# 1

## MOBILIZING WHITE POWER

### Music, Culture, and Politics

"There's a whole other genre of music out there that no one ever hears about and its [*sic*] real powerful, especially at that awkward stage where no one exactly knows who they are."[1] This California teenage skin girl is talking about white power music. Resistance Records, once the major distributor in the United States, has dubbed white power music "the soundtrack to the white revolution."[2] Mainstream Americans recently heard more about white power music due to several high-profile hate crimes. Wade Michael Page, the 2012 Sikh Temple shooter, played in multiple white power bands and belonged to Hammerskin Nation, a racist skinhead group known for its annual music festivals.[3] Paul Craig Cobb, the internationally known white supremacist arrested for terroristic threats in Leith, North Dakota, planned to host white power music festivals on his rural land.[4] Anders Behring Breivik, who committed the July 2011 terrorist attack on a socialist labor party camp in Norway, also enjoyed white power music, though he reportedly preferred hip hop.[5] They are only a few of the individuals, many of them teenagers, radicalized by white power music often accessed over the Internet.

The importance of white power music for an expanding network of white supremacists across the globe should come as no surprise. However, the role of music in politics generally receives too little

attention from scholars, politicians, and citizens—and white power music is no exception. In this book, I begin to fill that gap by examining the prominent role white power music plays in conveying ideas, funding activities, recruiting members, and promoting violence for a growing transnational white supremacist movement. My larger and deeper concern is the relationship between aesthetics, democracy, and politics, specifically how the arts and popular culture will shape the future of democratic politics.

The Anti-Defamation League, an organization that tracks the activities of hate groups, claims that "for listeners, white power music is not simply entertainment. It is music with a message, a medium used to express an ideology suffused with anger, hatred and violence."[6] According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, another watchdog organization, "[white power music] is accomplishing for the radical right what decades of racist theorizing didn't: It has given Skinheads and many other extremists around the world a common language and unifying ideology, an ideology that replaces old-fashioned state-based nativism with the concept of pan-Aryanism."[7] William Pierce, former leader of the neo-Nazi National Alliance and owner of Resistance Records, confirmed that these musical effects are intended. In his fall 1999 "Message from the Publisher" in *Resistance* magazine, he wrote: "Music speaks to us at a deeper level than books or political rhetoric: music speaks directly to the soul. Resistance Records . . . will be the music of our people's renewal and rebirth. It will be music of strength and joy for our people. It will be music of defiance and rage against the enemies of our people. . . . It will be the music of the great, cleansing revolution which is coming. Enjoy it!"[8]

## THE RISE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT POST-9/11 AND BEYOND

Right-wing extremism has increased in western liberal democracies, partly in response to the challenges globalization poses for the economic security and cultural identity of the white West.[9] In the United States, membership in white supremacist groups rose steadily post-9/11 with significant increases after the 2008 election and 2012 reelection of President Barack Obama. These increases were followed by slight declines in 2013 and 2014. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of US hate groups reached a record high of

1,018 in 2011 and, despite decreases to 784 by 2014, remains at record highs. The greatest increases occurred in patriot and militia groups, which grew from 149 in 2008 to 1,360 in 2012, including a 7 percent increase in 2012 alone. By 2014 these groups had also declined to 874—a 19 percent drop from 2011.[10]

Rising public debt, economic recession, changing demographics, and a series of Obama initiatives—including gun control, health care, and immigration reform—portrayed as "socialist" or even "fascist," partly explain the rapid increases. Recent declines are more difficult to explain. They likely reflect some combination of a slightly improved economy, increased and often anonymous online activity, shifts to other underground strategies, and negative publicity and stronger legal action following recent hate crimes. In addition, the Republican Party has embraced radical right issues, such as gun control, anti-immigration, Islamophobia, and states' rights, and may now provide a more respectable outlet for potential hate group members.[11] Ironically, the postracial messages that followed Barack Obama's election as America's first Black president also shifted control of public discourse about race and racism to the Republican right, at least temporarily.[12]

The slight decline in hate group numbers has not meant a decrease in hate-related violence, though. Stormfront, a major white supremacist website that boasts three hundred thousand registered users, two-thirds from the United States, picked up 32,736 new users in 2009 alone. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Stormfront users, including Wade Michael Page, the Sikh Temple shooter, have killed one hundred people in the past five years. Frazier Glenn Cross (aka Frazier Glenn Miller), who killed three people in 2014 outside a Jewish Community Center in Overland, Kansas, was active on another major white supremacist website, Vanguard News Network. Dylann "Storm" Roof, who confessed to the 2015 murder of nine African Americans in Charleston's Emanuel A.M.E. Church, reportedly frequented the Council of Conservative Citizens website. Hundreds of these smaller blogs, forums, and websites now exist to promote white supremacy, including its music.[13]

