

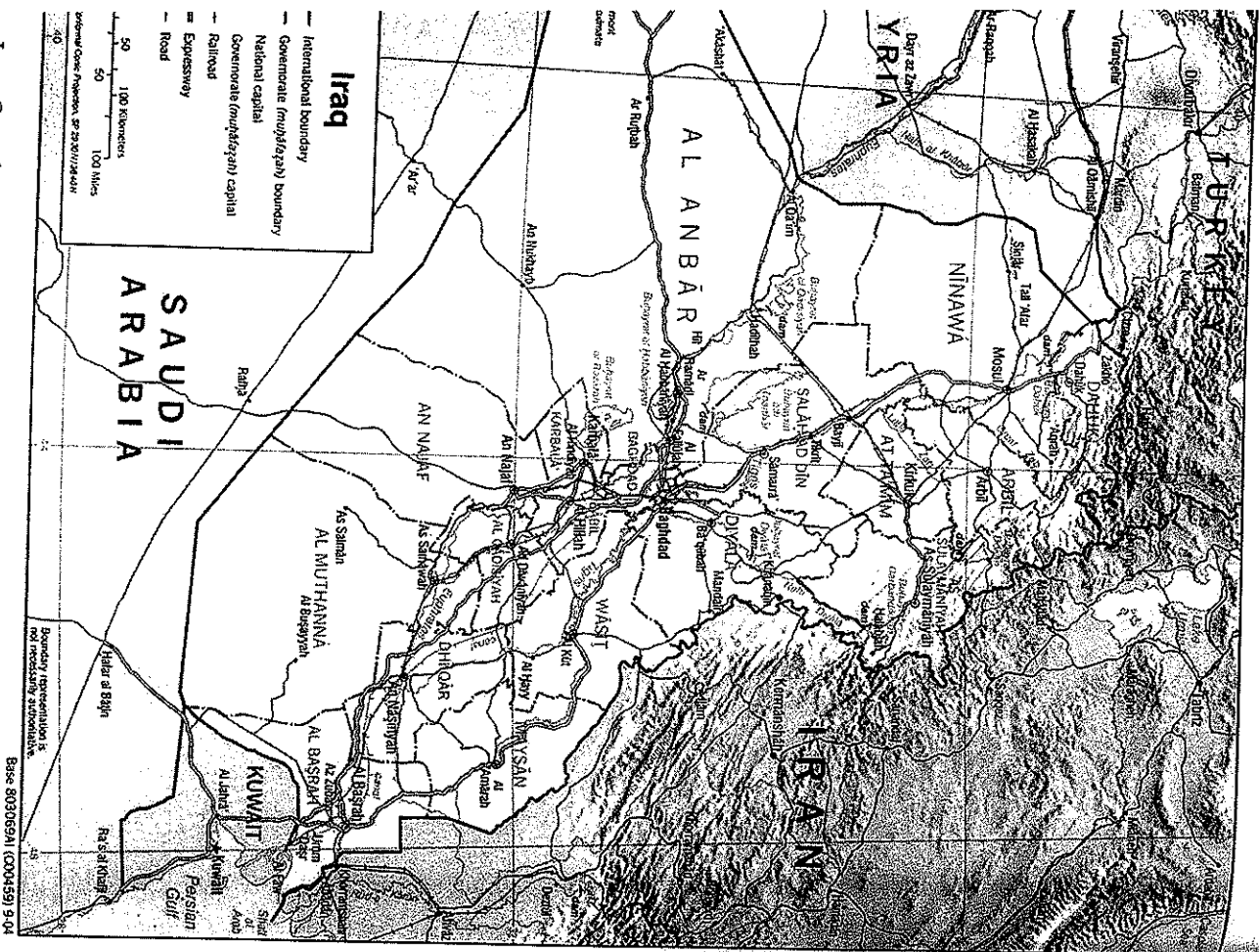
Sound Targets

American Soldiers
and Music
in the Iraq War

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Introduction



When the Iraq War began in March 2003, I was involved, like many Americans, with sending care packages to troops. My sister-in-law's brothers had been deployed, and our families took turns sending them monthly boxes filled with socks, deodorant, toothpaste, and other basic necessities. I contacted the United Service Organizations (USO) and asked if it was possible to send packages to additional soldiers.¹ From my sister-in-law's brothers we had learned that many men and women serving in Iraq were in need of such assistance; in fact, much of what we were sending was being shared among members of their unit. The USO subsequently provided me with the contact information of an Air National Guard unit from Nashville, Tennessee. In looking over soldiers' requests, I noticed that, in addition to the usual toiletries and clothing, the soldiers requested music, which seemed like a coincidence given that the unit was from Nashville, "The Music City." I sent a package with about a dozen CDs, among other things. Six weeks later, I received a letter from Major Rob Crawford thanking me for the music and letting me know that the CDs had become part of a "library that all of our troops share" (see figure 1.1). I soon sent over additional boxes with CDs to contribute to this growing library of shared music.

In January 2004, my scholarly interest in the relationship between American soldiers and music developed almost by accident. I was working on an article about rhythm and meter in metal music when I came across an interesting statistic on a fan web site of the thrash/death metal band Slayer. The posting stated that during the Persian Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm (1991), over 40 percent of Slayer's fan mail came from American sol-



Dear General, J. GRIFFIN

5 June 2003

I just wanted to personally thank you for the music you sent the troops recently. I have added your music to the library that all of our troops share. We greatly appreciate the support of you and Americans like you. We have received music from all around the world and all types of music.

We are an Air National Guard unit from Nashville, TN (The Music City) called to Active Duty in March for Operation Iraqi Freedom. We fly the C-130 cargo aircraft all over the theater in to provide airlift to all members of the Armed Forces in and around Iraq. Thank you again for your support. God Bless you and God Bless America!

Sincerely,

Rob Crawford

Rob Crawford
MAJ, TN Air National Guard

FIGURE 1.1. Letter from Maj. Rob Crawford

diers based in the Middle East.² This struck me as a fascinating claim. Slayer is an extremely popular metal band, and it was remarkable that 40 percent of their fan mail would have come from deployed soldiers during the war. While Slayer singer Tom Araya suggested in a 1992 interview with *Esquire*

magazine that this percentage was actually closer to 20 percent, some obvious questions arose nevertheless.³ Why did fan mail from American soldiers increase during the war? What were soldiers experiencing in this music that caused a surge of fan mail? How do the music and lyrics operate in their lives as soldiers in combat zones? These and many other questions motivated my initial interest and led me to investigate this topic in relation to the Iraq War.

My subsequent research revealed that many enlisted-rank soldiers use metal and rap music as an inspiration for combat. Some soldiers, alone or in a group, listen to metal or rap before missions, patrols, and raids as a way to prepare themselves for the possibility of combat. Furthermore, I learned that new technology allows for music on and off the battlefield in unprecedented ways. Tanks, Strykers, and Humvees are equipped with audio and communication technology that enables soldiers to construct improvised sound systems with which to listen to music while on patrol. And as digital technology has advanced over the last decade, the ways in which American soldiers interact with music has continued to evolve. In the Iraq War, music appears to play a more direct and significant role in the lives of soldiers than in previous American military conflicts. One soldier I interviewed, who adopted the pseudonym "American Soldier," emphasized, "Music was a huge thing for me while in the war. [and] music played a great deal in deployment. I listened to it as much as I could. I really don't know what I would have done without my iPod over there. The military ought to issue an mp3 player to every Soldier!"⁴

During deployment, soldiers experience music in a wide variety of ways. Most American soldiers bring portable audio devices with them, such as laptop computers, CD players, iPods, or mp3 players, to make their personal music preferences available in daily life. In my interviews, I asked soldiers about the general musical environment and how music fit into a typical day in Iraq (see appendix 1 for a list of sample interview questions). Their responses suggest that soldiers' listening practices involve almost every musical genre in a wide range of contexts. Regarding the musical environment during his deployment, Sergeant First Class C. J. Grisham, a noncommissioned officer who served during the initial invasion of Iraq in March 2003, explained, "Almost everyone had a CD player. You walk into any tent and if anybody is there, they've got headphones on. And if there isn't anybody there, then they're playing music without headphones. It almost seemed like if we weren't watching a movie, we were listening to music. As for me personally, from the moment I woke, I had music wake me kind of up and get

these military contexts and their profound effects on soldiers in the Iraq War. However, these are not the only genres or circumstances in which music plays a significant role for soldiers in Iraq; in fact, almost every genre of music can be said to influence the musical lives of soldiers.

The research for this study has presented some unusual challenges. Although the nature of my interest relates directly to how music is used in combat zones, onsite fieldwork has not been possible due to political instability, which in turn made travel and accommodation to the Green Zone in Baghdad prohibitively expensive. As such, I make no claims that this is an exhaustive study; rather, it presents my documentation and analysis based on the information provided by a cross-section of soldiers who have now returned from Iraq. In addition to the obvious safety risks, onsite fieldwork would have been problematic as active-duty soldiers in Iraq have become less inclined to speak to the media or to people outside the military. Some are under direct orders from their commanding officers not to speak to news reporters. Soldiers frequently have different views about the war from what circulates in popular American television and newspapers, and many feel there is an inconsistency between their experiences and what is projected by the media. Interviewing soldiers on leave or based in the United States as well as those no longer in the military seemed more fruitful because these individuals tend to speak more freely than those on active duty in Iraq.

I contacted soldiers through a number of different resources: friends, family, the internet, and sometimes dumb luck—as when I discovered that an Iraq War veteran lived in my building. Casual conversations would occasionally transform into frantic searches for pens, pencils, and paper to scribble down an e-mail or phone number for a potential interview. Over the last few years, the internet has become the norm through which soldiers voice their experiences, and I contacted some soldiers through their blogs. Many soldiers have established web sites and blogs expressing their attitudes about the war and experiences in the combat field, and these blogs sometimes form the primary material for books about soldier life in Iraq.¹¹ In May 2008, www.milblogging.com had 1,987 military blogs, with 432 blogs specific to soldiers deployed to Iraq; these represent both sexes and almost all races, ages, ranks, and sites of service in Iraq.

Since I had to primarily rely on phone and e-mail interviews, the interpersonal connection that comes from being in the same room with another person was lost. I felt that the interview process would be dehumanized to a certain degree, so I tried to inform myself as much as possible about each soldier before talking about his or her music. I began each interview with

questions about the soldier's background: Where were you born? What was it like growing up? Did music factor into your life as a child? How did you become involved with the military? Did your background influence your musical life in Iraq? This was useful in reaching my goal to know the soldiers on a personal level. Erik Holman, for instance, was a little embarrassed but revealed that he is a big Mötley Crüe fan, and we shared a laugh about having a mutual fondness for the band.

My conversations with soldiers would then move to general questions about music in Iraq: While deployed, did you listen to music? If so, what kinds of music? Did your musical preferences change while in Iraq? How did music fit into a typical day, if at all? The soldiers' responses clarified some aspects of the musical cultures of American soldiers in Iraq and, perhaps more important, highlighted how their musical interactions varied due to the specific circumstances of their deployment. Sergeant William Thompson, an Army counter-intelligence soldier who served in 2004, was relatively stationary in Baghdad and able to keep a laptop computer and keyboard with him. He recorded an album of jazz-inspired music during his deployment. On the other hand, Marine Corps sergeant Jason Sagebiel, who served in Iraq from March to September 2003, moved around considerably, and his duties as a scout-sniper required him to carry significant amounts of equipment. He had little or no interaction with recorded music. I also asked soldiers about specific listening contexts and how they may have used music to assist them, like listening before or during missions or in psychological operations (PSYOPS), and if they were involved in making music themselves.

