

FROM

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## 6 Voracious Souls

### Race and Place in the Formation of the San Francisco Bay Area Thrash Scene

*Kevin Fellezs*

I really believe that Metallica invented thrash metal. I really believe that thrash metal did not exist until *Kill 'Em All* came out. You know, there [were] pockets of bands in L.A. and pockets of bands in New York that played heavy metal. But it was Metallica that brought it up to the next level. And it happened in San Francisco [...] Metallica was kicked out of L.A. because they weren't understood. I'm sure that after the fact it was really convenient for people to say, 'Oh, yeah, it started in L.A.'. But, no. *It started in San Francisco.*

—Kirk Hammett (Ernst, 2008)

American thrash metal was forged in the early 1980s in California, primarily by bands located in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Indeed, three of the so-called Big Four of thrash hail from California—Metallica, Slayer, and Megadeth—while the fourth band, Anthrax, originates from New York. Danny Lilker, bassist in Anthrax, adds support to Hammett's origin narrative in the film documentary, *Get Thrashed: The Story of Thrash Metal* (Ernst, 2008), confessing, 'Yeah, Metallica influenced Anthrax. We were like, holy shit. We saw those guys rehearse in the Music Room in Jamaica [Queens, NY] and it was very intense'. The two bands met while Metallica was in New York to record the band's debut, *Kill 'Em All* (Megaforce, 1983).

It is not my intention here to defend or denounce any particular origin narrative; this chapter is not a specific historical argument regarding thrash metal's origins. Rather, I begin with Metallica guitarist Kirk Hammett's pronouncement regarding the location for the launching of Metallica's eventual global success in order to think about the importance of place in locating thrash metal culture. Varas-Díaz et al. (2014) and many others (see Wallach, Berger and Greene, 2011) have produced convincing studies in which a particular geographic location set within its own array of spatialized imaginaries, colonialist histories, and hybrid populations—Puerto Rico in Varas-Díaz's case—contain the conditions of possibility that allow for a particular type of metal scene and, in some cases, metal music as well. I am interested, in this chapter, in questions and issues particular to outlining the specific 'contexts' for 'originary sites' by thinking through the case study of thrash metal. How do locale and location articulate Hammett's narrative



of Metallica finding 'their audience' in San Francisco after the band was 'kicked out' of Los Angeles 'because they weren't understood' in the Southern California scene? Why might San Francisco *matter*?

I aim to show that thrash metal's hybrid aesthetic can be heard as an articulation of the San Francisco Bay Area's history of racial and ethnic diversity, cultural openness, and artistic experimentation, which had long characterized the city's rock musicians. While the term thrash metal can be aptly applied to Venom's music on the 1981 release, *Welcome to Hell*, or Mötörhead's 1980 recording, *Ace of Spades*, neither of the bands nor their records were described as such on their release. There were early scenes external to the San Francisco Bay Area in New York, Brazil, and Germany in which overlapping local heavy metal and punk scenes shared audiences, musicians, and taste hierarchies; indeed, the Los Angeles scene is often seen as a 'rival' to San Francisco, in terms of bragging rights over thrash's origins, but this relationship is only one marker of a scene, as delineated by Jeremy Wallach and Alexandra Levine (2013, p. 130; see also Brown, in press). Still, in terms of shaping the formation of 1980s thrash metal, nothing achieved the iconic status of the San Francisco Bay Area.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, it is thrash's sonic articulation in California bands Metallica, Megadeth, and Slayer that became the sound of 21st century metal, particularly in terms of drumming styles and the highly compressed 'crunch' distortion timbre of the rhythm guitar. Phil Anselmo of Pantera asserts, 'Metallica was all about the brilliance of that crunchy fucking guitar. Before anyone else had it, *they had it*'. Hammett is not shy to claim Metallica 'took [metal] to the next level' (Ernst, 2008).

The aesthetics of San Francisco Bay Area thrash metal, which merged the heavy sounds of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) with the aggressive speed of hardcore punk, was a sonic rapprochement between metal and punk, which were seen to be poles apart politically, ideologically, and aesthetically. In addition, popular music in the San Francisco Bay Area's various scenes had long demonstrated the local area's cultural hybridity in which Asian, Latino, and Black contributions to the local cultural vitality were reflected in the audiences, music ensembles, and programming. As with any other cosmopolitan urban 'scape, there were musical performances of European, Asian, African, and South American music ensembles offered in multiple locations on any given evening, from the Davies Symphony Hall to the nightclubs of the North Beach neighborhood.