In Europe increases in right-wing extremist violence now complement electoral challenges to mainstream candidates and increased electoral support for right-wing parties in some countries.[14] Although many European nations saw declines from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, the overall number of violent extremist incidents is rising again,

especially in the former Soviet nations of Eastern Europe.[15] European nations have also experienced high-profile hate crimes, such as the July 2011 terrorist attack on a socialist labor party camp in Norway by Anders Behring Breivik. White power music also plays a major role in European right-wing extremist movements, including Scandinavian white supremacist groups. Like Page, Breivik frequented the Stormfront website and reportedly enjoyed the white power music of Saga, who performs a well-known cover of Rahowa's "Ode to a Dying People."[16]

Although this rising tide of hate shares some features with mass mobilizations under earlier fascist regimes, such as Nazi Germany, I argue that such comparisons are ultimately limited. According to Joel Olson, race and racism involve both the social construction of group identities and a political system of power relations.[17] Claims to "whiteness" (or some shade of it) have long been used to divide the working class economically and politically in western democracies. In the United States, white racial identity historically granted higher "standing" to working-class citizens, who struggled to distinguish themselves from enslaved and free Blacks as well as waves of Irish, Italian, and other immigrants.[18] White racial identity has also compensated for some of what Richard Sennett calls "the hidden injuries of class." By mobilizing "a kind of moral hierarchy of national and cultural differences," the politics of whiteness could assuage the internalized sense of many poor(er) whites that they were "nothing special."[19] The question "Who *may* be considered white?" has mattered in the political history of the United States, and terribly so. In the present ostensibly postracial era, "whiteness" still matters, but it has now become an unacknowledged norm rather than an acclaimed status symbol.[20] To look ahead briefly, this presumed color blindness combined with liberal individualism means that racially motivated hate crimes will appear to be aberrant acts of disturbed individuals, rather than the products of systemic racism.

Judith Butler uses the term "precarity" to describe the increasingly uncertain economic circumstances of many white and nonwhite workers today. In a 2013 interview in *R/evolutions*, she distinguishes "precarity" from "precariousness" and "precaritization": "*precariousness* is a general feature of embodied life, a dimension of our corporeality and sociality. And *precarity* is a way that precariousness is amplified or made more acute under certain social policies. So precarity is

induced. And *precaritization* helps us think about the processes through which precarity is induced—those can be political actions, economic policies, governmental policies, or forms of state racism and militarization."[21] According to Butler, diverse populations currently live under conditions of induced precarity, and they experience it in different ways and to different extents. Many middle- and working-class whites now find themselves among the newly disposable populations of the culturally and economically dispossessed. In conversation with Butler, Athena Athanasiou notes that these "frames of dispossession become a performative occasion for various contingencies of individual or concerted actions of political despair and dissent."[22] It is tempting to assume that this collective resistance will be progressive. Yet today the political Right, including the extreme right, is mobilizing citizens against these processes of precaritization. For Butler, this means "there is obviously a limit to our alliances as we live through historical moments of forced loss. In that respect, the battle against induced precarity ought to be simultaneously a battle against racism, nationalism, anti-immigrant politics, misogyny, homophobia, and all forms of social injustice."[23] The culture and politics of white supremacy compromise such alliances and may undermine their very possibility. Olson asks the trenchant question here: "How, in a polity in which whiteness and democracy have been inextricably connected, can greater participation be achieved without inviting a lynch mob?"[24] Recent rises in hate groups and increasingly violent hate crimes suggest that it cannot—at least, not yet.

Kathleen Blee outlines the new tactics employed by the radical right today to mobilize support among newly (and earlier) disaffected and dispossessed whites. They include: apocalyptic images of a global race war; alliances between KKK, neo-Nazi, and Christian Identity groups; sophisticated use of new technologies, including the Internet; and recruitment strategies focused on so-called vulnerable populations, especially prisoners, teenagers, and women.[25] The growing white power music scene now plays a major role in efforts of the radical right to recruit teenagers, in particular. The music is intended to appeal to the sense of alienation, rebellion, and even despair among white working-class youth, who now find themselves on the margins of society with little hope for progress. According to Pierce, "My aim with Resistance music is to give them a rationale for alienation, to help them understand why they're alienated, to help them understand the

programs and policies behind these alienating conditions, and to give them a target, a purpose for their anger and rage."[26] Participating in the white power music scene allows dispossessed white teenagers to perform their precarity and resistance to it. Former white supremacists frequently relate how white power music got them involved and how they then used the music to recruit others. T. J. Leyden, a former racist skinhead recruiter, recounts: "I continued to use the most effective technique to bring kids in, which was music. . . . Any time I possibly could, I would get a kid listening to white power music—especially the fast-paced, heart-pounding music that they liked, and soon enough he would be embodying, believing, and spouting all kinds of racist verbiage. Then I could get him to pass out a hundred tapes or CDs to all his friends."[27]