I interviewed eighteen soldiers in person, over the phone, and via e-mail. Our communications ranged from a single e-mail message to a three-hour phone interview and daily correspondence. Compiling exact demographic and background statistics was difficult because, in some cases, the soldier preferred not to reveal his or her name, ethnic background, age, socioeconomic status, or other personal information. I can only be sure of the following profiles for the soldiers with whom I spoke: two women and sixteen men; two African Americans, two Hispanics, and twelve whites. The soldiers ranged in age from their early twenties to their early fifties, and the nature of their service spanned from the National Guard to over thirty years of experience in the active military. The soldiers now live throughout the United States, including in New York, Los Angeles, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Minnesota. At least half come from lower-middle-class and middle-class backgrounds.

From what I could assess, my pool of soldiers was relatively proportional to the demographic makeup of the military. The Department of Defense provides the following statistics: 89 percent male, 11 percent female, 16.25 percent African American, 1.23 percent Asian, 78.5 percent white, and 4.02 percent other. Hispanic ethnicity is listed as a separate question in military ethnicity polls, which makes the military/population ratio a better way to assess the percentage of a racial group in the U.S. population relative to its percentage in the military. A mark of 1.00 means that a race in the military is represented exactly by its percentage within the overall population, while higher ratios indicate that a group is overrepresented in the military: African American 1.44, Asian .31, White 1.01, Hispanic .89. These ratios also approximately represent the racial demographics of troops deployed to Iraq. Casualty statistics through March 2008 show the following percentages by ethnicity: 9.5 percent African American, 1.9 percent Asian, 10.7 percent Hispanic, 74.8 percent white, 3.1 percent other.

In the first chapter, I discuss music in military recruiting. Since its return to an all-volunteer force in 1973, the U.S. military has engaged in active recruiting campaigns, including television commercials and propaganda videos. Music in these advertisements typically portrays military service as an honorable duty, or a source of action, adventure, and excitement. Around 2003, the navy launched its "Accelerate Your Life" campaign, employing metal music and songs by the popular hard rock/metal band Godsmack in commercial sound tracks. This campaign demonstrated a dramatic change in style from the music of prior recruitment efforts. Since then, other military branches, including the army and Marine Corps, have used hard rock and metal in their advertisements as well. I analyze this change in depictions of action, adventure, and violence within television, film, and MTV through the 1980s and 1990s to explain this shift in music in recruiting ads. Additionally, I discuss music, or the lack thereof, in basic training. Personal music devices, like stereos and mp3 players, are not allowed in basic training. Music exists almost exclusively in the form of running and marching cadences sung by drill sergeants and recruits, with the purpose of building morale and camaraderie, or to assist in physical training exercises.

Chapter 2 examines music as an inspiration for combat. While carrying out patrols and missions, soldiers can listen to music in tanks and Humvees through self-made sound systems, portable CD players, and mp3 players. Although soldiers may engage in a variety of activities before combat, like playing video games, sleeping, or praying when time permits, almost every soldier I interviewed recalled listening to music at some point before going

on patrol or within a military vehicle. Many soldiers believe that listening to music, primarily metal and rap, before or during missions, psychologically prepares them for combat. I provide excerpts from my interviews with soldiers in which they describe these experiences. Aspects of ritualization and community building emerge from these interviews as soldiers discuss planned, pre-mission gatherings involving music and chanting or yelling.

Chapter 3 offers an introduction to the music of anti-American and anti-Israel movements among opposing forces in Iraq and focuses on how these forces utilize music in recruiting efforts and as inspiration for combat. The comparison reveals some interesting similarities to the music of American military forces: both groups use culturally conditioned signifiers of meaning to project the idea that military/militia service is an honorable duty.

In chapter 4, I introduce the two principal ways music has been employed as a psychological tactic in battlefield operations: music played from loudspeakers and in detainee interrogation. Since the success of Operation Just Cause in Panama 1989, the military has projected music, particularly hard rock/metal, from special PSYOPS speaker trucks in order to induce a sense of frustration and irritation among opposing forces during specific combat missions. I investigate how music has been employed in this way within battlefield tactics in Iraq. My interviews with army interrogators also reveal how hard rock/metal music has operated as a tool to break the will of detainees if they refuse to answer questions during interrogation. This new technique has provoked widespread debate as an ethical as well as a legal issue. I address the complex issue of music as torture in interrogation in light of soldiers' training and practices, which are determined primarily by international law and U.S. military policy.

The fifth chapter explores how music has become a voice through which soldiers express their feelings about wartime experiences. In the past, soldiers mostly practiced text adaptation as the primary form of musical expression. Even with the availability of musical instruments, particularly acoustic guitars, soldiers more often played and sang existing songs or wrote parody lyrics. The Iraq War, however, has seen a proliferation of original music composed by soldiers. Soldiers express a wide variety of textual themes in their compositions, such as patriotism, grief over the loss of a friend, and the realities of daily soldier existence. Additionally, new recording, mixing, and editing programs for laptop computers now allow soldiers to record music in the setting of combat theaters. In one instance, 4th25 (pronounced "Fourth Quarter"), a group of American soldiers led by Sergeant Neal Saunders, released the first rap album written and recorded entirely in Baghdad, *Live*

from Iraq. I examine the diversity of lyrical themes and styles that emerge from this music and focus on how original music serves as a vehicle for soldier expression.

In the final chapter, I analyze my previous findings within the framework of metal and rap ideologies. Like all popular music genres, metal and rap are part of a larger system of sociopolitical beliefs. I examine how themes of power, chaos, violence, and survival operate within these contexts, and how race, gender, and social class, which are important components of both metal and rap, are involved as well. My discussion explores, first, why metal may have been chosen over other popular music genres in military recruiting. The use of metal is not only a projection of the power of military institutions, but can be seen as a sonic appeal to feelings of individual empowerment. Second, I analyze the influences of metal and rap as an inspiration for combat. Some soldiers experience an intense emotional interaction with the music and its lyrical themes, and I consider ways in which metal and rap may function, to varying degrees, as catalysts for psychological transformation.

With regard to psychological tactics, I suggest that the primary source of antagonism for music in battlefield operations is timbre. More than volume or cultural resonance, timbre operates in highly impacting ways as a form of aural harassment during detainee interrogation. Next, I explore the relationship between the music of 4th25 and gangsta rap. While *Live from Iraq* adopts much of the rhetorical framework of gangsta rap, the attitudes expressed within the album, and particularly Saunders's personal views, stand ideologically opposed to many of the fundamental components of gangsta rap. In closing, I discuss areas of study, like the role of music as nostalgia and post-deployment soldier therapy, which seem promising avenues for future research.

Given that there is little scholarship now on the subject of American soldiers and music in Iraq, I wanted my theoretical and methodological frameworks to materialize from soldiers' experiences. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl proposes that "each culture is likely—perhaps certain—to have its own musicology," and my goal was to let the musicology emerge from a culture of musical practices that music scholars know very little about.¹² Because of this approach and my reliance on soldiers who have returned from Iraq, however, it is important to present soldiers' accounts as an ethnography of memory. Psychologist Daniel L. Schachter suggests that "we do not store judgment-free snapshots of our past experiences but rather hold on to the meaning, sense, and emotions these experiences provided us. . . . Memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events

themselves."¹³ I had to rely on soldiers' stories without observing their musical habits during the war or having the ability to notice anything that they might not have relayed in their interviews.

Many researchers find onsite fieldwork invaluable for gaining insights into musical cultures and that participation in musical events greatly enhances their understanding of the music's sociocultural contexts, listeners' memories, and variable meanings. In her examination of music and memory among Syrian Jews, for example, Kay Kaufman Shelemay points out that "observation of musical performance provides an additional unique perspective, one where the ethnomusicologist stands to make a contribution to understanding the moment in which a memory is constituted. . . . Ethnographic observance of performance can provide insights into social and cultural factors that help shape the psychology of remembering."¹⁴ In my case, I was limited to a great degree. I was not able to travel to Iraq and I am not a soldier; thus, my research and conclusions are limited by what I was told and not what I personally experienced or observed. On the other hand, soldiers were interviewed individually and deployed to Iraq at different times to various locations. Many of their accounts are corroborated by other soldiers. By using interviews as my primary research source in conjunction with books, articles, and documentaries, it has been possible to gain a fairly clear idea of how music operates in the Iraq War as it relates to my areas of focus.

Another difficulty arises with regard to my position as a researcher. For the last few decades and at least since George Devereux's *From Anxiety to Method* (1967), scholars have been proposing that it is impossible to thoroughly separate oneself from one's own embeddedness in social and political contexts when conducting research.¹⁵ As Michael H. Agar, Charles L. Briggs, Clifford Geertz, and many others have discussed, claiming simple neutrality or objectivity on a subject ignores the researcher's own position as subject in a complex web of social and political influences.¹⁶ As Philip V. Bohman summarizes, "Musicology is a political act."¹⁷ Even in the laboratory sciences, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar have shown how the collection and interpretation of observations is often influenced by factors outside the realm of scientific knowledge.¹⁸ Moreover, any study involving the Iraq War may introduce further questions concerning the position of a researcher given the highly charged political feelings some readers might have about the war. There are no easy solutions to these problems. Scholars have negotiated the varying difficulties involved in the reflexive subjectivity of the ethnographer in a number of ways—Ruth Behar's concept of "vulnerability," Harris

Berger's "critical phenomenology" and dialogue, and others.¹⁹ Underlying these concepts, however, is the idea that one should present, examine, and ultimately embrace the many influences surrounding research. I outline, to the best of my reflexive ability, my approach and position relative to these issues. In trying to negotiate the difficulties of "musicology as a political act" on a topic with political resonance, I want to present my work as transparently as possible.

When I began research in 2004, I believed—and still do—that I should try to maintain an open mind to all the perspectives on the issues surrounding music and the Iraq War. Any scholarship involving the Iraq War risks becoming a forum for expressing the political views of the author, and my aim is to document certain musical practices of American soldiers in Iraq, not to engage or critique the politics of war or larger issues of American policy in Iraq and the Middle East. As I was pursuing research on this topic, it quickly became clear that my presentation could be easily manipulated to enhance a position either for or against the war. While I admit that a true neutrality in my approach is impossible, it has, nonetheless, been the goal: acknowledging the limitations of impartiality does not necessitate a partisan position.

Knowing these problems, I want to share with the reader as much as possible my research process. To that end, I have created a web site in conjunction with this book, <http://soundtargets.com>, which provides recordings of some of my interviews and links to the video examples I discuss. "A picture is worth a thousand words" certainly applies here, and I recommend listening to these interviews because they allow the soldiers to speak in their own voices. Throughout the text, I quote them often and at length in order to provide a more comprehensive context for their words. However, inflection, tone, and emphasis are not easily transferable to the written page, and the audio allows for a more personal experience of what is being said. I want the reader to be able to examine my ability to conduct interviews with or without predisposition.

Some may argue that it is only natural for my opinions about the war to influence my research, and that I should have taken a firm stand from the beginning, either against or in support of the war, and conducted my work from one of these positions. But this strategy would have produced a number of problems in the ethnographic process. Soldiers were decidedly more willing to talk to me because I did not set out to argue political issues, and many trusted that I was not going to decontextualize their words for the purposes of defending or criticizing the war. In fact, one soldier told me over the phone that it was exactly because I did not want to talk about

politics that he agreed to share his experiences. He mentioned that had my study been politically slanted, he would have refused to participate. To be sure, soldiers have political opinions, but many were enthusiastic to talk just about music.

