness through visible markers like "white skin," "blond hair," and "blue eyes" against an enemy that cannot be contained in any fixed racial category ("muddy," "race mixing"). In this song, interracial

relationships are constructed as not only immoral but also perilous because they supposedly erase racial differences and shatter the rigid categories according to which the racial regime of white supremacy has classified individuals. Indeed, the imagined threat not only blurs white supremacist racial categories in the song, it also blurs the line between human and non-human, as the racialized ‘Other’ is characterized as degenerate, monster- and zombie-like (“monster of cruelty,” “ghouls”). Through the building of a supposedly dystopian future for white subjects, the song generates a sense of urgency and panic, and seems to be warning white individuals that their whiteness is under threat of being consumed, absorbed, and annihilated by a racialized ‘Other.’

In the songs analyzed in this part, the dehumanizing representation of nonwhite, Black, and Jewish people as animalistic, monster-like, and hazardous puts them into stark opposition to white characters whose sense of righteousness, exceptionality, and imagined entitlement to land and power remains unquestioned. The narrative of captivity then, in framing whites as oppressed and endangered, and especially white women as imperiled, elevates the dramatization of the sense of harm of white individuals to greater heights and ultimately condones and legitimates the use of extreme violence against a perceived ‘Other.’

2) The Hunter

Apart from the figure of ‘the captive,’ the myth of regeneration through violence portrays a second protagonist, the hunter hero. The latter emerges in the 1720s frontier narratives and is exemplified by characters like Leatherstocking. According to Slotkin, the hunter is a (white male) warrior or “destroyer” (*Regeneration Through Violence* 563) who acts as “a savior of captives” and an “exorcist of Indians” (“Dreams and Genocide” 44). He is generally depicted as “low, coarse, rude-spoken, antisocial, outlawed or socially inferior” and as an “agent of pure white civilization” (44). The white power movement constructs a similar figure in its music.

Indeed, while the captive frame emphasizes a passive social actor constrained by the perceived detrimental effects of modern society, the hunter frame centers on a highly aggressive social actor, whose violence is justified by the music as last recourse for ‘survival’. In “Your Worst Nightmare” (1994), Bound for Glory depicts a (presumably white) protagonist tracking down an animalistic enemy.

Low life dirt, at night they roam the streets
 Preying on the innocent, the helpless and the weak
 They’re giving andouts [sic], yet they’re always wanting more
 Parasites of society, rotten to the core
 And I, [sic] have got no pity for you
 And if you ask my name, I’ll tell you who
 I am the hunter, taken to the streets
 Test my rage, and you will get beat (1-8)

The lyrics above depict a violent racist (man)hunt as an act of righteousness and bravery. Indeed, while the antagonist is here framed as worthless, parasitic, and threatening, the white

'hero' is imagined as ruthless but virtuous and uncorrupted. He is depicted as a savior who fights for the rescue of supposedly endangered white captives who cannot defend themselves, and reestablishes a naturalized order through violence ("In my court you cannot cop a plea" (17); "I am the hunter" (7) which makes "you" (3) the prey). The song further appeals more clearly to a militarized masculinity ("I'm the man i'm [sic] taking the stand" (17)), when violence is intensified to bring about death ("I will give you the rope" (16) and "from my blade, nothing will save you tonight" (24)). The protagonist is here depicted as not only taking up arms against a racialized 'Other' (a racist slur used against Black men at the end of the song clearly denigrates African Americans) but also against a deemed 'lesser' man (characterized in the song as nonhuman, a "sickness in a sick society" (16)). In other white power songs, such as "Aryan Rage" by Angry Aryans, hunter figures often enact acts of extreme violence against nonwhite, queer, and white men considered brainwashed by 'the System.' The latter two are considered 'brainwashed' because they do not conform to western hegemonic masculinity, based on an image of white, middle- or upper class, heterosexual men, and therefore threaten the fixed, traditional patriarchal hierarchies found at the core of the white power movement. Lyrics often mourn the alleged corruption of modern society, in which men are supposedly 'feminized' and underprivileged, and the nuclear family structure is under threat. Violence in white power songs is highly romanticized and embellished through narratives of hunter-heroes, who – by enacting moral acts of care (for the white family, white women and children, and white 'brothers') and, as we will see below, acts of vigilance – re-assert, or regenerate, a supposed 'natural order' in US contemporary society.