   White power music has long thrived in what Pete Simi and Robert Futrell call "hidden spaces of hate," such as closed bars, private clubs, restricted festivals, and now the Internet.[28] These spaces have expanded since the late 1970s when Ian Stuart Donaldson, the "god-father of the racialist movement the world over," and his racist skinhead band Skrewdriver first began performing and recording white power music.[29] Approximately 350 white power bands now perform in the United States and Western Europe. One hundred and twenty bands are based solely in the United States, the only country where it is completely legal to produce and distribute white power music.[30] Major genres include: neo-Nazi folk, racist skinhead, heavy metal, and fascist experimental music.[31] In the 1990s, Resistance Records and other online distributors, such as MiceTrap, Panzerfaust, and Stormfront, started marketing white power music online. In 2004, Panzerfaust launched "Project Schoolyard USA" and issued a $0.15 sampler CD targeting middle school students. In 2006, RadioWhite, an online white power music station, offered six different twenty-four-hour music feeds and a playlist of five thousand songs.[32] Resistance Records, once the major US distributor, reported an average of fifty Internet orders per day of approximately $70 each. Most white power music CDs are priced under $20 and cost no more than $5 to produce, making profit margins relatively high.[33] Although Apple's iTunes recently removed most "white supremacist–themed music" from its offerings, white power music remains readily available from mainstream distributors, such as Amazon and Spotify.[34] Exact figures are impossible to

obtain, but the white power music scene certainly contributes millions annually to white supremacist groups and national front parties.

## FROM POPULAR MUSIC TO HATE MUSIC (AND BACK AGAIN)

Many scholars distinguish between high culture and so-called low or popular culture.[35] According to Stuart Hall, this distinction presumes that "culture" is " 'the best that has been thought and said' in a society. It is the sum of the great ideas as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music, and philosophy—the 'high culture' of an age."[36] By this definition, classical compositions performed by professional musicians in opera houses and concert halls are high art; popular music played at bars, clubs, and festivals and sung by people in their homes or on the streets is low art. I resist this distinction here for several reasons. First, it tends to limit the arts and culture to beautiful objects created for an art world and experienced by a select few in formal settings. Second and closely related, it defines the value of the arts and culture in terms of their autonomy and distance from popular influences. As Theodore Gracyk notes, "a cultural practice belongs to 'popular' culture only in contrast to the cultural practices favored by a distinct, more privileged class."[37] Third, the distinction perpetuates ideas of western culture as high culture at the expense of more innovative and nonwestern forms of artistic expression. According to Marshall McLuhan, new and different art forms are often thought to corrupt or degrade the standards of high art. However, they simultaneously secure the supposedly higher status of "great" western artworks and sometimes are eventually granted that status.[38]

According to Hall, "culture" should also refer "to the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of 'ordinary people'—what is called the 'mass culture' or the 'popular culture' of an age."[39] Gracyk draws a further distinction between popular culture and mass art. He argues that popular culture becomes "mass art" when it is mass produced, widely circulated, and readily accessible economically and cognitively. As a type of popular culture, "mass art must employ a familiar vernacular code."[40] The aesthetic meaning and value of the arts and

popular culture are, then, a matter of degree. Popular performers and their audiences must possess the requisite "cultural capital" in order for the arts and popular culture to be properly understood. According to Gracyk, popular audiences must learn to recognize "the social or political identity that a creative musician 'encodes' into the music's message."[41] This suggests that popular music involves more than mere entertainment for mass consumption; it also shapes the shared identity of democratic citizens. Popular music can reinforce conformity to a dominant order, resist its established norms, or both. In the process, it can catalyze the imagination, express creativity, integrate the self, provide meaningful symbols, and, at its best, sustain a sense of beauty and harmony. These many functions make popular music a powerful tool for advancing democratic or, in the case of white power music, undemocratic causes.[42]

A detailed analysis of the cultural politics expressed in popular music lies beyond the scope of this book. I focus here on white power music as hate music, and I draw a clear line between it and most popular music. However, I also position hate music as an extreme form that illuminates the white supremacist norm. Considerable continuity exists between white power music and some of the messages found in popular songs today. Popular song lyrics often include racist, sexist, and homophobic language, and stories of violence. Many country, folk, and rock songs also express emotions of anger, fear, grief, and even hatred. For this reason, it seems important to begin with some examples of how hate-filled messages span white power music and other popular music genres. Although my analysis foregrounds the racist messages of white power music, I also consider the complex ways that race intersects with class, gender, sexuality, and nation.