The e-mail inquiries I sent to soldiers made clear that political propaganda—for or against the war—was not the purpose of my work (see appendix 1 for a sample e-mail sent to soldiers). Some soldiers are reluctant to speak about their experiences in the war for fear of being misinterpreted, and I believe that the intentional limitation of political discussions in my study was an important factor in many soldiers agreeing to answer my questions and in my developing rapport with them during the interviews. The restricted focus on musical issues was also helpful in this regard. Certainly, it could be argued that, even though the contexts in which I am examining soldiers' listening practices are not directly involved in the politics of the war, the reasons for their deployment are; and as such, the larger context of their musical practices is the product of global politics and U.S. government policy in the Middle East. I agree. But a scholar can discuss how college football players listen to music before a game as a way to inspire their performance without having to unpack the larger issues of their academic curriculum, athletic department budgets, and how football can strain a college's resources by diverting money from underfunded disciplines. The issue of how far up the contextual ladder any study should climb is debatable. In *Sound Targets*, I focus on the local consideration of soldiers' musical habits. This is not to deny the value of examining larger contextual issues, but I found a "boots on the ground" consideration to be the least problematic from a research and scholarship perspective. For some soldiers, the larger political issues do not significantly factor into their lives during deployment; as Neal Saunders noted, "We don't deal with whether Bush is an idiot or a liar. He ain't over there with us. I'm worried about whether this other dude is an idiot or a liar—the soldiers that are fighting beside me."²⁰

My biographical relationship to this work is worth mentioning as well. I am a thirty-four-year-old white, heterosexual male from an upper-middle-class background. While my father served in the Army Reserves, I was not born until he was honorably discharged, and his service was rarely a topic of family discussion. My great-uncles served in World War II, but this too was not a significant component of my interaction with them. Am I predisposed to a sympathetic viewpoint of military personnel? Possibly, but I do not know to what extent and in what ways. And I doubt I could convincingly self-analyze my position in this regard. Conversely, one could argue that be-

cause I come from an educated, academic background, I am more inclined to liberal ways of thinking. Again, there are no easy solutions to these problems. However, one of the ways to confront the issues involved in the politics of musicology on a political topic is through transparency, thereby allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions, and this is one of my goals in including the web site as part of the book project. I accept the criticisms that may be lodged against me and my position as a researcher, and, after thinking about this situation from a different perspective, I welcome them. This study represents the first ethnography-based book on music and American soldiers in Iraq; it is only natural that these issues will arise and be debated. I hope that further discussions will advance the theoretical frameworks involved in music and war.

My research also presented practical and ethical challenges. In my attempts to contact interrogators, for example, I was once rejected for security reasons. A former army interrogator in Iraq, who wished to remain anonymous, wrote me an e-mail explaining, "I was told that I can not answer any [questions] that involve interrogation techniques. Our enemy uses the media to disseminate and collect information."²¹ This response led me to consider how my writing could possibly be involved in the war itself. The interrogator's reason for refusing to answer my questions implied that, hypothetically, if I were able to obtain information about interrogation that was classified, or in some way not intended for public knowledge, publishing this information might violate security restrictions. Clearly, the military felt it was important not to risk the possibility that certain information could become known among its adversaries. This made me consider how conducting research on a topic related to a war that is still being fought could potentially influence the tactics of either side. Fortunately, I did not, to my knowledge, gather any such information, and I have tried to maintain an awareness as to what might compromise secure information.

Additionally, the interview process presented numerous difficulties. Although I mainly focused on music, my discussions with soldiers often involved stories about life and death situations in combat, where fellow soldiers were killed or wounded. In some cases, these casualties were close friends of the soldiers. I wanted to maintain a sensitivity to the fact that many of these experiences may have been traumatic, and by asking soldiers to speak about those events I could have been opening deep wounds. The experience of being a soldier in Iraq is something that I can never fully comprehend. As such, I recognize a level of discord between my awareness of this war and the experiences and perspectives of soldiers.

The many difficulties addressed above are only some of the challenging issues that arose in my work on this topic, but I believe the insights offered in the following pages outweigh the problematic aspects. It is likely that this book raises more questions than it answers: Are these practices distinctly American? What, if any, are the differences between soldiers in Iraq as opposed to Afghanistan? What are the differences in listening practices between soldiers who regularly encounter combat and those who do not? How are soldiers' combat-zone musical interactions different from those at military bases not located in Iraq? These and many other questions will surely emerge from my research, and I hope the reader will not find this to be a shortcoming but rather a function of the nature of introductory work where new ideas seem to unfold at every turn. My hope is that this book will provide a platform for others to pursue topics related to music and the Iraq War.

The relationship between music and war has a long and distinct history. For as long as war has been waged, music has played important roles: God instructed the Israelites to blow silver trumpets when they were attacked (Numbers 10:9), fife and drum corps rallied the soldiers of the American Revolution, the boogie woogie bugle boys encouraged the troops of World War II, and pop musicians like Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison provided the musical backdrop for the so-called "first rock 'n' roll war" in Vietnam. The present war in Iraq is no exception. My research has taught me that soldiers' musical practices are dynamic, always changing and taking new forms throughout history. This book offers a glimpse into the lives of soldiers in the present conflict in Iraq, and I hope it will provide a valuable contribution to the literature on music and war.

ing their experiences related to war in the form of recorded song albums are now being created within the context of the combat tradition of adaptation, which was an important part of soldier practices in previous conflicts, now exists alongside a much of original music composition.

6 | Metal and Rap Ideologies in the Iraq War

The musical genres of metal and rap figure prominently in the lives of some American soldiers serving in Iraq. From the advertisements employed in military recruiting to the psychological tactics, personal expression, and pre-combat rituals characteristic of the deployment period, metal and rap appear to be an integral part of many soldiers' experiences.¹ The salience of these genres and their varied uses in the Iraq War are the result of many social, cultural, and political factors. The systems of ideas, or ideologies, expressed through these genres shape their reception and position within popular culture. In this chapter, I explore the ideologies of metal and rap in order to clarify how and why these genres came to play such important roles in the context of the Iraq War.

Throughout history, the term "ideology" has carried diverse meanings for scholars in different fields. For instance, Karl Marx described ideologies, generally speaking, as the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness," which operates as the "ruling ideas" of a society and creates the structure of dominant cultural power relationships.² Many scholars have built upon this understanding of ideology.³ Political scientist Mostafa Rejai believes ideology is

an emotion-laden, myth-saturated, action-related system of beliefs and values about man and society, legitimacy and authority, acquired as a matter of routine and habitual reinforcement. The myths and values of ideology are communicated through symbols in a simplified, economical, and efficient manner. Ideological beliefs are more or less coherent, more or less articulate, more or less open to new evidence

and information. Ideologies have a high potential for mass mobilization, manipulation and control.⁴

Given the varying definitions and complexities involved in these concepts, many music scholars have limited the definition of ideology to suit their specific objectives, or adopted a somewhat flexible description. Joel Croty and Kay Dreyfus, for example, understand ideology "to mean a set of ideas that attaches itself to music in its social and political context," a suitable definition for my purposes.⁵ When I speak of metal or rap ideologies, I refer to the systems of beliefs and sociopolitical ideas represented and projected, respectively, by these musical genres.

METAL AND RAP IDEOLOGIES

At first glance, presenting a collection of beliefs that comprehensively represents metal or rap ideology may seem an impractical endeavor. These genres are highly diversified with a variety of often-opposed subgenres. In fact, the tensions among subgenres can be strong and rhetorically violent. Metal scholars Bruce Friesen and Jonathon Epstein point out that fans of thrash/death metal (Megadeth, Metallica, Slayer) typically consider fans of pop metal (Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Whitesnake) to be "poseurs" who "have not developed an appreciation for the true aesthetic of metal, and must therefore be accorded less prestige with the subculture."⁶ Likewise, Adam Krims outlines numerous rap genres, like "party rap," "mack rap," "jazz/bohemian," and "reality rap," each with its own distinct set of sociocultural contexts and musical characteristics.⁷ The idea that there exists a set of aesthetic principles embodying all metal or rap music may not be sensible. Consequently, I contextualize my understanding of metal and rap ideologies in order to account for different subgenres and focus on specific aspects of these subgenres that play important roles in soldiers' musical practices in Iraq.

While metal music is rampant with hyper-individualism and conflicting subgenres, Robert Walser observes that the genre "now denotes a variety of musical discourses, social practices, and cultural meanings, all of which revolve around concepts, images, and experiences of power."⁸ In her book *Heavy Metal*, Deena Weinstein examines the sociocultural aspects of metal music and similarly claims that "the essential sonic element in heavy metal is power, expressed as sheer volume. Loudness is meant to overwhelm, to sweep the listener into the sound, and then to lend the listener the sense of

power that the sound provides."⁹ The music operates not as a dominating force over the fan, but as an empowering agent. Throughout the metal literature, scholars like Jack Harrell, Robert L. Gross, Robert Pielke, and many others identify power as the most important concept that unifies otherwise opposed metal subgenres.¹⁰

The power element of metal can be discerned in a variety of ways within the music, such as the degree of guitar distortion and aspects of musical structure like vocal articulation. While power is a unifying principle shared by different forms of metal, scholars have primarily focused on musical characteristics and thematic content as a way to distinguish subgenres.¹¹ Walser describes metal in terms of musical features: volume, vocal timbre, mode and harmony, rhythm, melody, and guitar solos.¹² Friesen and Epstein differentiate pop metal from thrash metal according to many of Walser's categories: pop metal emphasizes a semi-vibrato vocal articulation, blues-derived harmony or Aeolian/Dorian modes, moderate-fast tempos, and syncopated guitar/bass parts; thrash metal features guttural growls and screams, Phrygian/Locrian modes, very fast tempos, little or no harmonic motion, and less syncopated guitar/bass parts.

The music and sound of metal then ascribe power to the lyrical themes of the music, which Weinstein divides into two opposing categories, "Dionysian" and "Chaotic." Dionysian themes involve "sex, drugs, and rock and roll," and focus on forms of physical gratification and ecstasy. Conversely, chaotic themes rebel against social norms and reveal a fascination with conflict, violence, and death. Pielke claims that metal songs demonstrating themes of chaos express an "attitude of negation, with its emphasis on the images of death, Satanism, sexual aberration, dismemberment, and the grotesque," to which Harrell adds images of war, destruction, decay, disillusion, pain, torture, vengeance, blood, murder, chaos, confusion, insanity, and weapons, among others.¹³ Weinstein's categorization of metal lyrical themes certainly risks oversimplification, but it is useful to this study because it highlights a significant trend in metal music that is concerned with elements of war, death, and destruction. As I will show, metal subgenres that emphasize chaotic themes and more aggressive musical features, like high levels of guitar distortion and rapid, forceful bass drum and guitar/bass performance, operate more prominently in the topics I have considered.