In *Exorcising Blackness* (1984), Trudier Harris skillfully analyzes in the works of Black writers the role and meaning of representing ritualized violence in the form of lynching and burning. In discussing the Ku Klux Klan's tactics of intimidation and violence against African Americans during the years of the Reconstruction, she powerfully examines the function of the white perpetrator: "[...] the white man attains kingly status by determining what is wrong with his society, ferreting it out, and reestablishing the order which was the norm before the disturbance" (20). Klansmen's lyrics of "Join the Klan" (1990) with its chorus "Be a man, be a man, and join the Klan" (qtd. in Love 55) and the title of their song "Fetch the Rope" (1989) explicitly call for a white vigilante by appealing to notions of hypermasculinity as well as ritualized and organized violence. The myth of the vigilante resonates loudly with the myth of the hunter, as the tracking down of an enemy and performing violence as a means of (fantasized) justice and/or pleasure characterizes both. John Cawelti analyzes the figure of the vigilante in "Myths of Violence in American Popular Culture." Focusing on different popular literary genres (from the western to the detective story), he argues that the vigilante appears in narratives when the state can no longer "protect the innocents nor avenge acts of criminal violence," so that the vigilante "must become the law himself" and "destroy the criminals through violence" (532). In both Slotkin's theorization of the myth of regeneration through violence and in white power music, the figures of the hunter and of the vigilante share the belief in a moral necessity of violence and a future state of social regeneration.

In white supremacist cultural artifacts, such as pamphlets, novels, forum discussions as well as songs, morally justified violence is also reiterated and celebrated in the figure of the lone wolf terrorist,¹³ a romanticized loner who fights a private war for the ‘survival of the white race.’¹⁴ In the song “Robert Mathews,” the band No Remorse pays tribute to American neo-Nazi Robert Mathews, the founder and leader of the terrorist organization ‘the Order’ which was active in the US in the 1980s, as a lone wolf terrorist: “Robert Mathews, for you we play this song / You raised your gun as a nation sunk, but still the fight goes on / [...] /And every Aryan soldier holds your memory in his heart / And when the war is over, everyone will play their part” (qtd. in Cotter 133). Alongside Nazi references, Vikings, and Norse mythical heroes, the American white power music scene promotes ‘local heroes’ in such songs. Like Mathews, a random activist can also become ‘a hero’ in the broader movement narrative and be celebrated in songs for his so-called sacrifices to the movement. Those depictions of heroic figures and ‘martyrdom’ in white power culture cultivate an exceptional white identity that becomes symbolic of the whole movement’s identity and agenda.

More broadly, narratives of violence found in white power music, whether in the form of hunting or acts of vigilantism, are not only means of solidifying a collective identity and motivating audiences among the movement to exert violence, they are also messages framed as acts of terror themselves. As Blee has argued in multiple of her publications, vile depictions of racial, religious, and sexual minority group members as well as the frequent images of violence found in white power culture do not only serve the movement. They are also “intended to be immediately damaging” to and “instill fear” in minoritized and othered communities “who see [or hear] them” (“Study of White Supremacism” 6). Those messages are part and parcel of a violent propaganda to exacerbate existing racial divisions in the United States and trigger what some WPM activists have referred to as a race war.