Many scholars regard country music, which is typically associated with conservative or traditional values, as especially prone to racist, sexist, and homophobic messages.[43] A recent example is Brad Paisley's and LL Cool J's "Accidental Racist," a country song about Southern pride and the Confederate flag that laments how the legacy of slavery continues to hurt young white southerners.[44] The lyrics include LL Cool J's offer to deal: if you overlook my gold jewelry, then I'll forget the iron shackles. Some critics and fans were outraged by this false analogy between chattel slavery and consumer culture with its suggestion to forget past oppressions rather than learn from them. Others saw the song as well intentioned but racially tone deaf. Brandon

Soderberg of *Spin* said, "It's hard to get really outraged at Brad Paisley's and LL Cool J's country-hop attempt at racial solidarity because their clueless take on race-based message music seemingly went well." He concluded that "Accidental Racist" was the "most politely offensive thing to drop on the Internet this year."[45] On *The Colbert Report*, Stephen Colbert and Alan Cumming even parodied the song with a spin-off, "Oopsy, Daisy Homophobe."[46] Their parody highlighted the linkages between the racist nationalism expressed in "Accidental Racist" and a heterosexist hypermasculinity.

Male dominance figures prominently in popular music, especially rock music, which has been described as a "white boys club."[47] Despite the increased presence of women in rock today, Gracyk notes that "rock had become synonymous with a male-defined sexuality that sees women in light of a demeaning ideology of subordinate Other."[48] For example, recall the Beatles song "Run for Your Life," in which the singer claims he would rather see his girl dead than with another man.[49] John Lennon, who composed the song with Paul McCartney, later said it was his "least favorite Beatles song" and the one he most regretted writing.[50] Although better known for Natalie Maines' 2003 comment to a London audience, "Just so you know, we're ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas," the Dixie Chicks gained notoriety earlier for "Goodbye Earl," a country song composed by Dennis Linde that also created considerable controversy by reversing stereotypes of sexual violence.[51] The lyrics relate how Wanda with the help of her high school girlfriend, Mary Ann, murders her abusive husband, Earl. As this country example suggests, sexual violence is not limited to rock songs. Folk murder ballads, such as "Pretty Polly," have a long history and often cross over into country and rock. "Down on the Banks of the Ohio," the story of Willie, who stabs his girlfriend when she refuses to marry him and disposes of her body in the Ohio River, was recorded by Joan Baez, Johnny Cash, Bill Monroe, Olivia Newton John, Dolly Parton, Pete Seeger, and other artists.[52] More recently, one need only consider the controversial lyrics of "Kim," which describes white rapper Eminem's graphic fantasy of murdering his then ex-wife, Kim Mathers.[53]

Public outcry more typically targets Black rappers for lyrics that refer to "bitches" and "hoes" and promote sexual irresponsibility, substance abuse, disrespect for authority, and violent behavior.[54] Prominent Black leaders, such as Spike Lee, Barack Obama, and Oprah

Winfrey, have joined with Black churches and community members to express their concern about the effects of such messages on Black youth. The cultural critic Stanley Crouch drew this controversial analogy: "Images of black youth seen on MTV, BET, or VH1 . . . are not far removed from those D. W. Griffith used in *Birth of a Nation*, where Reconstruction Negroes were depicted as bullying, hedonistic buffoons ever ready to bloody somebody. This is the new minstrelsy. The neo-Sambo is sturdily placed in our contemporary popular iconography."[55] It is crucial to note that Black rappers did not create these racist stereotypes of Black youth as "thugs," "pimps," "bitches," and "hoes," and that many underground rap artists reject or recast them. In *The Hip Hop Wars*, Tricia Rose notes that white listeners now account for the majority of hip hop sales, and she asks: "Why has the black gangsta-pimp-ho trinity been the vehicle for hip hop's greatest sales and highest market success?"[56] I return to this important question in my final chapter.

Other popular songs invoke the (white) American nation as an "imagined community" without explicitly espousing racial and sexual violence. Toby Keith's 2009 country hit "American Ride," composed by Joe West and David Pahanish, highlights a host of political problems, such as illegal immigration, political correctness, frivolous lawsuits, rising gas prices, and declining religious faith, followed by a chorus that repeatedly affirms America.[57] The animated video released with "American Ride" shows Pat Robertson mounted on George W. Bush, portrays Barack Obama as a bobble-head doll, and casts Muammar Gaddafi, Kim Jong-Il, and Fidel Castro as pirates. Keith describes himself as "a conservative democrat who is sometimes embarrassed by his party." In response to criticisms from the "blogger terrorists," he says that "they really can't get a fire started in the direction they want to go because the video makes fun of *everybody*."[58] Yet his "everybody" sustains the myth of a white, male American nation facing foreign enemies of other races. Patriotism takes on an ambiguous meaning here. As one blogger puts it, "Modern patriotism, no longer rooted in land (who owns land anymore?), ideology (have you seen Congress recently?), or culture (information age stratification), seems unmoored. What makes us American at all, other than simply being present on the American ride?"[59] Although Keith is an avowed Democrat, his commitment "to the American ride" includes the post-9/11 patriotic,

militaristic "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue" and his support in 2004 for George W. Bush as president.[60]

