

The Hammerskin Nation

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The Hammerskin Nation is the most violent and best-organized neo-Nazi skinhead group in the United States. A number of its members have been convicted of harassing, beating or murdering minorities. Many popular racist rock bands are affiliated with the Hammerskin Nation, and the group regularly sponsors concerts. Though internal dissension and a civil lawsuit currently threaten its continued strength, the Hammerskin Nation remains active and dangerous.

Quick Profile

- **Founded:** First Hammerskin group formed in Dallas in the late 1980s
 - **Publication:** Hammerskin Press (defunct)
 - **Other media:** Hate rock concerts, online bulletin boards, e-mail mailing list
 - **Composition:** Almost exclusively young white males inclined to violence
 - **Ideology:** White supremacy
 - **Criminal activities:** Murder, beatings, vandalism
 - **Significance:** Most respected and feared racist skinhead group
 - **Connections:** Panzerfaust Records; the Hammerskin Nation Web site listed chapters in several other countries, including Canada, England, France, the Netherlands and Germany.
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Emergence

The name and symbol of the Hammerskin Nation came from *The Wall*, a 1979 album by the rock group Pink Floyd that was made into a film in 1982. *The Wall* tells the story of Pink, a rock singer who becomes a drug addict, loses his grip on reality and turns to fascism. Pink performs a song in which he expresses a desire to line all of the "queers," "Jews," and "coons" in his audience "up against the wall" and shoot them. In obvious references to the Holocaust, he sings of the "final solution" and "waiting to turn on the showers and fire the ovens." The swastika is replaced by Pink's symbol: two crossed hammers, which he boasts will "batter down" the doors behind which frightened minorities hide from his fascist supporters. Though Pink Floyd does not support fascism, the Hammerskin Nation has made real the gruesome fantasy depicted in the band's film: racist rock music and racially motivated violence under a banner bearing two red, white and black crossed hammers.

The first Hammerskin group, the Confederate Hammerskins, formed in Dallas, Texas, in the late 1980s. Since then, dozens of local and regional Hammerskin groups have appeared, including the Eastern Hammerskins, the Northern Hammerskins and the Arizona Hammerskins. These groups have been united under the umbrella of the Hammerskin Nation for more than a decade. As of May 1, 2000, the Hammerskin Nation Web site listed 19 chapters across America, down from 21 a year before (the group has not subsequently updated this information). The site lists ten chapters outside of the United States: one each in Canada, England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand as well as two in Germany; given the multinational nature of the skinhead movement, such widespread foreign participation is not surprising. According to imprisoned Hammerskin Jimmy Matchette, international unity is an important Hammerskin goal: "Our mission has drawn all of us from the four corners of the earth. The winds of destiny have drawn us and have carried us across geographical boundaries and from various ethnic branches of the White Aryan race to graft us into one Nation."

One of the major elements binding skinheads from different cultures or geographical areas together is white power music. The Hammerskin Nation is no exception. In fact, in four domestic locations, Hammerskin Nation contact points are maintained by hate rock bands: The Brawlers in Wichita, Kansas; Max Resist in Rochester, Michigan; Intimidation One in Clackamas, Oregon; and Dying Breed (now known as H8Machine) in Harrison, New Jersey. One popular hate rock band, Bound for Glory, is led by Ed Wolbank, past director of the Northern Hammerskins in St. Paul, Minnesota. According to Wolbank, "Music is number 1. It's the best way to reach people. Through music people can start getting into the scene, then you can start educating them. Politics through music." Indeed, hate rock has been both a powerful inspirational force and an effective recruiting tool for racist skinhead groups like the Hammerskins. Some racist bands have even written songs promoting the Hammerskins, such as "H.S.N." by the Brawlers and "Hammerskins" by the Bully Boys.

Recruiting

The Hammerskin Nation does not try to hide the fact that it wants to recruit disillusioned young people. "Everyday we get a letter from some kid who is fed up with his multi-culturist surroundings," boasts an editorial in the Hammerskin magazine, *Hammerskin Press*. "They are looking for answers and a way out...Kids grow up without any form of self-identity. They are given two choices, either go with the 'norm' of multi-culturalism and race mixing or be deemed an outcast, a minority. Let's take hold of the Racist minority and welcome them into the movement."

Though the Hammerskins seem eager for recruits, they are selective about whom they accept into their ranks. Most white supremacist organizations allow prospective recruits to join by doing nothing more than filling out an application and paying annual dues. In contrast, the Hammerskin Nation, like a college fraternity, asks prospective members to prove themselves before they are allowed to join. Imprisoned Hammerskin Louis Oddo tells those who want to join to "hook up with a close Hammerskin crew" and "learn what they are about."

"If everybody likes what they see, I'm sure you'll be given a chance," Oddo explains. "I know of people that were on probation for up to 2 years, so be patient." Forrest Hyde, another Hammerskin who has served time, points out that because "a movement is only as strong" as its "weakest link," the Hammerskins value "quality over quantity" when it comes to membership.