The local hard rock and metal scene was anchored by clubs such as the legendary East Bay local metal club, Ruthie's Inn, San Francisco's The Stone, The On Broadway, and Mabuhay Gardens, as well as Metal Mondays at the Old Waldorf. Audiences could also tune into the eclectic deejay-driven programming at KUSE, the University of San Francisco's college radio station, which built on a legacy of local 'free-form' FM radio stations such as KSAN and would feature the *Rampage Radio* show with heavy metal fans Ron Quintano (who also founded the *Metal Mania* fanzine), Ian Killen, and

Howie Klein, beginning in 1982. Local concertgoers had also enjoyed decades of eclectic programming in the concerts produced by local music impresario Bill Graham in which, for example, jazz trumpeter Miles Davis shared bills with the Grateful Dead at the Fillmore, the San Francisco concert hall.

Because thrash appeared to celebrate an individualist autonomy, it appealed to musicians interested in heavy metal who might otherwise have felt hesitant to participate in a genre racialized as white, meaning a presumed cohort of white musicians creating music listened to by an exclusively white audience. The assumption that the audiences for metal are comprised exclusively of suburban, working- and middle-class white males rests on the racial black-white binarism that permeates US American discourse regarding music genres (Weinstein, 2000 [1991] 2009; Walser 1993; Arnett, 1991; Binder, 1993). With few exceptions such as Latin music, which is racially and ethnically marked in specific ways, US American popular music is divided into black and white genres despite the hybrid, transracial constituencies and musical elements at play (and totally disregards any Asian influence or participation). While there are several facets to this binarism, including a significant historical involvement of early recording industry players such as Ralph Peer, who institutionalized the racialized distinction between 'race records' and 'hillbilly records' (Miller, 2010), I want to remain focused on the fact that the black-white binary effectively excludes other kinds of racialized bodies. Asian, American Indian, and other 'brown' ethnicities disappear before the logic of a black and white sounding world.

As George Lipsitz argues, 'Whiteness is everywhere in American culture, but it is very hard to see [...] *As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations*' (1995, p. 369, emphasis added). As a result, non-white musicians have felt generic limitations more dearly than their white counterparts who could easily perform in a variety of styles without losing credibility and whose relative ability to shrug off questions regarding authenticity reflected whiteness's cultural power and dominance (Miller, 2010; Small, 1998a).

Thrash metal, however, held a liberating vision of radical autonomy for musicians across the racial spectrum and was one of the reasons Black, Latino, and Asian American musicians began forming or joining thrash bands in the San Francisco Bay Area. This aspect of the thrash metal story has been largely ignored—even Kirk Hammett's Filipino background largely escapes notice (but see Wallach and Clinton, 2014, p. 2)—yet the contributions of these musicians formed a core element of thrash metal. Rather than provide an historical rundown of bands or musicians, I aim to challenge the *doxa* (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term for a widespread 'common sense' or the seemingly self-evident, even unconscious, ideological assumptions that tend to reinforce given social hierarchies) in which the racialization of thrash metal as a 'white genre' ignores the racial and ethnic diversity of the San Francisco Bay Area thrash scene itself. While I marshal historical evidence



to support the claim that non-white working-class participation in the scene helped shape thrash metal's aesthetics and ideological orientation, my focus is on the ways in which that dominant perspective has served to eclipse the facts of hybridity, categorical transcendence, and a vernacular cosmopolitanism offered from the 'bottom up', that are central to understanding it.

### Vernacular Cosmopolitanism

Combining the heaviness of NWOBHM bands with the speed of hardcore punk, thrash musicians both discarded and privileged various aspects of more mainstream hard rock performativities and aesthetics. As Steve Waksman (2009) notes in *This Ain't the Summer of Love*, his magisterial study of the connections between punk and metal: 'Often considered in oppositional terms, metal and punk have crossed into one another as often as they have been starkly differentiated [...] Metal and punk have enjoyed a particularly charged, at times even intimate sort of relationship that has informed the two genres in terms of sound, image, and discourse' (p. 7).