The iconic rock musician Bruce Springsteen, whose song "Born in the U.S.A." confronts the challenges facing working-class America, also struggles with issues of gender, nation, and race.[61] Ronald Reagan's 1984 presidential campaign briefly coopted "Born in the U.S.A.," because the song portrayed hard-working white men as American heroes and "remasculinized" the post-Vietnam United States. According to Bryan K. Garman, "Like Reagan and Rambo, the apparently working-class Springsteen was for many Americans a white hard-bodied hero whose masculinity confirmed the values of patriarchy and patriotism, the work ethic and rugged individualism, and who clearly demarcated the boundaries between men and women, black and white, heterosexual and homosexual."[62] In a 1984 *Rolling Stone* interview, Springsteen disassociated himself from Reagan and Republicanism, claiming that the president used his music to manipulate voters.[63] According to Marc Dolan, "All his life, Springsteen had believed in and preached a biracial America," a commitment powerfully expressed in his 2008 endorsement when he said Barack Obama "speaks to the America I've envisioned in my music for the past 35 years."[64] Yet Springsteen remains associated with the image of America as a nation built by white working-class males. Even his recent forays into progressive folk music, such as the Seeger Sessions, continue to position him within the white working-class Left.

With these few examples I would suggest how popular music helps "compose" the identities of nations and peoples as "imagined communities."[65] Regarding the United States, Eyerman and Jamison argue that the "active use of music and song by social movements" is "a natural outgrowth of the multilingual background of the American people."[66] They note that "white folk music . . . was very early on used by movements of social reform for getting the message out."[67] Their focus is protest songs, but the claim that music mobilizes traditions (and opposition to them) applies more broadly to popular music. These and other country, folk, rock, and rap songs tell and retell the stories that shaped—and continue to shape—popular identities. Popular music is often associated with specific places and people: country sounds invoke Nashville, Tennessee; Liverpool, England, gave birth to the Beatles and the British invasion; and so on. These place-based

associations often become the basis for musicians' and marketers' claims to authenticity. [68] Yet academic folklorists may be as responsible for "segregating" musical sounds as the artists and their audiences.[69] Today increased online access to popular music has led to more hybrid sounds, made place-based traditions less significant, and created new questions about cultural appropriation. The crucial point here is that popular music and popular culture carry the traces of the historical struggles that have shaped class, racial, sexual, and other identities. These traces include the homophobic, racist, and sexist messages that reinforce the dominant order, as well as efforts to resist, reclaim, or transform them.

Contemporary white power musicians also participate in the creation of "imagined communities" through the arts and popular culture. In later chapters, I discuss how they coopt and shift popular rock, folk, and Goth/metal music genres. Without denying the continuities between white supremacist hate music and popular music, I place the former in a different category than the aforementioned examples. Broadly defined, hate speech attacks a person or group on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation, and it is a legally recognized violation of equal rights. Regarding hate music, Keith Kahn-Harris asks the crucial question: "when does hatred towards *an* other become hatred towards *the* other?"[70] Following Kahn-Harris, I argue that two features distinguish white power music from many expressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia in popular music. It is: 1) overtly racist and/or ultranationalist, 2) and directly associated with violence toward historically oppressed groups.[71] Although it is often protected as artistic, political, or religious speech, white power music satisfies both of these criteria for hate music. These earlier examples of popular music do not, though they contribute to creating the cultural-political context within which hate music survives.

When listeners hear white power music, they experience more than the verbal messages in its hateful lyrics; its melodies and rhythms also convey anger, hatred, and violence, perhaps even more powerfully.[72] Like many white power listeners, T. J. Leyden attests specifically to the impact of the music: "Punk rock music and the venues it was played at spoke to me in a language I understood—the fear, rage, and chaos that was so familiar. . . . I loved the beat, the head games, the cruel aggression in the mosh pits, the crowd surfing, the stage diving. It was pure, raw power, and I craved it. Sweat and adrenaline—I

was addicted."[73] Political scientists typically regard music as nonrepresentational and nonrational or even irrational, and Leyden's response may seem to prove their point. However, Stuart Hall argues that many other media "'work like languages' *not* because they are all written or spoken (they are not), but because they all use some element to stand for or represent what we want to say, to express or communicate a thought, concept, idea or feeling."[74] He notes, "Even music is a 'language,' with complex relations between different sounds and chords, though it is a very special case since it can't easily be used to reference actual things or objects in the world."[75] My argument returns to these qualities of musical sound at multiple points in the chapters that follow. Like Hall, I argue that music functions as a mode of public discourse, even though its meanings are ambiguous and fluid.[76]

Regarding hate music, hateful lyrics combined with angry sounds and the violent acts that often accompany them express deep aversions to racial and other differences. These aversive reactions are themselves part of a pre- or nonlinguistic collective memory and political imaginary. Among the arts, musical expression is especially adept at engaging these visceral human experiences and bringing them to the forefront of public discourse. A content analysis of the political ideology in song lyrics cannot fully convey these affective, corporeal aspects of musical expression. A purely formal analysis of melodies and rhythms is similarly incomplete, although it reveals important musical features. Following Paul Willis, I adopt instead a "grounded aesthetic" of musical experience. He writes: "The crucial failure and danger of most cultural analyses are that dynamic, living grounded aesthetics are transformed and transferred to ontological properties of things . . . the aesthetic effect is not the text or artifact. It is part of the sensuous/emotive/cognitive creativities of human receivers, especially as they produce a strong sense of emotional and cognitive identity as expanded capacity and power."[77] As we will see later, white power musicians consciously intend for their music to have these aesthetic effects.