3) Racial War

According to Slotkin, Puritan narratives did not only depict American “Indian Wars” as a local struggle, but also as a cosmic one. He writes,

Puritans were inclined to a Manichean conception of universal war between Good and Evil; in their frontier situation facing the Indians they found a correlative of that archetypal confrontation. [...] Logically enough, the Puritan-Indian relationship finally resolved itself into one of overt race war. (“Dreams and Genocide” 41)

¹³ It should be noted here that white supremacist Louis Beam popularized the term “lone wolf” (SPLC) in his infamous essay “Leaderless Resistance” in which he argues that the future of white supremacy lies with activists taking individual (as opposed to organized) action. Beam attributed an essential role to cultural artifacts, such as books, newspapers, leaflets, and music, in spreading white supremacist ideology and the strategy of leaderless resistance.

¹⁴ In a 2013 interview with Bill Moyers, Slotkin recognizes the seemingly inherent relation that exist between US society and the ‘lone killer.’ He argues that the latter tries to place himself/herself in relation to “the historical mythology of our society” that has validated and romanticized violence for centuries.

In “The White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web,” Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno write that “[t]he divinely sanctified supremacy of the white race and inherent inferiority of all other races” (761) are prominent themes within the ideological framing of white supremacist organizations. In white power music, the notion of race war (sometimes called “racial holy war”) is often framed through apocalyptic images. Prussian Blue’s song “Victory Day” (2004) invokes a “holy creed of Racial [sic] purpose” and “a mighty Race [sic] to defend” in a moral and racial war that will lead to a “sacred Destiny” (13-14, 25). The band also sings about the outcome of this war: “after that purging” (3), “when we finally conquer, our people will be free / And all across this great land, the bold Truth [sic] we shall see” (18-19). The lyrics above rely on a religious vocabulary to construct the white race as ‘chosen’ and endowed with a sense of mission, a ‘manifest destiny.’ This ‘mission’ seems to involve an awakening of a ‘white consciousness’ (“the bold Truth”) and the resurgence of white supremacy as governing ideology in the United States. The song also heavily rests on a colonial discourse, invoking processes of conquest and domination, that reflects the potential imperialist and expansionist aspirations of the white power movement—conquest, here, is linked to a spiritual project and quasi-transcendental enterprise.

This colonial rhetoric of ‘manifest destiny’ and holy creed found in white power music also hinges on metaphors of purity and impurity, health and disease, and often invoke notions of cleansing, purification, and “purging” (“Victory Day” 3). Another example of this rhetoric can be found in the song “White Victory” (1999) by Blue Eyed Devils, which suggests the need “[t]o cleanse my land and culture of the Jewish plight” (14). The song “Aryan Victory” (2016) by Xenocide also imagines a world that will be “free, white and clean” once ridden of “a dirty jew bastard” (18, 13). In discussing Nazism, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust in *Theories of Race and Racism*, Zygmunt Bauman sheds light on the dehumanizing processes systematically employed by the Nazis against their perceived enemies. He writes that the racist regime posits “a total and uncompromising isolation of the pathogenic and infectious race – the source of disease and contamination – through its complete spatial separation or physical destruction” as the “only adequate solution to problems” (223).

Although Bauman focuses his argument on Nazism and Jewish people specifically, I would extend his remark to include other nonwhites and non-Christians against which white power activists construct their worldview. White power songs designate a broader agenda of purification and restoration in harboring a discourse of hygiene and purity against a powerful racist depersonalized imaginary of filth and pollution, and try to justify extreme violence as both necessary and providential. This is very much like the way Puritans’ captivity and “Indian Wars” narratives legitimized the Puritan settlers’ project of colonization and ethnic genocide as an act of necessary purification against what they considered the physical and moral ‘impurities’ of the ‘new world.’

III. Regeneration

In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Slotkin argues that through the violence acted out in the hunt, i.e. the domination of the conquered land and its Native American inhabitants, the white settler Puritan regenerates him/herself into a supposedly better, ‘purer’ self. Slotkin argues that the violence the hero experiences during his captivity and during his fight against Native Americans “is an initiation and a conversion in which he achieves communion with the powers that rule the universe beyond the frontiers” and whereby he “acquires a new moral character, a new set of power or gifts, a new identity” (551). White power ideology also promises a regenerated white community with a new moral character and supposedly ‘grander’ purpose to be found in an era after the so-called racial war. Firstly, this regeneration is often imagined in white power discourse as territorial, in the form of a white ethno-state.