Rap scholars have also found it helpful to distinguish among subgenres according to lyrical themes and musical features. Krims creates a method for rap genre classification by examining sociocultural function, musical styles, "flow" (rhythmic vocal delivery), and lyrical topics.¹⁴ This framework allows

Krims to identify four main types of rap: party, mack, jazz/bohemian, and reality. Party rap, for example, consists of foregrounded rhythms for dance, consistent pitch and timbre combinations, and lyrical topics of romance, sex, celebration, pleasure, and humor; reality rap comprises more innovative rhythmic patterns, timbral "hardness," and textual themes related to difficult aspects of urban life, racial discrimination (particularly from the African American perspective), politics, religion, and didactic topics.¹⁵ While there does not appear to be a single unifying aesthetic idea expressed among these rap genres, like power in metal, they share a common musical characteristic involving a distinct form of vocal articulation based on rhythmically driven spoken words. Some fans and enthusiasts describe rap as an acronym for "Rhythmic American Poetry," "Rhythm and Poetry," "Rhythmically Applied Poetry," or "Rhythmically Associated Poetry." These acronyms suggest that rap music texts and the style of their delivery ("flow") are critically important; Tricia Rose summarizes rap as "a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music."¹⁶

For the purpose of analyzing soldiers' musical practices in relation to my areas of study, soldiers tend to listen to "gangsta rap," a subgenre within the larger category of reality rap. Krims emphasizes that while reality rap "undertakes the project of realism, in the classical sense, which in this context would amount to an epistemological/ontological project to map the realities of (usually black) inner city life," gangsta rap "describes gang life, or more generally, life in the ghetto from the perspective of a criminal (or liminal, transgressive) figure."¹⁷ Reality rap refers to any lyrical theme that depicts the difficulties of human existence, usually from an urban, African American perspective, but gangsta rap tends to isolate focus on lyrical themes that emphasize a "survival of the fittest" attitude in which the violence and death of the "other" (often contextualized in street life, gang life, or inner-city existence) are seen as fundamental components of one's survival. Gangsta rap's rhetorical position is typically associated with criminal or deviant behavior, misogyny, and violence in the form of murder with a firearm; the glamorization of violence and romanticization of gun culture are distinguishing features of gangsta rap within the larger category of reality rap.¹⁸ Gangsta rap ideology also engages a power element, the power of an individual to survive and wage violence against anyone or anything that threatens survival. The texts of gangsta rap often express power through threats to destroy an enemy, and power is channeled musically through the rhythmic articulation, which tends to be the most aggressive of all rap genres. The worldview expressed in the lyrics seems to demonstrate the nihilistic attitudes Cornel

West describes as a "numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world."¹⁹

Some aspects of gangsta rap ideology intersect with those of metal ideology. The concept of power, for example, is important to both genres, albeit in different ways. Gangsta rap often expresses power through the content of its lyrics, while power in metal is typically produced by the sound and timbres of the music itself. This is not to suggest that the timbral "hardness" of rap does not play a role in the genre's articulation of power. In his analysis of "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy, Walser proposes that the sounds of rap are an important factor in conveying power, but while timbre and sound may operate in this supportive way, many scholars have focused on the song texts as the primary manifestation of power in rap music.²⁰ Additionally, there is a correlation between the lyrical themes of gangsta rap and the chaotic themes of metal to the extent that they address aspects of violence and death. While gangsta rap expresses violence in terms of street life and urban struggles for survival, metal's chaotic themes engage violence in terms of war, murder (though not from a gang or inner-city rival perspective), blood, and destruction. Indeed, the textual themes of gangsta rap and chaotic metal, respectively, tend to be the most graphically violent and controversial of all popular music genres.

Because both musical styles explicitly address such topics, and in some cases glorify violence and deviant behavior, both metal and gangsta rap have been targeted by censors and restrictive legislation. In September 1985, the lyrics to songs by metal bands AC/DC ("Shoot to Thrill"), Judas Priest ("Beyond the Realms of Death"), Ozzy Osbourne ("Suicide Solution"), and others were the subject of congressional hearings initiated by the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC). Although these hearings were intended as a fact-finding endeavor and calls for self-censorship by the music industry, many fans, musicians, and those involved with metal music interpreted the proceedings as threats to their rights of free speech. When South Carolina senator Ernest Hollings began the hearings by describing metal music as "outrageous filth, suggestive violence, suicide, and everything else in the Lord's world that you would not think of," the neutrality of the congressional panel's intentions seemed questionable.²¹ The testimony given during the hearings addressed chaotic themes of violence, suicide, and death, as well as Dionysian themes, such as the objectification of women and sexual exploitation, which the PMRC labeled "porn rock."²²

After its emergence in the late 1980s, gangsta rap achieved success in mainstream popular music in the early 1990s and soon encountered legisla-

tive efforts to restrict album dissemination based on lyric content. Rap became the subject of highly publicized censorship in 1990 when 2 Live Crew's album *Nasty As They Wanna Be* was declared "obscene" by a federal judge in Broward County, Florida, for sexually explicit lyrics, particularly the song "Me So Horny." The violent themes of gangsta rap were not far behind in these censorship campaigns as a Tennessee judge later ruled that *Nasty As They Wanna Be* and NWA's (Niggaz With Attitude) *Straight Outta Compton* (1988)—one of the seminal gangsta rap albums—were obscene under state law. Since the 1990s, gangsta rappers like Ice Cube, Ice-T, Tupac Shakur, and many others have been targeted by social groups for explicitly violent and misogynist lyrics, and numerous music retailers have refused to sell their albums. Like metal, gangsta rap earned its own set of congressional hearings in 1994 to address explicit lyrical content. Kansas senator Bob Dole, former secretary of education William Bennett, and political activist C. Delores Tucker were highly critical of what they viewed as moral corruption within gangsta rap, especially during Dole's 1996 presidential candidacy.²³ A Senate hearing in 1997, "Music Violence: How Does it Affect Our Children," focused extensively on the impact of metal and rap music in relation to acts of violence.²⁴

Metal and rap have generated the most controversy and public outcry in recent popular music history. Certainly the chaotic themes of metal and gangsta rap lyrics have been the focus of censorship more so than the themes of other popular music genres. Interestingly enough, soon after metal and rap became the center of the music censorship debate, the two genres began to fuse. In 1991, Public Enemy and Anthrax remade the Public Enemy song "Bring the Noise," synthesizing the rap vocal articulation (Krim's "flow") with the musical structure of metal. Other examples of such collaborations during this time include Ice-T's *Body Count* (1992), Biohazard and Onyx's remake of "Slam" (1993), and songs from the *Judgment Night* movie soundtrack (1993), which feature original songs (not remakes) performed by rap groups and metal bands such as House of Pain and Helmet, Living Colour and Run-D.M.C., Sonic Youth and Cypress Hill, Slayer and Ice-T, Biohazard and Onyx, and Faith No More and Boo-Ya Tribe. Although the idea that the two genres were the focus of censorship is not the only reason for their fusion, it certainly seems to have played an important role. In 1993, for example, the rap-metal band Rage Against the Machine expressed their own protest when they opened Lollapalooza III in Philadelphia by walking on stage naked with duct tape over their mouths and one letter of "PMRC" written on each of the chests of the four band members. They then stood

motionless in front of the audience for their entire set amidst the sound of guitar and bass feedback.

The synthesis of metal and rap during the early 1990s not only illustrates a further connection between the two genres, but largely laid the foundation for a metal subgenre that has been extremely popular since the late 1990s, nu metal. This subgenre grew out of the synthesis of rap vocal articulation and the musical structure of metal. Apart from the collaborations that characterized the *Judgment Night* soundtrack, rappers began appearing more frequently on songs by metal bands. For instance, rapper Ice Cube, who was a member of NWA on *Straight Outta Compton*, appeared on the Korn song "Children of the Korn," from *Follow the Leader* (1998). The album also featured rappers Fred Durst of Limp Bizkit and Tre Hardson of Pharcyde on three of the thirteen songs. From 1998 to 2007, this synthesis style of metal and rap increased in popularity, and nu metal bands like Korn, Limp Bizkit, and Linkin Park released albums that reached #1 on the U.S. Billboard and UK Album charts. Today, however, the nu metal classification has broadened to include bands like Godsmack, Staind, and Taproot, which do not incorporate rap elements in the drums or vocals as strongly.²⁵

Another common thread linking metal and rap is the public reception of these genres and the feelings of unity among fans. From my personal experience, it seems reasonable to assert that metal and rap elicit some of the strongest responses, either positive or negative, among music consumers. Ronald Botelho's comment that "hard rock has a very limited and dedicated clientele" summarizes the position of the genre within popular music, and the same can be said for gangsta rap.²⁶ Very few people have lukewarm reactions to this music and I have yet to meet someone who is ambivalent about Slayer or NWA. Although metal is strongly fragmented into subgenres and gangsta rap frequently witnesses feuds among artists (Dr. Dre and Eazy-E; Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls) or even between record companies (Bad Boy Records and Death Row Records), the negative reaction from those who dislike the music in general often strengthens the bonds and feelings of unification among fans. Writing about metal, Bettina Roccor suggests, "In spite of all their differences, what contributes considerably to the 'we feeling' of the scene is the negative perception among outsiders of the heavy metal subculture."²⁷ Even fans who take sides in the classic East Coast versus West Coast rivalry of gangsta rap appear united in their stance against those who criticize or dislike the genre. The negative reception of metal and gangsta rap frequently serves as an important factor in forging connections among fans, even if these fans oppose one another within the internal conflicts of

the subculture. As it relates to soldiers' musical practices, this factor may indirectly impact the sense of bonding among soldiers in their pre-mission listening; the metal and rap communities generally tend to be more strongly unified in opposition to those who dislike their music than fan bases of other genres. The feelings of community within metal and rap subcultures may subtly operate in soldiers' pre-combat listening rituals.

Gender, race, and social class also operate in important ways within metal and rap. As metal scholars have shown, the genre is deeply rooted in lower/lower-middle class, white, male youth culture. In his study of the northeastern Ohio metal scene, Harris Berger demonstrates that metal in this region is strongly connected to deindustrialization and working-class disenfranchisement.²⁸ These issues, however, can be manifest in different ways across metal subgenres. Speaking about gender, Walser proposes, "Heavy metal as a genre includes a great variety of gender constructions, contradictory negotiations with dominant ideologies of gender that are invisible if one is persuaded by metal's critics that the whole enterprise is a monolithic symptom of adolescent maladjustment."²⁹ A consideration of gender in glam and thrash metal provides a good example of Walser's point. Glam metal bands, like Mötley Crüe and Poison, seem to project aspects of gender in contradictory ways. While members of these groups frequently dress in spandex or fishnet stockings, use copious quantities of hair spray, and even wear makeup, some of their song lyrics have been criticized for objectifying women in sexually explicit ways (the PMRC's "porn rock"). The feminine aspects of their image seem at odds with the sexually aggressive or even exploitative content of some lyrics. On the other hand, the lyrics of thrash metal bands, like Metallica or Slayer, rarely engage topics of love, romance, or sexual conquest, and the genre is largely characterized by a "jeans and black T-shirt" image, even among the smaller percentage of female performers and fans. Although the sociocultural fan base of metal primarily consists of lower/lower-middle class white males, the genre as a whole cannot be summarized by a single gender position or outlook.

Likewise, rap exhibits diversified attitudes about gender, race, and social class. The genre is primarily produced by young African American men, but is also consumed by a large white audience, mostly men. While "party rap" and gangsta rap are predominantly created by male artists, these subgenres express varying attitudes about women and social class. Gangsta rap can be unapologetically misogynistic and positions itself from a lower-class, ghetto point of view. Meanwhile, "party rap" typically views women as objects of romance and sexual desire, and while the subgenre maintains certain "street"

roots, artists typically boast of their acquired wealth and do not position their class status within the poverty and violence of lower-class ghetto life.

The discussions that follow engage the varying ways that gender, race, and social class operate in the specific contexts of soldiers' listening and how these topics are factors in soldiers' choices of particular metal and rap songs. I examine how aspects of metal and rap ideologies operate within the music of military recruiting, as well as music as an inspiration for combat, as a psychological tactic, and as a form of soldier expression.