A grounded aesthetic is necessarily also a performative one. Multiple musicologists have recently called for an aesthetic that conveys "how music works and undoes us when we stop observing and enter it."[78] Quoting Roland Barthes, Barbara Engh distinguishes this performative approach from formal aesthetics: "Let the first semiology manage, if it can, with the system of notes, scales, tones, chords, and rhythms; what we want to perceive and follow is the effervescence of

the beats . . . a second semiology, that of the body in a state of music."[79]
The percussive beats and sonic vibrations of musical sounds often cre-
ate a sense of individual and collective ecstasy in their audiences. The
term "ecstasy" derives from *Ekstasis*. As Robert Jourdain describes it:
"*Ex*-for 'outside,' *stasis* for 'standing.' Sounds that leave you standing
outside yourself. Sounds like those that called Ulysses to the Sirens'
rocks. Sounds whose potency lies beyond pleasure and even beyond
beauty. Sounds that reveal to us truths we have always known yet won't
be able to recount when the last echo has subsided."[80] The military
and churches have long used ecstatic musical experiences, including
"muscular bonding" or coordinated group movement to neutralize
participants' sense of physical boundaries and personal vulnerability.[81]
By tapping into primitive brain regions (the amygdala, cerebellum, and
hippocampus) music triggers these ecstatic responses before full infor-
mation reaches the cerebral cortex for cognitive processing.

Humans store memories of motion, rhythm, and sound in these
primitive brain regions.[82] This makes music an especially effective mne-
monic device on a cellular level, a feature used by school teachers, polit-
ical candidates, and activist musicians alike. Generations of students
have learned their letters with the "Alphabet Song," and Will.i.am's
"Yes, We Can" is forever linked to the 2008 Obama campaign.[83] These
and other "catchy" tunes work by "chunking" and then repeating infor-
mation; distinct phrases in the melody line carry the performer and
listener over any brief gaps in cognitive memory. The simple refrains
of popular protest songs work the same way and have similar results.
"We Shall Overcome" remains the iconic anthem of civil rights strug-
gles and, more recently, global Occupy has given "sound check" new
meaning by turning assembled crowds into urban microphones. These
simple phrases create shared memories that can sustain the cultural
underpinnings of social movements when their political organizations
and formal leadership are in decline or disarray.[84]

## THREE THEORIES OF AESTHETICS, CULTURE, AND POLITICS

Although many scholars have explored relationships between aesthet-
ics, culture, and politics, their analyses do not fully explain the role
white power music plays in liberal democracy and white supremacy
today. Democratic theorists tend to underestimate the impact of the

arts and popular culture on public discourse and the need for democratic citizens to exercise their moral judgment in response to undemocratic cultural projects. The democratic theories of Jürgen Habermas, Iris Young, and Sheldon Wolin illustrate why democratic theorists need to reconsider how fascist aesthetics shapes the cultural politics of western democracies.

## Public Discourse, Aesthetic Experience, and Postsecular Solidarity

The philosophy of Jürgen Habermas initially prompted me to study the relationships between politics and music. For those who know Habermas's theory of communicative rationality this probably seems like a very odd move. What I noticed was Habermas's tendency to use musical metaphors at crucial junctures where rational argument, his preferred mode of public discourse, proves insufficient for mutual understanding. Among his more frequent musical metaphors are amplification, concord, dissonance, harmony, resonance, symphony, vibration, and, most important, voice. These metaphors typically bridge communication gaps between wild(er) subcultural publics and the legal-rational systems of liberal states and capitalist markets. For Habermas, language performs two primary functions: problem-solving and world-disclosing.[85] The legal-rational discourse of politics and economics focuses on problem-solving within given systems. Maria Pia Lara defines "world disclosure" as "the capacity of a concept to open up a previously unseen area of interaction between social or political actors."[86] Although figurative language, such as metaphors, can disclose new realities, I argue that nonlinguistic arts better exemplify this aesthetic effect. Written texts, even literary ones, presume either a shared language or the possibility of accurate translation. Because speech acts are always already embedded within cultural-political contexts, spoken words are surrounded by the "mute presence" of unspoken, often unconscious, realities. Like religious experience, aesthetic expression invokes this "speechless materiality" and, in the process, it discloses hidden meanings.[87] Among the arts, musical expression may best convey these unspoken aspects of culture and politics. Elsewhere I have argued that Habermas's musical metaphors disclose this deeper register of public discourse and, with it, the commitment to democratic inclusion that animates his theory of communicative rationality.