Additionally, as Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene point out in *Metal Rules the Globe*, metal is a 'key site in which social agents publicly think about and debate modernity's wrenching social changes' (2011, p. 8). Building from these insights, I argue that the Filipino, Latino, Black, and American Indian metal musicians of the San Francisco thrash metal scene sought to carve out spaces of radical autonomy by forging a vernacular cosmopolitanism that pointedly ignored given cultural hierarchies with its attendant racializations.

In the 1987 video for 'Voracious Souls', the Death Angel song from which the title of this chapter is taken, a series of images is shown throughout the brief instrumental introduction: the band skateboarding in Aquatic Park in the Fisherman's Wharf area of San Francisco; sauntering along various San Francisco streets; hanging out at a bonfire on a beach—followed by a live performance, which occupies the majority of the video. In the introduction, there is also a brief segment showing the band members cavorting in a graveyard, jumping in and out of the cemetery, and goofing around at a gravestone, but as the introduction ends, band members stride aggressively past the gravestones. The metaphor I want to draw out here is one in which the performance of the song corresponds with the series of social policies that occurred throughout the 1980s under the Reagan administration, adversely affecting youth, particularly those from aggrieved communities, through 'tough on crime' policies that increased the surveillance and incarceration of these youth. This increase in the policing of youth of color was coupled with federal policies explicitly targeted to reduce government spending on public education and institutions dedicated to alleviating the quality of life and concerns of the poor and working classes, which complemented an increasing lack of employment opportunities for these same youth (Beckett and Sasson, 2004; Blanchard, 1987; Wilson, 2008, 2009).

In the 1990s, debates surrounding the theorization of cosmopolitanism circulated within anthropology and postcolonial studies. Scholars sought to strip the term of its Eurocentrism, and a number of qualified uses of cosmopolitanism were theorized. As Pnina Werbner notes,

Vernacular cosmopolitanism belongs to a family of concepts, all of which combine in similar fashion apparently contradictory opposites: cosmopolitan patriotism, rooted cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan ethnicity, working-class cosmopolitanism, discrepant cosmopolitanism [...] Vernacular cosmopolitanism is perhaps the most ambiguous of these conjunctural terms: are we talking about non-elite forms of travel and trade in a postcolonial world [...] or of non-European but nevertheless high cultures produced and consumed by nonwestern elites? (2006, p. 497)

Werbner's question unveils the contradictory sense of cosmopolitanism within contemporary globalization. There is an elite cosmopolitanism in which, as Stuart Hall describes, 'global entrepreneurs following the pathways of global corporate power and the circuits of global investment and capital, who can't tell which airport they're in', circulate (cited in Werbner 2008, pp. 346–347). Hall goes on to contrast this with another, a 'cosmopolitanism from below [of] people who have no choice as to whether or not to become cosmopolitans. They have to learn to live in two countries, to speak a new language and make a life in another place, not by choice but as a condition of survival' (ibid.).

The thrash musicians considered here are the diasporic children of these uprooted 'cosmopolitans from below', people who emigrated to the United States—or, in the case of American Indians, an internal displacement from 'home'—for reasons of survival. While most of the thrash musicians in San Francisco were working class, some raised in extreme poverty, their attraction to metal music can be heard as embodying aspirations of social equality on individualist terms, distinct from the normative disciplining of conventional political activity. While utopian and unrealized in many ways, thrash metal held out the promise of a cosmopolitan access to a larger world beyond the neighborhood or ethnic enclave for many young metal musicians on the scene. As then-14-year-old drummer for Death Angel, Andy Galeon, confessed in 1987, 'San Francisco is pretty cool but I'd like to check out some other cities. US or Europe or anywhere. Just to go, and play, and skate other territories',<sup>2</sup> a comment that speaks to metal's 'global turn' and a growing recognition of 'other territories' beyond the United States and Europe at the time.