METAL AND MILITARY RECRUITING

The U.S. military's recent inclusion of metal songs in commercials and videos represents a significant change in the music of recruiting efforts. While the use of metal suggests a new way to musically depict the familiar recruiting strategy of action, adventure, and excitement, this dramatic shift invites an examination from the perspective of metal ideology. One of the first issues to address is why metal was chosen over other popular music genres to represent aspects of military service. In the past, military advertising employed songs by Johnny Cash, such as "Won't Back Down," and techno/electronic-influenced music, as in the air force's "No One Comes Close" commercial; however, the use of metal appears to be more widespread now, perhaps due to its associations with the concept of power. Scholars identify power as one of the most important aesthetic expressions of metal music, and the power connected to the metal sound in recruitment advertisements reflects the power of the military. Military groups are, by their nature, manifestations of power. Within most societies, military organizations attempt to display their power to self-defend and defeat an enemy, their strength to protect civilians and intimidate opposition through violence. Metal, then, "adds value" (after Chion) to the videos by signifying the overall strength of the military as an institution through metal's projection of power.

Metal music can also be interpreted as an appeal to the power of the individual. Gross mentions that "individuals who belong to the 'cult of heavy metal' are either seeking some form of power, or believe that they have found it in the music and trappings of heavy metal."³⁰ The connection of this music to scenes of individual soldiers in advertising videos suggests that military service enhances the power of the individual. By associating metal with military images, including guns and combat training, the music inscribes the ideological component of power to characteristics of military

service, and thus seeks to attract recruits by appealing to their sense of personal empowerment.

The relationship between metal music and military recruiting may extend more deeply than these observations suggest. The power element of metal can also be understood as a reflection of the power relationships within the military itself. The power of command, obedience, and subordination is perhaps nowhere manifested more intensely than in military institutions. The hierarchical structure of military rank and superiority is largely based on power relationships of one individual over another. As Atkinson mentioned, one of the purposes of Basic Combat Training is to "very much refocus you into doing everything the way the Army wants you to."³¹ Metal, then, could be seen as metaphorically signifying the power structure inherent in the hierarchy of military command, and individuals can aspire to such power by ascending the ranks of the military.

The metal music employed in advertisements fits within the military recruiting strategy of action, adventure, and excitement. As illustrated in chapter 1, metal now has strong associations with these features in television, film, MTV, video games, and sports television. Commercials and videos depicting soldiers' training exercises with a metal soundtrack display military service as an experience of action, adventure, and excitement similar to the scenes that metal often accompanies in these media. In video games and sports television, for example, metal is frequently used for the purposes of invoking an adrenaline rush. Certainly, elements of power emerge in these contexts, like the power to defeat a sports rival or a video game enemy, but the music is also intended to increase the experience of excitement for the viewer. In the majority of television and film, metal is not only associated with action, adventure, excitement, and violence, but there is also a subtle relationship between these types of scenes and aspects of heroism. Action sequences involving metal in television and film frequently present a scenario in which a protagonist triumphs over an adversary. Sometimes battered and bruised, but rarely killed, a hero almost always defeats an enemy, either through capture or death. These culturally conditioned associations may be operating at certain levels within the metal music of military recruiting. Through the metal reference, soldiers might be comparably interpreted as indestructible heroes. While I am not claiming that the military is consciously making this type or degree of reference, metal music portrayals of action and violence typically suggest a good-versus-evil conflict resulting in the defeat of an evil adversary and the survival of the protagonist. We cannot rule out that this type of connection, whether consciously made or not,

could shape a viewer's interpretation of the sounds and images.

The music of military recruiting also reflects the popularity of metal subgenres. Metal encompasses vastly differing subgenres, not only in terms of sociocultural activity, but with respect to musical structure as well. A distinguishing feature of the metal music I described in the first chapter is that it mostly falls into the subgenre of *nu metal*. While the metal music of military recruiting adopts the less rap-influenced style, it displays many characteristics of *nu metal* (heavily distorted, detuned guitars and syncopated, riff-based music), as illustrated by the Godsmack songs in the navy's "Accelerate Your Life" commercials. The narrow focus on *nu metal* should not be surprising considering the subgenre's popularity. Since the late 1990s, *nu metal* has been the most popular of all metal subgenres, largely consumed by young, white men from lower-middle and middle socioeconomic levels. This demographic is also the primary target group of military recruiting.

The original texts of *nu metal* songs, however, are most often absent from military advertisements. Lyrics are rarely sung in soundtracks to military commercials, and in the instance of "The Creed," the words are derived from slogans and texts about army service. When the lyrical themes of the subgenre are omitted from these advertisements, the music becomes the sole means of inscribing power to the message of action, adventure, and excitement. In television and film depictions of these types of scenes, metal operates in much the same way. For the most part, lyrics are included in these soundtracks only if the words relate directly to the scene or characters in some way. In fact, musical excerpts may be used even when the original song lyrics conflict with the message of the scene. Mötley Crüe's "Live Wire," for instance, accompanies the opening action sequence to the movie *Charlie's Angels*, but a verse of the song expresses a sexually violent attitude toward women: "I'll either break her face or take down her legs. Get my ways at will, go for the throat. Never let loose, going in for the kill. Take my fist, break down walls, I'm on top tonight." This is strongly paradoxical. While the "angels" are highly sexualized and based on cinematic female stereotypes, they function as the action heroines of the movie who fight and ultimately defeat numerous male aggressors. It is puzzling why a song with lyrics about violence against women would be used in a film where women are the main action heroines. Although these lyrics are not heard in the song excerpt from the film, the example underscores the idea that the music, not text, is the most important communicator of meaning for metal music's depictions of action, adventure, and excitement.

One question I am often asked regarding music in military recruiting is

why the military selected metal for recruiting efforts and not rap. This is not an easy question to answer. As outlined above, certain aspects of metal and rap ideologies overlap, and in the present popular music market, rap is no longer consumed primarily by an African American audience. Young white males purchase a significant amount of rap, particularly gangsta rap, which suggests that the genre also appeals to the military's primary recruiting pool. Considering that metal has a limited following among African American music audiences, rap might have a wider musical appeal than metal within the total framework of military recruiting. All this presents a compelling case for at least the inclusion of rap in soundtracks to military propaganda.

Yet because rap does not appear in these advertisements, I would like to explore some reasons for its exclusion. First, the concept of power functions differently in rap ideology than it does in metal. Power is the single unifying aesthetic element of all metal subgenres. While rap expresses power, it does so mainly through its lyrical themes and vocal delivery. Since military commercials typically use the music, not the texts or song lyrics, any element of power is conveyed more immediately through the sound of metal as opposed to the music of rap, which is more text-dependent. Second, metal has been employed in mainstream media depictions of action, adventure, excitement, and violence over the last twenty-five years. This distinguishes metal among popular music genres as having these associations, but also overlaps with one of the two primary recruiting strategies of military recruiting; namely, that military service is a source of action, adventure, and excitement. Rap does not convey these references as clearly as metal.

Finally, I suspect that the absence of rap from military recruiting soundtracks also involves racial perceptions of the military in U.S. culture. The use of rap in military recruiting would most likely be seen as a direct appeal to young African American males. Throughout its recent history, the military has been sharply criticized by civil rights leaders and groups for unfairly targeting African Americans and placing them in military jobs with greater risks. These criticisms were well grounded at the beginning of the Vietnam War. In 1965 and 1966, African Americans constituted 11 percent of the U.S. population, but they represented 20 percent of war casualties. The rates fell to 11.5 percent by 1969 and, overall, approximately 12.5 percent of all Vietnam War casualties were African Americans. More support for such criticisms came in the late 1970s when African American soldiers were disproportionately represented in the military. In 1979, African Americans constituted 36.7 percent of the military, more than triple their percentage of the national population.³² Today, African Americans remain the highest

represented minority ethnic group in the U.S. military, approximately 16.3 percent (compared to 11.3 percent of the population); 9.5 percent of casualties in Iraq as of March 2008 have been African American. The use of rap in military commercials and videos would likely generate significant criticism because it would be interpreted as an effort to target a minority group that has been historically overrepresented in the military.

INSPIRATION AS TRANSFORMATION

Most of the American soldiers I interviewed for this project commented that they listened to metal and rap music before going out on patrols or missions to prepare for the possibility of combat. As presented in chapter 2, soldiers frequently listen to metal or rap songs, either individually or in a group, as an inspiration for combat. Colby Buzzell said that he listened to Slayer, which "got me in the mood for it, it just gets you pumped up"; Jennifer Atkinson explained that her husband's unit would call this "getting crunked" and listened to Lil' John's "I Don't Give a Fuck" as a group before missions; C. J. Grisham and his tank mates listened to Metallica and Mudvayne, and during their assignment to Fallujah played "Go To Sleep" by DMX, featuring Eminem and Obie Trice, as a pre-mission anthem. What is it that links metal and rap music to the process of "getting crunked" before missions? How do these musical genres operate within the psychological context of combat preparation?

The discussion of musical meaning in chapter 1 provides a suitable framework for engaging these questions and understanding soldiers' reception of metal and rap. Musical meaning is constructed in highly varying ways for different listeners, and factors like age, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic and cultural background play important roles in how listeners may interpret meaning within music. Steven Feld's work emphasizes that musical communication is a process of listener experience, whereby music exists through social construction and creates meaning through social interpretation.³³ As it relates to soldiers, their combat environment seems to largely influence how they interpret meaning in metal and rap. The songs chosen as an inspiration for combat appear to lend themselves, through timbre, performance, text, or some musical feature, to an understanding of meaning that relates to the experience of combat or violence. Tia DeNora mentions that "musical affect is contingent upon the circumstances of music's appropriation; it is, as I wish to argue, the product of 'human-music interaction,' by which I mean

that musical affect is constituted reflexively, in and through the practice of articulating or connecting music with other things."²⁴ In this way, some soldiers connect the music to aspects of their surrounding environment, which involves combat. The social interpretation of metal and rap is constructed such that aspects of these genres "articulate" or reinforce soldiers' feelings and experiences of combat and violence. As I show, soldiers may interpret meaning in metal or rap songs in different ways than the artists themselves have intended.

Almost all the metal songs selected by soldiers as an inspiration for combat involve themes of chaos. A favorite song among soldiers is Metallica's "One," about a fictional World War I soldier, Joe Bonham, who is injured in an attack and loses his arms, legs, and the ability to see, hear, smell, and taste. "One" was popular not only among American soldiers, but as Ziv Shalev indicated, among some Israeli soldiers as well. Soldiers appear to relate to these lyrical themes of death, war, and violence as reflections of their own combat experiences. They also tend to reinterpret lyrical meanings or phrases within metal songs to suit their specific circumstances of combat inspiration. For example, the repeated refrain "Let the bodies hit the floor" to Drowning Pool's "Bodies" has adopted different meanings for soldiers than the original intent of the lyrics. The band claims that the refrain refers to the audience "hitting the floor" in the mosh pit at a concert, not bodies falling to the ground from acts of violence, which is how many soldiers reinterpret the meaning. Another example is "Angel of Death" from Slayer's *Reign in Blood* (1986). This album is credited as one of if not the seminal album of the death metal subgenre. The lyrics below were written by guitarist Jeff Hanneman to describe the experimental atrocities committed by Josef Mengele, a Nazi physician, on people at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Soldiers appear to recontextualize the song's themes of violence and death within phrases of these lyrics to apply to combat preparation.