His metaphors convey how the diverse voices of democratic citizens exceed the limits of rational discourse, especially the legal language of equal rights.[88]

For Habermas, democratic discourse necessarily involves careful translation, especially regarding aesthetic and religious expression.[89] He argues that the liberal principle of toleration models an inclusive liberal democracy for two reasons: 1) it situates questions of political legitimacy within a pluralist worldview, 2) and it links moral and legal principles within secular society to a religious ethos.[90] Recognition of cultural rights, especially religious freedoms, gives diverse citizens access to the "communications, traditions, and practices" that sustain their individual and communal identities. However, Habermas's liberal tolerance still requires citizens from different cultures to accept a "common political culture" for purposes of public discourse. In effect, liberal principles of freedom and toleration require religious citizens to set aside their cultural traditions and accept secular democracy.[91] Even Habermas's supporters argue that this requirement creates translation problems and unequal burdens for religious citizens. According to Maria Pia Lara, "Religious convictions, feelings, and views might not be easily translatable because they cannot be the subject of conceptual semantics. They are much better captured through stories."[92] Religious diversity also means that citizens may experience considerable cognitive dissonance when they encounter mutually exclusive and constitutionally protected worldviews. Liberal tolerance, at best, offers an uneasy and unstable truce between public reason and private beliefs.

Habermas does not minimize the difficulty of public dialogues between religious and secular citizens, and he acknowledges that mutual understanding is unlikely. Yet he hopes that "this confrontation can sharpen post-secular society's awareness of the unexhausted force [*das Unabgagoltene*] of religious traditions."[93] Philosophy and religion are both deeply rooted in metaphysical worldviews that postsecular societies falsely claim to supersede. For this reason, philosophers and theologians should consider how public reason and religious faith might interact productively. Most important, postsecular democracy should recognize that "secularization functions less as a filter separating out the contents of traditions than as a transformer which redirects the flow of tradition."[94]

The continued presence of religious worldviews reveals the limits of secular reason, among them the failure of liberal democracy to

foster social solidarity. According to Habermas, "secular morality is not inherently embedded in communal practices."[95] Because religious traditions sustain strong bonds of community, he turns to them for "what is missing" in modern democracies. Religious experience bridges the gaps in postsecular societies between the moral intuitions of individuals and shared struggles for "meaning, solidarity, and justice." To build those bridges, secular citizens and religious believers alike must recognize the limitations of their worldviews.[96] For his part, Habermas admits that the best reasons may not be merely rational, and that cognitive reason, moral autonomy, and individual rights cannot sustain a liberal democracy.[97] Something more is required. He concludes, "If religiously justified stances are accorded a legitimate place in the public sphere . . . [then] the political community officially recognizes that religious utterances can make a meaningful contribution to clarifying controversial questions of principle."[98]

As his musical metaphors disclose, the moral intuitions Habermas associates with religious experience are also expressed in the arts and popular culture. New social movements located on the seam between the public sphere and political-economic systems use aesthetic experiences to disclose new realities. Although "media publics" enforce control and coopt citizens, the media also empowers new social movements, some of them with "emancipatory potentials." When "system imperatives clash with independent communication structures," Habermas maintains that even a "damaged intersubjectivity" can mobilize in protest. In a well-known passage, he writes: "The issue is not primarily one of compensations that the welfare state can provide, but of defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life." Among other things, new social movements attempt "to foster the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication that have been buried alive."[99]

Habermas distinguishes between progressive social movements that carry forward the emancipatory potentials of Enlightenment traditions and regressive ones that focus on resistance and withdrawal. He further differentiates between resistance movements that stress "the defense of tradition and social rank (based on property) and a defense that already operates on the basis of a rationalized lifeworld and tries out new ways of cooperating and living together."[100] This further distinction illuminates the cultural politics of white supremacy

today. Even as the radical right defends traditional white racial superiority against global, multicultural democracy, they also mobilize their supporters in new and revolutionary ways. Habermas is no longer optimistic, if he ever was, that progressive movements will prevail against the formidable challenges facing postsecular democracies today. He writes, "I suspect that nothing will change in the parameters of public discussion and in the decisions of politically empowered actors without the emergence of a social movement which fosters a complete shift in political mentality. The tendencies towards a breakdown in solidarity in everyday life do not exactly render such mobilization within western civil societies probable."[101]

In the chapters that follow, I argue that right-wing and neofascist groups are already mobilizing to fill this gap in solidarity. For this reason, Habermas's turn to religion to explore "what is missing" in secular democracy and how cultural traditions can foster social solidarity is puzzling.[102] He risks valorizing more regressive, traditional, and holistic worldviews, and he fails fully to explore the role of aesthetic expression in public discourse. There are many possible reasons why Habermas focuses on religion rather than aesthetics. They include: the Nazi's use of propaganda to manipulate mass audiences; his intellectual debts to Theodor Adorno, his teacher; his need to distance critical theory from postmodern "young conservatives"; and his overdrawn distinctions between aesthetics, reason, and politics. With his reticence about aesthetic expression, Habermas potentially underestimates citizens' capacities to exercise their considered judgment, especially regarding undemocratic cultural projects.[103] He also leaves open the question whether and, if so, how the arts and popular culture, especially music, might foster aesthetic reason and social solidarity. I return to this question, specifically, the potential for aesthetic-expressive experience to build democratic solidarity, in my final chapter.