In contemplating race within the San Francisco thrash metal scene, metal musicians such as Chuck Billy (Pomo American Indian) of Testament; Kirk Hammett (Filipino) of Metallica; Mike Coffey, Anthony Starks, and Darren Tompkins (all Black Americans) in Stone Vengeance; as well as the original members of Death Angel, Filipinos Rob Cavestany, Dennis Pepa, Gus Pepa, and Andy Galeon, did more than simply participate in a scene out of which



a superstar band such as Metallica emerged—they helped to constitute it as racially diverse scene; one that undermines a narrative of white, working-class suburban male domination of metal scenes (Fellezs, 2013). Ryan Moore (2009), for example, assumes this narrative in tracing a genealogy of heavy metal from Black Sabbath to grunge and Nirvana that rests on an assumption of working- and middle-class US American white suburban male participation. While I agree with Moore that post-industrialization and downward social mobility are key factors in metal's often incoherent or, better perhaps, non-programmatic (a)political ideological underpinnings, I would like to complicate the racialization of thrash metal as a 'white musical style'. As Glenn Pillsbury asks at the conclusion of his study of Metallica, in which he dissects Metallica's articulation of white masculinity, 'How does the addition of bass player Robert Trujillo, who comes from a Spanish-American and Hispanic background, fit in the context of the constructions of whiteness so important to Metallica's reception history?' (2006, p. 188).

One possible answer might be found in the diverse population living in San Francisco throughout the 1980s. While Whites dominated at a little over 59%, there was a sizeable Black and Asian/Pacific Islander population (12.7% and 22%, respectively); add in a 'Spanish Origin' (taken to mean 'non-White Latina/o') population of 12.4%, and the Bay Area was almost evenly divided between Whites and non-Whites in 1980 (Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2009, n.p.). While a diverse population is not necessarily mirrored by participation rates within a particular scene, many San Franciscan scenes enjoyed a diverse set of participants.

### The Bay Area Scene(s)

The popular music scene throughout the early 1980s in San Francisco and California as a whole was much wider than thrash metal, which remained largely an underground phenomenon until Metallica managed to break into mainstream rock consciousness. While subculture and scene are often used interchangeably, I prefer scene, following Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett (2004), who, building on Will Straw's (1991) conception,

view a local scene to be a focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene. (p. 8)

Peterson and Bennett find the term subculture less useful as the 'term presumes that a society has one commonly shared culture from which the subculture is deviant [and] presumes that all of a participant's actions are governed by subcultural standards' (p. 5).

As Wallach and Levine's (2013) comparative study of metal scenes in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Toledo, USA, demonstrates, 'metal scenes generally do not emphasize ideological purity, as do punk and hardcore scenes' (p. 124). Their study not only explicitly marks the global reach of metal culture beyond a white male suburbia but also delineates four core functions as well as six generalizations of metal scenes that mirror Straw's demarcations (1991). I want to draw attention in particular to their second and third functions; namely, that scenes 'provide gathering places for collective consumption [and] for local performance and artifactual production' (Wallach & Levine, 2013, p. 119) of a particular musical formation. Indeed, as Waksman and others have described, the rich cassette trading culture in which knowledge about bands in distant scenes became known across the globe, inadvertently created a translocal network of fans, clubs, and record stores that metal bands would tap into in their attempts to reach beyond their local fan bases.

San Francisco is located on a geographically tiny peninsula, hemmed in by water on three sides, confined to a box-like 49 square miles. The scene, in other words, was easily accessible by many of its musicians and fans in a city with a transportation system that allowed even those without personal vehicles the means to attend concerts, rehearsals, and other related events. This spatial geography translated into a dynamic live scene involving active participants in a small, delimited urbanscape, allowing a rich cross-pollination of genres to develop. So, while the burgeoning metal scene was beginning to form around a number of local bands, venues, and record stores, there was also a nascent funk-rock fusion movement by bands such as Primus, Fishbone, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, which shared performance venues and somewhat overlapping audiences with punks and metalheads (and which would soon explode into the rock mainstream). Within the local punk scene, there were sub-scenes, including straight edge and hardcore punk scenes, particularly in the East Bay, which grew out of the activities of punk bands such as Romeo Void, the Dead Kennedys, Flipper, the Mutants, and the Nuns. Additionally, there was a vibrant funk and R&B scene, particularly in the Black and Chicano neighborhoods of San Francisco and Oakland. While Sly and the Family Stone, Tower of Power, the Pointer Sisters, Maze, and Cold Blood were the most visible funk bands, there were dozens of funk and soul bands performing in bars and nightclubs throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