"ANGEL OF DEATH"

Auschwitz, the meaning of pain
The way that I want you to die
Slow death, immense decay
Shows that cleanse you of your life
Forced in, like cattle you run
Stripped of your life's worth
Human mice, for the angel of death
Four hundred thousand more to die.

Angel of death
Monarch to the kingdom of the dead.

Sadistic, surgeon of demise
Sadist of the noblest blood
Destroying, without mercy
To benefit the Aryan race
Surgery, with no anesthesia
Felt the knife pierce you intensely
Inferior, no use to mankind
Strapped down screaming out to die.

Angel of death
Monarch to the kingdom of the dead
Infamous butcher
Angel of death.

Pumped with fluid, inside your brain
Pressure in your skull begins pushing through your eyes
Burning flesh, drips away
Test of heat burns your skin, your mind starts to boil
Frigid cold, cracks your limbs
How long can you last in this frozen water burial?
Sewn together, joining heads
Just a matter of time 'til you rip yourselves apart
Millions laid out their crowded tombs
Sickening ways to achieve the holocaust.

Seas of blood, bury life
Smell your death as it burns deep inside of you
Abacinate, eyes that bleed
Praying for the end of your wide awake nightmare
Wings of pain, reach out for you
His face of death staring down, your blood running cold
Injecting cells, dying eyes
Feeding on the screams of mutants he's creating
Pathetic harmless victims, left to die
Rancid angel of death, flying free.

Perhaps more important than chaotic textual themes, the notions of power inscribed in the metal sound provide a highly influential tool for soldiers as they prepare for combat. Any discussion of "sound" and "timbre" is a difficult endeavor because, as Krims points out, Western musicology has struggled to develop a method for analyzing the cultural resonances of

have this concern and understanding of the theoretical limitations within discussions of timbre. My approach to timbre, then, is analysed by David Brackett, Susan Fast, Allan Moore, and others, discussed timbre as a fundamental component of popular music works.³⁶ Like these scholars, I find timbre too important not to be addressed, even if the methodological grounds are still a bit uncertain.

Just as metal timbres served as the principal musical communicators of meaning in military advertisements, the sound of metal seems particularly conducive to combat inspiration, resulting from the timbres, performance style, and musical structure of specific songs. Mark Miner claims that he did not listen to metal before deploying to Iraq, but the music somehow fit his experience of war, and Buzzell mentions that he hears a direct, almost "sur-realist" connection between combat and Slayer's music.³⁷ The first issue I consider is the possible parallelism between aspects of metal music and soldiers' experiences of combat. Many metal songs that operate effectively for soldier motivation demonstrate rapid double-pedal bass drum parts and tremolo-style guitar picking.³⁸ "Angel of Death" provides a good example. While Slayer never made a music video for this song, video example 28 shows the band performing it live at a 1996 Ozzfest concert. Many of the guitar riffs are played at circa 210 beats per minute and involve extremely fast, tremolo guitar picking. Quite often, the double-pedal bass drum mimics the guitar tremolo, creating a sonic barrage of unyielding rhythm. Example 6.1 presents a transcription of the introductory and main riff of "Angel of Death"; the guitar rhythm is doubled at some points in the song by the double-pedal bass drum. The correlation between this music and combat, which is felt by many soldiers, derives from how the music re-creates the sense of gunfire and shooting an automatic weapon. The relentless, unsyncopated rhythm of "Angel of Death" sounds considerably like the consistent discharge of bullets fired from an automatic gun. The rhythm of the music mimics the rhythm of gunfire and the sonic experience of combat; the rapid guitar tremolos emulate the firing patterns of automatic weapons. Harrell, in fact, draws the analogy explicitly, noting that "the double bass drums create a 'machine gun' rhythm that corresponds to the overall tone of the music."³⁹ The element of inspiration may be created through the sense of power a soldier feels when firing an automatic weapon. The violent expression of power associated with firing a gun becomes sonically replicated in the rhythms of the music. Because these rhythms are articulated in ways that resemble gunfire, soldiers may feel empowered by the music that, for them, evokes the sounds of combat.

Intro Riff
♩ = ca. 210
(tremolo)

Main Riff
(tremolo)

EXAMPLE 6.1. "Angel of Death," introductory and main guitar riff

Another important factor for conveying power in metal is guitar timbre. Most of the metal songs employed as an inspiration for combat use high levels of guitar distortion. Greater degrees of distortion within the overall guitar sound tend to operate as timbral signifiers of harshness, aggression, and sonic dissonance.⁴⁰ The general characterizations of metal as angry or assertive arise, in part, from the nature of the distorted guitar timbre. Sheila Whiteley, for instance, claims that the acoustic properties of guitar distortion "produce an 'aggressive' quality through the introduction of many high frequency harmonics."⁴¹ The heavy guitar distortion characteristic of metal songs "pumps up" soldiers by timbrally conveying feelings of intensity and aggression. The distortion psychologically empowers soldiers by communicating an energized aggressor's mindset. In this context, power is manifested as feelings of violent superiority over an adversary through the guitar timbre.

Guitar distortion and performance style are not the only factors involved in metal inspiring soldiers for combat. Aspects of musical structure play significant roles as well. For instance, the basic unit of pitch in metal, the power chord (root and fifth), helps create an aggressive quality by reinforcing the fundamental tones of metal riffs. Power chords musically add strength or "power" to the sound, which is particularly effective with a distorted guitar timbre. Also, the primarily Phrygian/Locrian-based modality of many metal songs may evoke feelings of anger and assertion; recall that Plato believed the Phrygian mode could incite aggressive behavior. The idea that a mode can evoke different emotions may be difficult to verify empirically, but many times such meanings are culturally produced and the note structure of metal tends to emphasize dissonant relationships among pitches, particularly the half step and tritone.⁴²

Finally, the vocal articulation in the metal songs soldiers listen to as an inspiration for combat typically ranges from pitched yelling to guttural growls.⁴³ The yelling articulation profoundly emphasizes the sonic expression of anger, aggression, and power. Ultimately, I believe that all these factors make metal especially conducive for combat inspiration. The timbres, performance, and musical structure of metal communicate feelings of power and aggression, which operate in highly impacting ways for soldiers as they prepare for combat.

The influence of gangsta rap seems to derive more frequently from the lyrical themes rather than from timbre. While the "hardness" of gangsta rap sounds and the aggressive vocal delivery style may operate to some degree, soldiers appear to relate more strongly to the texts as an inspiration for com-

bat. The songs chosen by soldiers tend to be the most violent within the lyrical themes of the subgenre. Grisham, for instance, said that the lyrics of "Go To Sleep" would pump them up for "the forthcoming hell of being ambushed" while stationed in Fallujah.⁴⁴ The first verse and refrain of "Go To Sleep," which he and other soldiers sang and shouted before missions, follow:

"GO TO SLEEP?" CRADLE 2 *THE GRAVE SOUNDTRACK* (2003), DMX,
FEATURING EMINEM AND OBIE TRICE, FIRST VERSE AND REFRAIN

Eminem:

I ain't gonna eat, I ain't gonna sleep
Ain't gonna breathe, 'til I see what I wanna see
And what I wanna see, is you go to sleep, in the dirt
Permanently, you just being hurt, this ain't gonna work
For me, it just wouldn't be, sufficient enough.

'Cause we, are just gonna be, enemies

As long as we breathe, I don't ever see, either of us

Coming to terms, where we can agree

There ain't gonna be, no reasoning, speakin' with me

You speak on my seed, then me, no speak-a Ingles (English)

So we gonna beef, and keep on beefin', unless

You're gonna agree, to meet with me in the flesh

And settle this face to face, and you're gonna see

A demon unleashed in me, that you've never seen

And you're gonna see, this gangster beat on himself

I see you D-12 [a rapper], and thanks, but me need no help

Me do this one all by my lonely, I don't need fifteen of my homies

When I see you, I'm seeing you, me and you only

We never met, but best believe you gonna know me

When I'm this close, to see you exposed as phony

Come on, bitch, show me, pick me up, throw me

Lift me up, hold me, just like you told me

You was gonna do, that's what I thought, you're pitiful

I'm rid of you, all of you, Yah, you'll get it too.

Refrain:

So go to sleep bitch

Die, motherfucker die

Uh, time's up bitch, close your eyes

Go to sleep, bitch (what?)

Why are you still alive?

How many times I gotta say, close your eyes?

Go to sleep bitch (what?)

Die, motherfucker die, bye, bye motherfucker, bye, bye

Go to sleep, bitch (what?)

Why are you still alive?

Why? Die motherfucker, ha ha ha.

By listening to gangsta rap, soldiers appear to identify with the lyrical themes of violence and the survival of the fittest. The opposing forces in Iraq replace the gangsta rap "other" and become the targets of aggression and violent acts. Another example is Lil' John's "I Don't Give a Fuck," which Atkins' husband and his fellow soldiers shouted together as an inspiration for combat. The last verse and refrain of the song further demonstrate the urban, survival-of-the-fittest attitude expressed through references to violence, guns, and a detached worldview to which the soldiers related.

"I DON'T GIVE A FUCK," *KINGS OF CRUNK* (2002), LIL' JOHN & THE EASTSIDE BOYZ, FINAL VERSE AND REFRAIN

Rapper Krayzie Bone:

Y'all niggas ain't ready for this

Motherfuckers ain't steady for this

'Cause y'all still ain't learn

Nigga got a 44 [handgun] cocked and a flow so hot, make a motherfucker feel that burn

Niggas ain't workin' with an urn

You stay up off my dick, don't back talk, my nigga finna [finally] get up in 'em

Back up off my dick, if you don't wanna get fucked up, then shut up the talkin'

Barkin', better block 'em off, the nigga talkin', sparkin'

Better watch and dodge, and never mind me, call it

Where the thugs at, up in this bitch?

Fuck a nigga up, y'all represent

Gimme some gun, gimme some hen [Hennessy]

No, just gimme both and I'll mix it all in

Who wanna take a lil' sip of this sin?

Let me get you twisted, man

Niggas on fire

Don't stop droppin' them, that's a lie

We just won't die

We come back fierer than ever, higher than ever this time

We feelin' this thyme

So any nigga wanna get involved, what?

You think you can fuck with my dogs [friends]?

Nigga you thinkin' you rubbin' us while we're thuggin' this?

Did you think you can fuck with us? Bone, bone, bone, bone, bone

You ready to do this? The hell with the song

We ain't got to tell you it's on

You know it's poppin', the Glock [handgun] to put a stop to the whole shit

Y'all still can't fuck with us and never will because

We too fuckin' bold, too fuckin' cold,

With too many soul-jabs [soldiers] ready to roll with the god damn bones.

Refrain:

You ride up to the club nigga, I don't give a fuck

Shakin' your ass in the club bitch, I don't give a fuck

Drinkin' Chris [Cristal champagne] in the V.I.(P), I don't give a fuck

Talkin' shit about me bitch, I don't give a fuck

You got a pocket full of money nigga, I don't give a fuck

You drinkin' off with them ho's bitch, I don't give a fuck

In the club with your pussy clique, I don't give a fuck

Security on my dick bitch, I don't give a fuck.

The idea of power in gangsta rap lyrics is manifested through the ability to commit violent acts against an enemy, and soldiers appear to use these notions of empowerment in combat preparation.