Hammerskin Crime

Violence is an integral part of the skinhead subculture, among racist and nonracist skinheads alike. Racist skinheads have committed a large number of violent hate crimes across the United States during the past two decades, ranging from brutal beatings to outright murder. As one of the most prominent white power skinhead groups in the country, the Hammerskins have frequently shocked the communities in which they are active with the violence of some of their activities.

The Confederate Hammerskins of Dallas were both the first Hammerskin group and the first to come to public attention. In the summer of 1988, group members Sean Tarrant, Jon Jordan, Michael Lawrence, Christopher Greer and Daniel Wood chased and beat blacks and Hispanics in an effort to keep them out of Robert E. Lee Park in Dallas. During that summer and into the fall, the Hammerskins vandalized a synagogue and a Jewish community center by shooting out windows, smashing doors and spray painting anti-Semitic slogans and swastikas. Michael Lawrence also committed violent crimes with skinheads Christopher Jones, Daniel Roush and Forrest Hyde in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the following year. The Tulsa group firebombed a minority-owned nightclub and assaulted its nonwhite patrons.

In June 1991, Arlington, Texas, was the site of further violence by Hammerskins. Three 16-year-old members of the Confederate Hammerskins murdered an African American, Donald Thomas, while he sat on the back of a truck with two white friends. Joshua Hendry claimed that after he, William Roberts and Christopher Brosky drank about two cases of beer, Roberts said that he wanted to "do a drive-by" and "shoot a black person." According to Hendry, after he and Brosky agreed,

Roberts readied a sawed-off shotgun. Hendry later testified that when the three passed Thomas, Brosky yelled "shoot him!" and Roberts pulled the trigger.

Also in 1991, Jimmy "Soda Pop" Miller, an Arizona Hammerskin, firebombed a residence he mistakenly thought was occupied by rival skinheads. Miller also defaced a synagogue. Though he was sentenced to more than five years for these crimes, he was released after serving only two years in prison. That same year, in Birmingham, Alabama, Hammerskin Louis Oddo and his colleague Adam Galleon murdered a 50-year-old black homeless man on Christmas Eve. Oddo and Galleon killed the man, Douglas Garrett, by hitting him with a baseball bat and kicking him with their heavy boots. Oddo and Galleon were subsequently convicted of murder.

Less than two years later, in the summer and fall of 1993, members of the New Dawn Hammerskins defaced two synagogues, harassed black patrons of a local bookstore and assaulted two black girls in Brockton and Randolph, Massachusetts. In July 1994, these Hammerskins were charged with conspiring to intimidate and interfere with the rights of black and Jewish citizens. The leader of the group, Brian Joseph Clayton, was also the only adult among the defendants. He pled guilty to the charges and received 46 months in prison.

The next major incident of Hammerskin-related violence took place on March 17, 1999, in an open field near Temecula, California. Six Western Hammerskins (Travis Miskam, Daniel Butler, Alan Yantis, Gregory McDaniel, Jesse Douglas and Jason McCully) allegedly attacked a 23-year-old African American, Randy Bowen. They apparently chose to attack him simply because he was black, approaching him without provocation at an unplanned youth gathering. Miskam reportedly hit Bowen over the head with a beer bottle, and when Bowen asked him why, Miskam allegedly replied, "We don't like niggers here; I don't like niggers." According to legal documents, as Bowen tried to flee, the Hammerskins chased him, shouting "Die, nigger," "Get that nigger," "Kill that nigger," and "We're going to get you, nigger." Between them, the Hammerskins carried a bottle, a screwdriver, a folding

knife and a razor knife. They cut and stabbed Bowen on his head and back before he escaped to a stranger's home. Witnesses indicated that after attacking Bowen, the Hammerskins started goose-stepping, giving Nazi salutes and singing German songs.

On August 16, 1999, a grand jury indicted the four adult Hammerskins involved in the attack (Miskam, Butler, Yantis and McDaniel) on charges of attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder with enhancements for gang affiliation and commission of a hate crime. In March 2001, as Miskam, Yantis and Douglas awaited trial, Butler, McDaniel and McCully pled guilty to assault with a deadly weapon and committing a hate crime. In addition, lawyers representing Bowen filed a civil suit that aims to force all six Hammerskins involved in the attack, their families, and the Hammerskin Nation to pay Bowen general and punitive damages. The suit alleges that the Hammerskins are a "street gang," as defined by the California Penal Code, and describes the group as encouraging its members, including the defendants, "to commit acts of violence and intimidation against African-Americans to promote their white supremacist goals."

Schism

As it faces a lawsuit that could bring about its bankruptcy, the Hammerskin Nation has encountered internal ills. It is likely that the discontinuation of Hammerskin Press, announced online in September 2000, was the result of infighting. In another incident, when a group of Northern Hammerskins used extreme violence in rescinding the membership of a colleague who "wasn't living up to his oath," five of its members were "kicked out" of the Hammerskin Nation. Eight others quit and joined these five in forming the Outlaw Hammerskins, which now claims to have chapters in four Midwestern towns. According to Hammerskin Press, the Hammerskin Nation will never recognize "these wannabe renegades" as "any kind of Hammerskin in any way shape or form."