Dominating all of these scenes and bands, however, especially in the local press and on the national charts, were the pop-rock groups out of which highly successful bands such as Huey Lewis and the News emerged. There were dozens of local pop-rock acts, including Eddie Money, the Greg Kihn Band, Pearl Harbor and the Explosions, Bonnie Hayes and the Wild Combo, Tommy Tutone, and the Rubinoos. There were also hard rock bands such as Montrose, whose guitarist, Ronnie Montrose, would go on to form progressive rock group Gamma, Y&T (originally named Yesterday and Today),



and local Hendrix impersonator, Randy Hansen. Art rockers, The Tubes, were somewhat in a category of their own with their elaborate stage shows and hard rock sensibilities as were The Residents, an 'anonymous' art rock group. Additionally, overriding all of these rock groups were internationally known groups such as Journey, Jefferson Airplane/Starship, Santana, and the Grateful Dead, though with the exception of the Dead and its various members' offshoot groups, these superstar groups rarely played in the area unless part of large national or international tours.

Ironically, these superstar bands featured veterans of the earlier hippie countercultural scene associated with San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, though by 1967—a year in which both the 'summer of love' and the November 'funeral for the hippie' transpired—the failure to reconcile the contradictions within the hippie movement with its mix of communal, anti-capitalist counterculture and bourgeois, even entrepreneurial, individualism was already beginning to disperse the early Flower Children from the neighborhood. 'Haight-Ashbury', however, would continue to index a cluster of ideas regarding, among other issues, sexual mores and drug use that continued resonating within (and outside) rock culture, reflected in the phrase 'sex, drugs, and rock and roll', even in music that sounded nothing like period 'acid rock' or was produced by artists otherwise antagonistic to 'hippie values' (e.g., Velvet Underground, Frank Zappa).

Outside of rock, jazz has enjoyed a long history in San Francisco, which, at the time of thrash metal's emergence, boasted internationally known local musicians such as vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, drummer Billy Higgins, drummer Eddie Marshall, alto saxophonist John Handy, pianist Denny Zeitlin, and drummer Tony Williams, all of whom could be seen performing in local jazz clubs. In fact, the jazz scene enjoyed a rich legacy of clubs such as the Blackhawk and the Hungry i from the 1950s and 1960s that was continued in the 1980s by the Keystone Korner and Pearl's, both of which were located in the historically Italian neighborhood of North Beach. In addition, there were numerous restaurants, cafes, and neighborhood bars where jazz continued to be performed. Across the Bay Bridge in Oakland, there was the high profile jazz club nestled into a Japanese restaurant at Yoshi's, as well as jazz performances in numerous restaurants and bars throughout Oakland and Berkeley.

Given the large Latino population in San Francisco, there was a dynamic Latin music scene centered at clubs like Bajone's and Cesar's Latin Palace in the Mission district. There were also smaller scenes such as the West Coast Western Swing bands in which Norton Buffalo's Stampede and Asleep at the Wheel gave evidence of the rich cross-genre (jazz and country, in this case) sensibilities of the San Francisco Bay Area. There was also the 'new dawg' movement of David Grisman and his cohort, which updated bluegrass with a virtuosity that was informed by the jazz stylings of Django Reinhardt as much as by traditional bluegrass conventions.

Though not part of scenes per se, there were bands that continued to draw on the legacy of earlier periods of San Franciscan musical movements such

as neo-surf heartthrob Chris Isaak, the psychedelic-surf band the Mermen, and perennial scenesters the Flamin' Groovies, all of which kept the sounds of older styles of rock alive in San Francisco clubs. There were a small number of ska bands of which The Uptones were the best known nationally. Similar to large metropolitan areas throughout the United States, there were numerous reggae, country, and blues bands adding their sounds to the rich musical soundscape heard throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

This brief overview of the various popular music scenes is meant to provide a broader context against which thrash metal emerged in the San Francisco Bay Area. While this survey is certainly not complete or comprehensive, scenes are often written about as if they were formed in isolation or only in conjunction with or opposition to a purported mainstream (notable exceptions are Barry Shank's (1994) *Dissonant Identities* and Harris Berger's (1999) *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*). I mean to highlight the fact that underground scenes are often jostling for visibility with a number of other subcultures/scenes and therefore must be considered co-constitutive elements in a broader local or regional popular music culture.