Expressions of violence in gangsta rap are typically cast within urban environments, where handguns and small arms are the instruments of fighting an enemy. Rivals engage one another among local populations, in civilian residences, businesses, or other urban locations, like the "club" in "I Don't Give a Fuck." A prevalent method of attack is the drive-by shooting, in which one group attempts to catch another off guard by surprising them with gunfire from a moving or momentarily stopped vehicle, and then driving from the scene.⁴⁵ To a certain degree, these features of gangsta rap lyrics exhibit a correlation to the context of some soldiers' combat experiences. On 1 May 2003, President George W. Bush announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq, approximately six weeks after the war began on 19 March. During this time, the war was fought according to relatively traditional models of warfare in which (mostly) uniformed armies fought on a large scale for the control of the country. After the defeat of the Iraqi military, smaller movements began fighting on local and neighborhood levels, principally in Baghdad and other major cities. The resistance groups embedded and disguised themselves within civilian communities, using guerilla tactics such as IEDs, car bombs, and small arms ambushes to battle American forces. In many cases, soldiers operated against these movements by using small-scale

ry, like rifles, machine guns, and vehicle-born firearms. This type of has characterized much of the fighting in Iraq for many years.

These ways, gangsta rap may be particularly well suited as an inspiration combat because its lyrical themes parallel some of the contexts in which soldiers engage in war. To be sure, there are significant differences between the conflicts depicted in gangsta rap and soldiers' fighting in Iraq, like the references to money, alcohol, "the club," drugs, sex, and many others (what we might consider to be gangsta rap's dionysian themes), and I am not claiming that American street violence and the war in Iraq are closely related. However, certain features of the violence articulated within the lyrical chaotic themes of gangsta rap overlap with how soldiers conduct combat operations—ambush-style attacks are fought among urban, civilian populations with small-scale firearms. Gangsta rap can operate effectively as a musical inspiration for combat because soldiers can directly relate to certain aspects of its texts.⁴⁶

While soldiers frequently reinterpret textual meanings in metal songs to suit their specific circumstances, soldiers' interpretations of gangsta rap lyrics appear to be more literal. Some rap scholars, like Robin D. G. Kelley, have proposed that much of the violence glorified in gangsta rap should be understood as a deeper commentary on the reality of poor, urban existence.⁴⁷ She believes that those who disapprove of the genre as irresponsibly glamorizing gang life tend to overlook its cultural criticism, in which violence expresses a rebellion against larger social and racial oppression.⁴⁸ Despite this understanding of gangsta rap violence, most soldiers are not concerned with the possible social or racial commentary underlying the music they use for combat inspiration; rather, they relate directly to the lyrics. Their involvement with gangsta rap lyrics tends to unfold primarily on the immediate, surface level of listener identity, and many times, in the context of combat inspiration, they prefer the more explicitly violent and nihilistic songs over those with lyrics of social and racial criticism or texts expressing sexual exploitations of women or misogyny.

But there is a paradox here in that, as Cheryl L. Keyes and many others observe, not all gangsta rap is based on the reality of day-to-day, street life experiences. As gangsta rap has become more popular, many rappers have attempted to assert superiority over other rap artists by writing lyrics that are more explicitly violent. While issues of authenticity and street credibility are important within the genre, some rappers have admitted that their lyrics are not based on real occurrences, but on imagined violence meant to shock an audience. Eminem's song "Stan," for instance, addresses a fan who

misinterprets his violent, misogynist lyrics as truth. He raps, "I say that shit, just downin' dogs, Come on, how fucked up is you? You got some issues, Stan, I think you need some counseling, to help your ass from bouncing off the walls when you get down some. . . . I really think you and your girlfriend need each other or maybe you just need to treat her better."

It appears, however, that some of the exaggerated violence in gangsta rap correlates with soldiers' experiences. In the director's commentary to *Soundtrack to War*, George Gittoes comments, "This is a generation that has been brought up on rap, gangsta rap—the idea of being a tough guy in the street. Here they were, actually fighting professional soldiers to this gangsta rap music by rappers who'd never seen anything like the action they'd been through."⁴⁹ In this situation, the process of listener identity may work in reverse. Gangsta rap typically portrays violence as an aspect of urban reality, and the ability to relate to this street life is an important component of listener identity. Nonetheless, the more extreme violence of gangsta rap lyrics is sometimes the product of exaggerated fantasy. The thematic content is an embellishment of violence, but the soldiers are able to relate to the lyrical themes as a direct reflection of their own experiences. The process of identifying with the reality of gangsta rap becomes juxtaposed in that the listener is able to relate to the lyrics as an accurate reflection of their personal experience, but the original lyrical content is based on exaggeration.

Gender, race, and social class also emerge as relevant to metal and rap. Interestingly, however, the majority of soldiers seemed somewhat puzzled when I asked them whether these issues ever factored into their listening experiences; William Thompson was typical in this regard when he replied, "I'm having a hard time thinking of how these things played in. I didn't think about it until you asked."⁵⁰ In all, issues of gender, race, and class arose in my interviews only sporadically. This posed a challenge from a research perspective because even though soldiers did not highlight these issues as strongly involved in their listening experiences, many studies of metal and rap have in fact found gender, race, and class to be fundamental to the genres. Here again, the limitation of not being able to pursue onsite research was problematic. Many metal and rap scholars find onsite research invaluable when examining gender, race, and class. Their conclusions have even suggested relationships that in some ways contradict the perspectives of fans and practitioners. Such was the case in Berger's analysis of deindustrialization and working-class disenfranchisement in the metal scene of northeastern Ohio.⁵¹ His primary research participant, Dann Saladin, at first resisted Berger's notion that this subculture is connected to larger social contexts in

which working-class youths have been denied genuine economic opportunities. Saladin placed a far greater emphasis on personal responsibility as a component of social mobility. Clearly, Berger would not have been able to form his conclusions about class had he relied solely on Saladin's remarks and not been able to actively observe the metal scene. In my case, I was unable to notice subtle issues concerning gender, race, and class that the soldiers themselves did not point out; my research was limited by what I was told and by what I observed or experienced. Considering that many soldiers did not find these issues directly relevant to their musical practices when I asked, it became even more difficult to explore. This does not imply that gender, race, and class are not involved in the contexts of soldiers' listening that I am examining; rather, these issues did not appear immediately apparent to many soldiers. Onsite fieldwork would have dramatically improved my ability to engage these important topics.

Notwithstanding these limitations, my research leads to several significant points. As mentioned, metal and rap are largely consumed by male audiences, including soldiers in Iraq. This music is predominantly made by men, and scholars like Wälsner, Keyes, and others identify these genres as mostly male expressions of power.⁵² Generally speaking, metal and rap can be characterized as musical genres primarily produced and consumed by men as musical styles that frequently exhibit masculine expressions of strength and survival. With regard to combat preparation, soldiers' song choices typically contain lyrical themes of male-against-male power struggles and aggression. Rarely if ever did topics of sexuality or gender (i.e., "porn rock" or gangsta rap's sexual exploitation or misogyny) appear in these contexts of soldiers' listening.

In addition to the fact that metal and rap are male-dominated genres within popular culture, a major factor for the gender specificity in using this music as an inspiration for combat lies in the gender policies of the military. I learned from Atkinson that women are not officially permitted to serve in direct ground combat, which excludes them from most Military Occupational Specialties in combat units. As a result, women rarely go on patrols or missions that regularly encounter ground combat to the same degrees as infantry or armored units, so they do not usually participate in pre-combat rituals. This exclusion, she says, is not based on gender discrimination, but on the reasoning that tasks involved in ground combat, which include the operation of heavy artillery, are too physically demanding for most women. Atkinson explains, "Women aren't allowed to have those jobs. Sometimes they are just too physically demanding. Like I can't be a

Metal and Rap Ideologies in the Iraq War

rank crewman, I'm just not physically strong enough. Those shells weigh 100 pounds, I think, and you have to be able to shove them in a tube. I can't be able to pick them up, lift them to your chest, and put them in a tube."⁵³ Women do that. I'm not a small woman by any means, but I can't do that. They are not involved in the war in the same ways as men, particularly as it relates to their participation in combat, and these differences are reflected in casualty statistics. As of March 2008, 2.4 percent of American casualties in Iraq were women. Overall, one in seven U.S. soldiers (14.3 percent) in the Iraq war were women, and this correlates with the general percentage of women in the military (15 percent).⁵⁴ For these reasons, this study of musical practices is largely focused on men.

In terms of race, soldiers' interaction with metal and gangsta rap mostly reflects the ways in which different ethnic groups consume music within the American civilian population. As one might expect, metal is popular among white soldiers, and attracts limited interest from African American or Hispanic soldiers.⁵⁵ While gangsta rap is still primarily produced by African Americans, the genre's fan base does not seem as racially lopsided; it is now a mainstream musical genre, consumed by white as well as African American audiences. Within American culture, though, white audiences have received a degree of backlash for their interest in this music. Particularly among suburban white youths, those listening to gangsta rap are sometimes characterized as posers who pretend to associate with the urban violence of gangsta rap or adopt a voyeuristic fantasy about ghetto life, when in fact they have never experienced life "in the hood."⁵⁶ Ironically, while gangsta rap songs sometimes express attitudes of distrust, anger, and violence toward white society in general, white audiences still purchase this music in considerable quantities. For white soldiers in Iraq, however, listening to this music within a combat zone does not appear to attract this type of disapproval. Even if they come from suburban or rural backgrounds, the reality of their violent surroundings in the war seems to transcend such criticisms (often based on race) that accompany listening to gangsta rap. Joshua Revak, for instance, took part in freestyle rap sessions where he was the only white rapper. The racial tensions that would likely have accompanied such a situation in U.S. society were not present in this circumstance. Additionally, military units are more integrated than they have been in the past, and music sometimes facilitates connections among members of different ethnic groups. As Buzzell mentioned, music was a means for establishing cliques in the military, and Grisham (a white soldier) said, "If soldiers were listening to rap music, the main group would be black but I never felt excluded."

On the other hand, musical preference in some settings has been shown to intensify divisions among racial groups. For instance, in a recent Armed Forces Vietnam Network forum discussion, a Vietnam veteran, "Poirres," recounted how music was a source of racial tension during his deployment. "Toward the end of my tour music became a contentious issue in the base camps. Units coming in from the field had serious race problems over soul and C&W [country and western] music. One battalion I know of came in for a five day stand down and ended up being sent back out the same day they arrived because they tore the EM club apart over this very issue."⁵⁸

Social class seems to operate on a number of levels in the military. Most soldiers did not find the primary source of tension in their military experiences to arise from gender, race, or socioeconomic background, but rank. The class hierarchy of the military is based on the division between officers and enlisted soldiers. Thompson mentioned that some enlisted-rank soldiers view officers as privileged leaders who are not exposed to danger as frequently because they are more valued within the military hierarchy.⁵⁹ This creates a degree of animosity among enlisted soldiers analogous to a social class division. On a deeper level, though, the structure of the officer and enlisted ranks is largely a product of soldiers' socioeconomic backgrounds. The requirement that officers must have college degrees largely favors those from more affluent backgrounds who tend to have greater educational opportunities. The majority of enlisted rank soldiers come from working-class backgrounds, and while they may earn money for college education by serving in the military, their initial position is limited to the enlisted rank without a college degree. Moreover, officer rankings tend to correlate to the number of years of service; hence higher-ranking officers are usually older. Garry Trudeau's *Doomsday* comic, shown in figure 1.2, satirizes how the divisions of rank and age seem to correlate to soldiers' listening preferences. Because most enlisted-rank soldiers come from working-class backgrounds, metal and rap appear far more frequently among these younger soldiers. Gritman, in his mid-thirties, observed that even at his rank of noncommissioned officer, "I think it's more of an age thing than a race thing. When people hear me listening to Static-X [a metal band] or DMX, they're surprised. My soldiers thought it was funny that the First Sergeant was cranking rap music in his office!! We're supposed to be listening to Perry Como or Barry Manilow or something."⁶⁰ The choices of metal and rap music, which largely fall out according to rank, can also be understood as reflections of socioeconomic status. Metal and rap are enjoyed predominantly by enlisted-rank soldiers, but the majority of these soldiers come from working-class backgrounds without the education required for promotion to officer.