Through praises of small rural towns and independent, i.e. not federally governed, communities, natural spaces and their cultivation, white power lyrics draw on the prominent agrarian myth to imagine a ‘white homeland.’¹⁵ In *The Age of Reform* (1955), Richard Hofstadter identifies how the myth is ubiquitous in US American history, from seventeenth-century writings to contemporary literature and popular culture. He offers the following definition of the myth:

The American mind was raised upon a sentimental attachment to rural living and upon a series of notions about rural people and rural life that I have chosen to designate as the agrarian myth. The agrarian myth represents a kind of homage that Americans have paid to the fancied innocence of their origins. (23)

White power lyrics, with their oft anti-capitalist and anti-modern stance, criticize modern, urban, and industrialized society as a corruptive and destructive system and feel prone to (re)turn to rural life.¹⁶ This critique relies on tropes of an over-exploited, drained, and disappearing (feminine) nature and often takes shape in metaphors of rape, for instance, in the aforementioned song “Aryan Victory” by the band Xenocide in which the earth is described as “being raped” (14). Also in “Living in America” (1997) from Max Resist, men are called “to make a stand” against the “rape” not only of their “women” but also their “land” (11-14). By contrast, lyrics that imagine the emergence of a utopian ‘white homeland’ after the so-called ‘racial war’ paint a pastoral scene, in which nature is supposedly at peace and in symbiosis with the white race. In “Victory Day” (2004), Prussian Blue envisions the outcome of the WPM’s anticipated struggle:

¹⁵ As Belew writes, white power activists have long discussed sites where they could attempt to establish a ‘white homeland,’ ranging from the Pacific Northwest to Southern California (161-63). Indeed, white power leaders and activists across the country, Belew argues, “embraced the idea of Northwest migration and the founding of an all-white nation” (163), and in doing so, often reproduced narratives romanticizing ‘the West’ and frontier imagery of US settler colonialism.

¹⁶ Ironically, the white power movement and its music industry ultimately depend on modern tools like computers and the Internet to survive.

The women, they'll smile, on Victory Day.
 And the children, they'll laugh and they'll sing and they'll play.
 And the forests will echo our grace, for the brand new dawn of our Race. (9-11)

In the chorus above, nature assumes the position of an arbiter of life, seemingly agreeing with a white “[v]ictory” (9) against nonwhites and non-Christian ‘Others’ as it is described in harmony with the white power prerogative (“will echo”). The song implies that a ‘natural’ order has been restored: women will be happy *again*, children will play *again*, and nature will be harmonious *again*. Nature, together with women and children forming a sacred ‘trinity’ of white supremacy, is personified and imagined as a soothing and nurturing entity that will care for the further development (“brand new dawn”) of the white race.

Secondly, this regenerated land is depicted as a secluded space, which when reserved for the white individual to cultivate, will secure “a future for White Children” and thereby the survival of the white race (qtd. in ADL “14 Words”). In the song “Romantic Violence” (1995), the band Max Resist imagines a future “white world” (17) that reproduces tropes of what Patricia Hill Collins has coined the “traditional family ideal” (64) and exposed as heterosexual, patriarchal, middle- to working class, and white:

Together we will be until the end of time
 And you can tell the whole world
 That you are all mine
 We'll get a little place, and raise a family
 In a proud white world – how grand it will be (13-17)

The lyrics above depict with sentimentality the telos of the white power movement: to re-establish an official white supremacist state and world-system in which white people will have absolute control of political, social, cultural, and institutional structures. The song seems to conflate the intimate sphere of the home (“place,” “family”) to the communal and public sphere of the homeland (part of a “white world”). It imagines the boundlessness of the white power movement in time and space and offers to its listeners a fantasized “proud white world,” in which white power activists will be able to publicly voice their racist beliefs and enact their racist values.