### Deviance or Agency?

As Andy R. Brown's (2011) research indicates, academic work on heavy metal was initially produced by psychologists and sociologists wanting to 'measure' levels of 'deviance' within heavy metal youth subculture (see also Walser, 1993a). Deviance was defined as the underage consumption of alcohol and other drugs, truancy, delinquency, and other forms of 'anti-social' behavior. Many of these studies were conducted in the late 1980s, simultaneous with the consolidation of thrash as a commercially viable genre, when anxieties regarding metal and rap music reached a 'fever pitch' due to the reporting of 'record' suicides rates among metal fans and the moral panic surrounding gangsta rap lyrics (Litman and Barberow, 1994; Brown and Hendee, 1989; Arnett, 1991; Bennett, 2002; Binder, 1993; Brown, 2013).

These studies reinforced the 'public outcry' against these two youth music cultures, fomenting a 'tough on crime' rhetoric by political legislators. But as Amy Binder (1993) points out, the outcry took a decidedly racialized turn:

Writers who were concerned about heavy metal lyrics and rap lyrics did not address the content of the music alone; embedded in their discussions were reactions to differences in the demographic characteristics of the genres' producers and audiences—music made by and for working and middle-class white youth versus music they perceived as predominantly by and for urban black teenagers [...] rap music—with its evocation of angry black rappers and equally angry black audiences—was simultaneously perceived as a more authentic and serious art form than was heavy metal music, and as a more frightening and salient threat to society as a whole than the 'white' music genre. (p. 754)



Heavy metal music was heard as simultaneously threatening and comical, a threat by musical no-talents whose caricature in the comedy film, *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), engendered knowing nods and chuckles from both metal fans and musicians as well as from the music's detractors—and often for the same reasons—including overweening pretense, misguided virtuosic tendencies, and bellicose posturing. I raise Binder's insight in order to point to two main assumptions regarding heavy metal during this period: one, it is a white genre and therefore while occasionally accused of fueling aberrant white male behavior, is not considered a threat to social cohesion that rap, a 'black' genre, represents; and two, it is not a 'serious' musical genre worthy of scholarly consideration.

Leaving aside, momentarily, the impact of race on metal, I want to take up the notion of agency and its powerful rhetorical and signifying practice within metal music culture. Metal musicians, regardless of the type of metal music they perform, indulge in the forbidden (coincidentally the name of one of the better-known Bay Area thrash bands) as a means to not only acquire autonomous power but also to practice wielding it, establishing rituals and other symbolic means for performing individual as well as collective agency.

In particular, I want to suggest that the 'mosh pit' that emerges as a key symbolic practice in the Bay Area scene is an expression of this self-control, a space in which unwritten codes determine the extent of performative violence that allows participants to dance in a collective expression of power while controlling their movements *just enough* in order to keep actual physical harm to a minimum (Lull, 1986).<sup>3</sup> This balancing of abandonment and control is at the heart of understanding thrash metal as well as other extreme forms of metal music as agentive performance rather than deviant aggression. As another instance of the ways in which punk and metal fans interacted in the San Francisco Bay Area at the time, the preferred term was not 'moshing' but 'slam dancing'. Metal fans borrowed the term from the Northern California skate punk hardcore scene in which punk 'pogo-ing' had morphed into the more aggressive arm twirling, leg kicking movements that appeared more like fighting than dancing. The point, however, was not to intentionally hurt one another (though that certainly occurred often enough) but, as with stage diving, participants observed unwritten codes prohibiting actual fighting, policing each other and keeping fellow dancers from real harm. Admittedly, the rhetoric of metal music is often directed toward individual empowerment, often in the face of larger structural if mystified forces, but I want to keep our attention on the performance of individual empowerment in collective spaces such as concerts and the equilibrium sustained between violence and community caught within the mosh pit.

### Color-blind or just blind?

Psychologists attempted to explain deviance by surveying heavy metal audiences and assisted in fueling various moral panics associated with the purported ill effects of heavy metal musicking (often, as mentioned, accompanied

by comparisons to rap music). Indeed, Robert L. Gross (2004) writes, 'Most metal cultists [note the term!] come into this subculture with preconceived notions that this is a group in which there are others who share their feelings of isolation, anger and a dissatisfaction with life' (p. 126). Although Gross concluded that 'many of today's hard core metal fans will no doubt grow up to be outstanding community leaders' (ibid.), the stereotype of the typical metal fan as an alienated and inarticulate suburban working-class male remains a powerful caricature (e.g., Linxwiler and Gay, 2000).<sup>4</sup>