Despite these challenges, the Hammerskins remain unbowed. "We've experienced death, prison, and numerous court battles," asserts a Hammerskin Press editorial. "Through all this, we're still standing! No LAWS will ever break us!" They seem

equally unconcerned about defections from the group. "With a few COWARDICE acts [sic] and attempts to start 'Renegade' chapters," writes Louis Oddo in Hammerskin Press, "the true loyal Hammerskins have gotten such a positive feeling and resurgence of brotherhood something that I think was long overdue. So for all you 'Renegade Gangsters' out there, your actions brought us closer. What the HELL were you thinking???"

Hammerskin Music

Not all Hammerskins were violent. In the late 1990s, some members turned to promoting white power music. Hate music has been a useful source of money and recruits for white supremacists; groups that promoted and ran white power music concerts could best reap those rewards, and in 1999 and 2000 the Hammerskin Nation became particularly active in concert promotion. In March 1999, the Florida Hammerskins nearly staged a huge concert in Tampa, Florida, featuring Bound for Glory, Blue Eyed Devils, Chaos 88, Code 13 and the Bully Boys; when the owner of the venue discovered the nature of the bands, he cancelled the concert. On August 7, 1999, the Eastern Hammerskins sponsored a well-attended show featuring Vinland Warriors, Dying Breed, Max Resist and the Bully Boys in Hanover, Pennsylvania. On October 2, 1999, the American Hammerskins held their first national meeting near Bremen, Georgia. The Hammerfest 1999 concert followed; featured bands included White Wash, Dying Breed, Intimidation One, Max Resist, Bulldog Breed, Bully Boys and Midtown Bootboys. About 200 people attended this event. In December 1999, the Hammerskins hosted Plunder & Pillage, Angry Aryans and Max Resist outside of Detroit. A few months later, in March 2000, the Vinland Tour 2000, featuring Swedish group Pluton Svea, was presented by the Hammerskin Nation and Panzerfaust Records in cities including Detroit and Cleveland, Texas. The following October, around 300 people attended Hammerfest 2000, which was held, like the previous year's Hammerfest, on private land near Bremen, Georgia. A virtual Woodstock of hate rock, the concert featured 14 bands, including Brutal Attack, Extreme Hatred, Code of Violence and Hatecrime.

Given the violent and racist lyrics of white power music, it is not surprising that Hammerskin-run concerts have been associated with violent incidents. On December 10, 2000, in Jacksonville, Florida, three 20-year-old racists who met at Hammerfest 2000, Jacob Laskey, Edward Fix and Robert Parrott, reportedly beat and threatened a 44-year-old African American, John Newsome. Newsome told police that when the trio saw him, one yelled, "There's one, let's get him!" According to Newsome, the men chased him and beat him in the parking lot of a restaurant while threatening him with death and shouting racist comments. When questioned by police, the three assailants admitted that they had been driving around the city purposefully looking for blacks. All three have been charged with battery and commission of a hate crime.

Hammerskins Online

In addition to holding concerts and engaging in street violence, the Hammerskins have begun to use the Internet fruitfully. "The MOST NOTORIOUS band of Skinheads in the World have metastasized from the mean streets, and into your home [sic]," exclaims Hammerskin Press. "Where ever you go, our WEB of Racism will follow!" The well-designed Hammerskin Nation Web site, coordinated by the Eastern Hammerskins in New Jersey, features concert reviews, chapter listings and information about upcoming events. The site includes a "Cyber-Terrorist" page, which contains viruses, password-stealing programs, e-mail "bombers" and other downloadable hacking tools.

While the Hammerskins resemble other savvy extremists in their use of the Web, few groups use e-mail mailing lists and bulletin boards as effectively. The Hammerskin Nation has made particular use of e-mail in its promotion of concerts, providing details to its supporters about the locations of shows, places to stay nearby, directions on how to get to concert venues and other related information. At the Hammerskin Nation online bulletin board, hosted by the British Hammerskins, many longtime Hammerskins chat with each other and with potential recruits about their beliefs and tactics. The bulletin board also contains a number of sections open only to Hammerskins, where members of the

group can discuss their plans privately. One of these sections describes itself as a "private plotting forum."

Few and Proud

Hammerskin Nation members are notable for their unflagging commitment to the group and its ideas. "Being a Hammerskin is the distinct feeling of being set apart from the entire planet," writes Jimmy Matchette. "And of knowing we will conquer & overcome all obstacles to achieve our goals and accomplish our great work, knowing that if we fail, all is lost forever and the west will perish." He adds: "Even though I am locked down in a maximum security federal penitentiary, I wouldn't [have] traded the opportunity for all the gold in the world. You my true comrades hold all the glory of victory at your fingertips. We really are the most notorious White power Skinhead group in the entire World!"

UPDATE

July 29, 2002: The official Hammerskin Nation Web site disappeared from the Internet nearly a year ago, and white supremacist Tom Metzger has claimed that "there is no more official Hammerskin Nation." The original Hammerskin Nation also remains active.