*Inclusive Communication and Hybrid Democracy*

The second perspective I consider here suggests why and how the recognition of cultural differences requires more of democratic citizens than mere tolerance of cognitive dissonance. I began to notice Habermas's musical metaphors while I was reading Iris Young's work on communicative democracy. Young argues that representative institutions

and, more broadly, deliberative democracy should pluralize modes of political communication in order to counter "internal exclusions."[104] According to Young, internal exclusions involve cultural and structural norms that define the terms of political discourse in ways that privilege some groups and dismiss, ignore, or silence others. These norms often operate well below the surface of deliberative discourse and they constitute citizens' sense of ontological integrity or their basic security system. As Young puts it, "Judgments of beauty or ugliness, attraction or aversion, cleverness or stupidity, competence or ineptness, and so on are made unconsciously in interactive contexts and in generalized media culture, and these judgments often mark, stereotype, devalue, or degrade some groups."[105] In the process, they simultaneously celebrate or, at least, elevate the experience of dominant groups as normal and normative.

Young's primary concern was the tendency of deliberative democrats (like Habermas) to privilege rational argument, a highly cognitive mode of public discourse historically associated with the rising white, male, middle class in western liberal democracies. To counter this tendency and facilitate cross-cultural understanding, Young proposed three additional and complementary modes of public discourse. The first, "greeting," opens up a space for conversation by recognizing specific individuals in their concrete particularity. The second, "rhetoric," acknowledges the importance of art, humor, literature, music, and, more generally, figurative language in public discourse. It invokes the world-disclosive powers of human communication and reveals the impossibility of purely denotative language or entirely rational argumentation. The third, "story-telling," reveals the experiential truths of specific individuals that resist direct translation into general concepts, such as universal rights.[106]

To make a point that Young did not, these additional modes of political communication often disclose new meanings through what Alessandro Ferrara calls "the force of the example." According to Ferrara, singular individuals or entire peoples can be exemplary. Their gestures, rhetoric, and stories can exemplify beauty and ugliness, attraction and aversion, cleverness or stupidity, competence or ineptness—and, Ferrara adds, good and evil. Ferrara argues that "examples orient us in our appraisal of the meaning of action not as schemata, but as well-formed works of art do: namely, as outstanding instances of congruency capable of educating our discernment."[107] In politics,

constitutional provisions, institutional arrangements, fundamental principles, and even regimes or regions may serve as examples to others. The meanings these examples convey often help to create and shape the larger political imaginary that orients individual and collective action. They can even become part of the shared sense of ontological integrity and basic security that Young describes. As Ferrara puts it, "The ability to mobilize politically rests on the force of the exemplary to inspire conduct."[108]

Young's discussion of rhetoric is most relevant for my purposes here, though greeting and story-telling, especially the telling of exemplary stories, remain important. Young suggests why Habermas's musical metaphors frequently appeared when rational discourse encountered the problems of internal exclusion she addresses. Young specifically mentions that "chanting and singing for a cause" were among her greatest joys of democratic participation and collective solidarity.[109] An inclusive democratic discourse requires more than additional reasonable arguments; it takes multiple modes of political communication to reveal how cultural differences shape interactions in the public sphere.

In *Inclusion and Democracy*, Young developed two models of democratic processes—aggregative and deliberative—and gestured toward a third model, that is, agonistic democracy. Music plays a different role in the democratic politics of each model. Aggregative democracy with its focus on campaigns, candidates, and elections, is best represented by campaign theme songs. These songs are often borrowed from popular musicians, though some are composed for a specific campaign and not always with official support.[110] With its emphasis on social movements and justice struggles, deliberative democracy is best associated with protest music, most often in the folk genre. My focus in *Musical Democracy* was protest music from the civil rights and feminist movements, but the environmental, labor, and peace movements also have strong and overlapping traditions of protest music.[111] Here, I examine the use of music in agonistic politics or, more generally, the contesting of cultural and political borders and identities through music. Although protest songs also play a role, I would suggest that anthems—national, subnational, and postnational—typify agonistic political struggles.

In her later works, Young brings these multiple modes of political communication to debates about global justice and postcolonial democracy. Following Homi Bhabha, she reinterprets the history of modernity through the lens of cultural and political "hybridity." She