Despite the challenge to the prevailing moral panic about metalheads as anti-social delinquents mounted by the seminal studies of Deena Weinstein (2000 [1991]), Donna Gaines (1991), and Robert Walser (1993a), which emphasized the value of the music and the culture(s) of metal, their emphases on whiteness, heteronormative masculinity, youth, and exurbanity bore only a slight resemblance to the 1980s metal scene in the San Francisco Bay Area, as we have seen.<sup>5</sup> San Francisco is often characterized, even caricatured, by its 'anything goes' attitude toward alternative lifestyles, political views, and social relations that is reflected in the wide diversity of races, sexual orientations, and self-identified social positionings that its residents claim, perform, and enact. Thrash metal emerged in the wake of second wave feminism, gay liberation, black power, and a lingering hippie counterculture still fully resonant and visible throughout the Greater Bay Area. These social movements not only marked San Francisco as one of the more visible spaces for social experimentation and progressive political discourse but also gave room to artistic exploration that was not confined to historically bohemian enclaves such as North Beach with its legacy of the Beats or the Haight-Ashbury district with its remaining vestiges of the hippie counterculture. Particularly for thrash musicians, the lingering resonance of earlier rock experiments with leading exponents from San Francisco such as those found in acid rock (e.g., the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Moby Grape) that would eventually become larger trends within popular music paved the way for encouraging experimentation and exploration by rock musicians throughout the area. This also fed the idea that an underground movement could yield commercial success without compromising other ideals associated with rock music such as anti-commercialism, leftist politics, and anti-bourgeois sensibilities (Zimmerman, 2008; Fellezs, 2014).

In terms of race, there were a number of models of non-black, non-white musicians participating in various popular music genres, such as Filipino jazz pianist, Joseph 'Flip' Nuñez, whose career never achieved much visibility beyond jazz cognoscenti. Somewhat concurrent with the thrash scene was the emergence of the Asian American jazz movement, which was also initially centered in the San Francisco Bay Area with baritone saxophonist Fred Ho, tenor saxophonist Francis Wong, pianist Jon Jang, and bassist Mark Izu, among others (Dessen, 2006; Fellezs, 2007; Kajikawa, 2012). In terms of rock music, there was Carlos Santana and his brother, Jorge,



who led Malo, another Latin rock band, as well as the Escovedo family, from *paterfamilias* Pete, who led the brilliant Latin rock band, Azteca, to his daughter, Sheila E., who was enjoying widespread success due to her association with Prince during this time period, as well as the already-mentioned metal musicians. My main point here is that San Francisco provided not only a racially and ethnically diverse population but had also enjoyed a long history of Asian and Latina/o musicians, both native-born and immigrant, who were active not only in local scenes but had achieved national and international stature as well.

Within this larger musical and cultural context, then, the appearance of a band of Filipino musicians such as Death Angel is not particularly extraordinary. However, at the time, as I have detailed above, the metal world still assumed an environment exclusively racialized as white and Death Angel or American Indian vocalist Chuck Billy of Testament did little to trouble such assumptions, and again Kirk Hammett's own Filipino background was little noted at the time. Indeed, in an early promotional video for Death Angel, vocalist Mark Osegueda and drummer Andy Galeon disavow that their music has anything to do with their Filipino background. However, this can be seen in light of two central issues: young second-generation Asian-Americans are typically inured to racial discrimination, viewing it more as a problem for blacks or Latinas/os than for their communities, despite what they may experience, often through internalizing the model-minority myth; and, they may have chosen to downplay race in an effort to avoid tokenism and be evaluated on their 'music alone', a common strategy for musicians of color working in white-identified musical genres (Jung, 2012). In her study of Asian American musical production, for example, ethnomusicologist Grace Wang (2014) notes that contemporary discussions of color-blind universalism in music circles obscures the role of whiteness in the formation of standards and norms, which:

helps explain why Asian American musicians working in both classical and popular music might express pride in their ethnic heritage while downplaying the impact that race and/or racism play in their professional lives or seek to commodify their ethnic identity while disowning the existence of racial barricade. (p. 15)