While musical genres whose primary elements involve empowerment and the thematic content of death, war, and violence seem appropriate for soldiers preparing for combat, the roles of metal and gangsta rap may be more complex than what is first apparent. The majority of soldiers say that listening to metal or rap pumps them up for missions, but some also claim that the music exercises a psychological power that transforms them beyond their normal selves. Obtaining data on such intimate, personal experiences presents many challenges. In general, members of the military have not been known to speak openly about their emotions. Soldier life tends to emphasize toughness, typically framed within a masculine sensibility where expressions of emotions or feelings signify femininity or weakness.⁶¹ When soldiers told me about the music they would listen to during combat preparation, I often followed up with the question, "Did you feel that music affected you in any way?" Many times, soldiers would initially respond in the negative, but would then proceed to outline how they related to the music. In many cases, their first response may have resulted from the question's reference to feelings or emotions. It certainly appears that the metal and rap used as an inspiration for combat had a significant impact on the psychological state of some soldiers.

Soldiers' descriptions of pre-combat listening experiences suggested that music can, to varying degrees, artificially alter their state of mind so that they are able to handle the reality of their involvement in the war. Saunders, for instance, believes that "war is people having to step outside of themselves. It is you having to become what I consider to be a monster."⁶² "American Soldier" wrote that music "would provide motivation to get in the 'zone' before a very dangerous mission. It was part of my experience and I can still recall certain songs that would get me where I needed to be."⁶³ Other soldiers said that metal and rap music had similar effects on their experiences as an inspiration for combat. David Schultz noted that Drowning Pool's "Bodies" "did put you in a little different state of mind. . . . I think definitely that that hard rock type music is more indicative of the feelings that are being stirred up before you know you are fixing to go outside the wire and probably be targeted—you know, someone trying to kill you."⁶⁴ Speaking about metal and gangsta rap music before missions, Revak said, "I am a firm believer that music speaks to the soul, any music. . . . I don't think it's to the point where if you listen to Eminem that you are going to go kill your girlfriend, or your wife, or whatever. But I think that it definitely speaks to the soul. Music—it does, it affects the kind of person that you are. I really believe that it affects who you are in some way or another."⁶⁵

The idea of individuals, as Saunders believes, stepping "outside of them-

selves" resonates with certain aspects of metal and rap ideologies. In *Running with the Devil*, Walser claims that "metal energizes the body, transforming space and social relations," and Weinstein quotes a fan as saying that "the whole point of heavy metal music is to get out of your mind."⁶⁶ In the scene from *Occupation: Dreamland* in which soldiers watch a video of Slayer's "Bloodline" before going on patrol, a soldier says, "Yes, Slayer. I hear and obey." This is followed by a brief chorus of laughter, but the soldiers' silence and intense staring into the television as they watch the video imply the seriousness of their approach to combat preparation. The comment also suggests that the soldier jokingly viewed himself as being brainwashed by the music. In one way, the robotic tone of his delivery poked fun at himself for watching the video with such intensity, but it acknowledged that the music could have the power to transform a person's state of mind.

Similarly, in *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, Keyes claims that "gangsta rap artists argue that the tales from the hoods range from truthful accounts to exaggerated fantasies."⁶⁷ Much of the fantasy element within these songs involves violence or physical gratification—thematic content similar to the chaotic or dionysian themes identified by Weinstein in metal music. In *Soundtrack to War*, Gittoes finds that gangsta rap music can have a transformative impact on soldiers. He points out that a quiet, mild-mannered soldier undergoes a radical transformation into an explicitly graphic porno rapper when he participates in freestyle rap sessions: "He goes through a personality change when he's not performing, he's very quiet, almost intellectual. . . . He's a very mild-mannered person, but something comes out, there's this transformation."⁶⁸ For other soldiers, the fantasy element is more about stepping outside of themselves to be able to handle the realities of war (destruction, combat, death) than to enter a world of pleasurable fantasy. Talking about "Go To Sleep," Grisham says, "It's a very negative song, and I'm almost even embarrassed to say it was our theme song. But hey, that's what happens in war. You've got to become inhuman to do inhuman things. And by that I just mean, shooting a weapon in the direction of a living person. . . . The worst part is that I didn't used to use profanity but at some point I snapped. Now that I've returned to normal, I can't listen to this song."⁶⁹ Grisham identifies with the song in the process of becoming "inhuman" and psychologically "snapping." In the process of transformation or fantasy, soldiers place themselves in the position of the gang criminal and adopt the perspective toward violence and death articulated in the lyrical themes of the gangsta rap song. Some soldiers move into a state of mind outside of their "normal" selves as they prepare for combat in order to come to terms

with their violent surroundings, and certain aspects of gangsta rap ideology, like survival and violence, operate as important catalysts in this process.

Grisham also emphasizes that music can function as a way of becoming "inhuman" in relation to soldiers' experiences of war:

War is so ugly and disgusting, and it's very inhuman. It's an inhuman thing. It's unnatural for people to kill people. It's something that no one should ever have to do, unfortunately, someone does. And we happen to be that someone sometimes. And so listening to music would artificially make you aggressive when you needed to be aggressive. If you knew you were going out and you were going to get shot at, you didn't want to go out there thinking everything was hunky-dory, and you had to go out there with an aggressive mindset, hoping you wouldn't have to use that aggression. And so how it affected me is that it was really able to keep me alert. It made me—when I needed to get aggressive, I'd put some aggressive music on.⁷⁰

Grisham highlights the music's power to keep soldiers in a state of heightened awareness, but also to make them capable of committing inhuman acts. Psychologists Robert W. Rieber and Robert J. Kelly observe that the circumstances of war can cause combatants to develop inhuman or dehumanizing views: "Self and object-directed dehumanization are inevitably heightened in situations where the threat of combat is present."⁷¹ In these instances, the music could be said to have a transformative power that removes the humanity element from human identity. Music becomes a means of dehumanizing an adversary or oneself.

The ways in which the Iraq War has been fought may contribute to the process of dehumanization as well. On the Vietnam War, Robert J. Lifton says that intense feelings of enmification and dehumanization arose because of the circumstances related to the fighting: "Thrust into this alien revolution in an alien culture, assigned an elusive enemy who is everyone and no one, sent into dangerous nonbattles in a war lacking the most elementary rules and structures of meaning, what do we expect him [a soldier] to do? He in fact finds himself in exactly the situation Jean-Paul Sartre has described as inevitably genocidal—troops from an advanced industrial nation engaged in a counterinsurgency action in an underdeveloped area, against guerrillas who merge with the people."⁷² While there are many differences between the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, Lifton's description parallels aspects of the military conflict in Iraq. He believes that this type of warfare tends to induce strong feelings of dehumanization against an enemy or even the "inevitably geno-

cidal" attitude proposed by Sartre. Because U.S. soldiers in Iraq are fighting in similar situations, there may be a greater tendency to psychologically reduce an enemy to an inhuman status. Given this predisposition, the metal and rap music could be even more strongly influential as an inspiration for combat. Not only does this music pump soldiers up, but in some cases it assists in a process of psychological transformation where soldiers develop attitudes of dehumanization toward their adversaries, resulting from the music and specific circumstances of the fighting.

I do not suggest that the transformative possibilities of metal and rap music, or the specific circumstances of the Iraq War, affect all soldiers in the same way or somehow relieve soldiers of responsibility for their actions. Rather, music seems to influence soldiers to varying degrees. For some, the music does nothing more than pump them up and provide an adrenaline rush, but for others it may trigger some form of mental transformation. Judith Becker's research on trance and "deep listening" provides an insightful framework for understanding this latter group. "Deep listeners," a term Becker adapts from composer Pauline Oliveros, describes a person with an intense emotional interaction with music, resembling a secular trance.⁷³ Trance is usually associated with non-Western religious ceremonies in which persons experience an altered spiritual consciousness induced, at least in part, by music. The ways in which Becker describes deep listening, trance, and music's potential impact on the human psyche provide an avenue for understanding how some soldiers experience metal and rap music as an inspiration for combat.

Becker's account of Balinese *bebuten* trancing, in fact, reveals a degree of parallelism with the transformative event of deep listening for some soldiers:

The Rangda/Barong ritual in Bali, Indonesia, is an event invoked to restore balance between the people and the "other" world of the deities, spirits, and demons. If some misfortune befalls a village, such as a crop failure, pestilence, or frequent cases of mental illness, or the ritual calendar prescribes it, the village will stage an encounter opposing the great witch Rangda and her followers against the mythic beast Barong and his followers. Before the ceremony begins, all the participants are put into a trance at the temple to the accompaniment of long lines of classical poetry sung slowly, in unison, by a chorus of women from the village. . . . These men confront the witch and with the help of the Barong ultimately neutralize her power.⁷⁴

Unlike many rituals, *bebuten* trance is not joyful or ecstatic; rather, the trancers feel intense fury, "a homicidal rage" against Rangda, in order to restore

balance to the community.⁷⁵ The musically induced trance gives the villagers the power and context psychologically to kill an enemy. Some soldiers' use of metal and rap as an inspiration for combat resembles this form of trance. The music communicates intense feelings of power, aggression, and violence, and puts soldiers in an altered state of mind to the point of creating a dehumanizing, homicidal perspective. In the cases where the soldiers yell or scream the lyrics, their interaction with music provides a stronger internalization of this process.

Becker's theory of trance consciousness suggests that some trancers experience a loss of the autobiographical self during trance, which we might consider analogous to soldiers "stepping outside of themselves."⁷⁶ Through timbre and lyrical themes, metal and rap can create a deep listening experience for some soldiers in which they adopt attitudes about violence and dehumanization not typically associated with their autobiographical self. Music in this circumstance induces an aggressive mindset and operates as a pretext for the possibility of violent action. One important difference, though, is that soldiers remain within their existing state of consciousness. Clearly, they must maintain a heightened awareness of their immediate surroundings given the life or death consequences of combat. We might say that the depth of their listening is limited to a fully conscious, aware experience. Another difference is that the *bebuten* trancers ultimately direct the focus of their rage back upon themselves. They act out the fight against Rangda through self-inflicted violent acts with knives and daggers, whereas the soldiers direct their aggressive attitudes toward others.

At the end of chapter 3, I drew a number of comparisons between the ways in which music functions as an inspiration for combat for both U.S. soldiers and anti-American and anti-Israel movements. Thompson's account of the *nasheeds* played from the mosques during the Sunni/Shia battles demonstrated one way that music, or sacred recitation, motivated Muslim fighters. While it is difficult to fully assess to what degree, if any, the *nasheeds* may have had a transformative influence, I believe that there could be some elements of psychological transformation for Muslim fighters. Walid Shoebat suggests that suicide bombers perform their attacks in states of altered consciousness: "The suicidal act often involves a variety of dissociative processes, such as narrowing of vision, altered states of attention, absorption in the act, detachment from feelings of the body, semi-hypnotic ecstasy, and the self-surrendering sense of merging with a transcendental power. I know this to be true, since it is exactly what I experienced during my bomb operation. I was disconnected from reality."⁷⁷ Many psycho-