Resting on the ideology of American exceptionalism and American foundational narratives of ‘new beginnings,’ white supremacists envision themselves as ‘chosen’ for a ‘mission’ to establish a ‘better’ society, a ‘purer’ nation. Much like the first generation of Puritan New England settlers who believed that they were ‘God’s chosen people’ sent to a sacred ‘Promised Land,’ white power musicians, such as Max Resist, seek to establish what Puritan colonial leader John Winthrop called a “city upon a hill that will shine upon” (qtd. in Paul 152) a future “proud white world” (Max Resist, “Romantic Violence” 17).¹⁷ This exceptionalist rhetoric has

¹⁷ Winthrop coined the phrase in his treatise “A Model for Christian Charity” (1630). He writes: “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us” (qtd. in Paul 152). His use of the biblical topos of the heavenly city evokes the exceptionality of the Puritans as a model for Christian

been tenacious in US American history and culture and has lent itself through the notions of the 'Promised Land' and a 'manifest destiny' to exclusionist and violent attitudes toward nonwhite people and other minorities.

Conclusion

Analyzing the texts, ideas, ideals, and tactics of the contemporary white supremacist movement, such as the music made by white power bands, may be useful to understand and resist ideologies of white supremacist groups. In particular, there is a need to decode the systems of meanings from which those movements emerge and grow, but also to examine the shared histories and overlapping ideologies that exist between the racist extreme movement and American society. As I have argued in this paper, American foundational myths can represent points of convergence between those two spheres, in revealing the shared narratives and common 'icons' that permeate them. After all, a myth, as Slotkin argues "is a narrative which concentrates in a single dramatized experience the whole history of a people in their land" by "reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors" (*Regeneration through Violence* 269, 8). White power activists as members of the imagined community that is the US nation are familiar with its foundational myths, its "biography" (Anderson 204), and actively attempt to rewrite cultural memory through the revision—or re-adaptation—of those myths.

This article has analyzed a myriad of "compelling metaphors" (*Regeneration Through Violence* 8) that expose the entanglements between the American white power movement and mainstream society. Indeed, by drawing on Slotkin's study of the myth of regeneration through violence that developed in colonial literature of the North American Puritan colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I have shown that the white power music scene provides 'icons' and 'heroes' that stem from US hegemonic narratives and cultural memories of the nation's violent beginnings. White power music constructs white 'heroes' as 'captives' (culturally, socially, economically, and biologically threatened) and/or 'hunters' (i.e. vigilantes or lone wolf terrorists). Both figures are expected to enact violence on their racialized enemies in an ultimate 'racial war' for the supposed betterment or regeneration of the white race. In imagining what this regeneration entails, bands actively reproduce the agrarian myth according to which romanticized self-reliant white individuals cultivate their 'white homeland' and establish a white "city upon a hill that will shine upon the world" (Winthrop qtd. in Paul 152).

What I hope to have conveyed here is that the kind of racism found in white power lyrics derives from the racism and white supremacy that have justified the enslavement, exploitation, displacement, and genocide of racialized 'Others' by white Europeans and white

people around the world.

Americans for centuries. As Nancy S. Love points out, although the European empires that colonialism and enslavement made have fallen, the Eurocentric world order those empires built persists. Thus, the white power movement today is not a fringe movement, rather it “reveals, at least in some respects, the internal cultural-political demons of western liberal democracies” (27). Finally, Slotkin emphasized the lasting powers of myths and the potential hazard that can stem from them. He wrote, “myths reflect the life of Man, but they also can shape and direct it, for good or ill. They are made of words, concepts, images, and they can kill a man” (“Dream and Genocide” 38). Reading those lines in 2019, when white power terrorist attacks of the like of El Paso are now part of a growing global threat, can only feel as a wise invitation to pay closer attention to the culture that generates—and regenerates—white supremacy.

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