Unlike Osegueda and Galeon's early dismissal regarding the impact of race on their musicking, vocalist Chuck Billy of Testament frequently raises issues related to American Indians in his lyrics, notably 'Trail of Tears' (*Low*, 1994), 'Allegiance' (*The Gathering*, 2000) and 'Native Blood' (*Dark Roots of Earth*, 2012) and publicly announced his belief in American Indian spiritual practices as a result of their role in helping him overcome germ cell seminoma cancer (Billy, 2012). It is worth noting, however, that the first of these songs, 'Trail of Tears', was recorded nearly a decade after the heyday of the thrash metal scene in San Francisco. Still, contrary to the allegations

of metal music's debilitating effects, Billy was honored by the California State Assembly through Assemblyman Jim Frazier's efforts in recognition of Billy's 'positive influence' on American Indian youth and the general public in 2013 (Shrum, 2013).

## Conclusion

To return to the 1980s, the diversity of the Bay Area thrash scene was due to the heterogeneity of the Bay Area beyond the metal club stage and rehearsal studio. Indeed, as the Black American members of thrash band, Stone Vengeance, attest, while there was little room for Black American thrash musicians beyond the local San Francisco scene, particularly in terms of the commercial music industry, the local scene embraced them.<sup>6</sup> This inclusive plurality gave thrash metal its particular shape—a willingness to merge two disparate genres, heavy metal and punk, being the most conspicuous signifier of thrash metal's cultural openness. Mixed race band memberships as well as bands without white members at all were further indications of thrash metal's pluralistic origins and ideological thrust. While arguably having moved away from a strict definition of thrash metal, the scene's most visible and commercially successful band, Metallica, can still boast of having a Filipino lead guitarist, Kirk Hammett, and a Chicano bassist, Robert Trujillo, continuing the racial inclusiveness of the original San Francisco Bay Area metal scene.

Was it a perfectly integrated scene? It would be disingenuous to assert that the thrash scene was a perfect social experiment in racial harmony. However, my point in this chapter has been to underline the idea that an aesthetic that mixed musical genres and was formed within a heterogeneous, even proudly diverse, urbanscape, embracing members from a variety of racial and ethnic groups, is underserved and misrepresented by a discourse that roots heavy metal—and thrash metal, in particular—in white masculinist stereotypes. As the Black American thrash band, Stone Vengeance, sings in 'Higher Now': 'I listen to the wisdom now/I am, "Show me how"'. It is in this spirit of open-mindedness that thrash metal, for all its dark, violent imagery, invites a reconfiguration of the *doxa* that privileges and centralizes white masculinity within metal music culture—its challenge continuing to reverberate within various styles of extreme and progressive metal throughout the often rancorous chambers of metal music culture.

## Notes

1. San Francisco as thrash metal's originary scene is also the underlying argument of the film documentary, *Get Thrashed: The Story of Thrash Metal*. If one uses debut recording release dates as an indication of a scene's visibility beyond the local, then the appearance of Metallica's debut in 1983 is months, sometimes years, before the debut recordings of other contenders to thrash's origins and thus seems to trump those other claims. Additionally, while Los Angeles



had its own thrash scene, providing Brian Slagel the impetus to found Metal Blade Records, an important label for thrash, this chapter will focus on the San Francisco Bay Area scene. I concede that there are other ways to measure the importance of a particular scene or to support a claim for site of origin of a musical style or tradition.

2. Quoted in *Death Angel*, promotional video, 1987. The Death Angel promotional video is available for viewing on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kwpwWTvva4> (accessed July 6, 2014).
3. A participant-observer ethnography on the San Francisco area conducted by James Lull places 'thrashing' within the punk scene, see, in particular, pages 241–243, in which he details 'thrashers' at live shows. Interestingly, there is no mention of metal in the article. I want to thank Andy R. Brown for alerting me to Lull's essay.
4. While recent studies show that heavy metal fans, particularly outside of North America, are drawn from middle-class backgrounds (see Brown, this volume), early research focused on the ways in which heavy metal preference was indicative of limited educational and employment potential. See Bryson (1996).
5. Waksman (2009) provides an alternative to this general trend in his chapter-long study of The Runaways, an all-female band that he reveals was much more agentive than it was often given credit for.
6. According to Stone Vengeance leader, Mike Coffey, white San Francisco metal music radio disc jockey and scene booster, Ron Quintana, was instrumental in recording Stone Vengeance's first LP.

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