

MAKING AMERICA RAGE AGAIN

BY RONALD DUDLEY AND ERIC FALQUERO
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To say that Prophets of Rage is political doesn't quite cover it. When reporters or pundits – from ABC, to Bill Maher, to Rolling Stone – call this combination of musicians from Cypress Hill, Rage Against the Machine and Public Enemy a “supergroup,” guitarist Tom Morello is quick to counter them. “We're an elite task force of revolutionary musicians determined to confront this mountain of election year bullshit,” he says.

While the group's Make America Rage Again tour overtly criticizes Republican candidate Donald Trump,

the band doesn't show any love for Hillary Clinton either and has admitted to respecting Bernie Sanders' attempts to hijack the Democratic Party. Prophets of Rage is old school; they say the system is broken and can't be fixed from within. Change has to come from the bottom, from the people, through culture.

They believe that many lyrics from their combined catalogs of revolutionary music are more relevant today than ever before.

This can seem like empty rhetoric from a band that dropped its first single on the day of a protest show at the Republican

National Convention yet won't choose a side in the most divisive U.S. election to date. But that is their stance; that the corresponding levels of dissatisfaction in each camp should be bipartisan motivation for radical change rather than polarizing society and perpetuating the status quo.

When he's not rocking the mic, Public Enemy's frontman, Chuck D (Carlton Ridenhour), is a national representative for Rock the Vote as well as a university-level motivational speaker. He and Morello agree that no matter who moves into the Oval Office, the president will be only one person, and it's not

enough for citizens to cast their vote every four years and hope the elected individual can – or will – fix everything. You have to help your brothers and sisters on a daily basis. You have to take the power back.

With that philosophy in mind, the group puts economic inequality at the forefront of their work. Before playing pop-up shows to bookend Cleveland's End Poverty Now march during the RNC, the band could be found on a rooftop in Los Angeles playing an unadvertised free show exclusively for the people on Skid Row. Several banners hung below them, saying “Keys, Not Handcuffs,” and “They Say ‘Get Back,’ We Say ‘Fight Back.’”

“By most accounts, Skid Row residents loved having the Prophets of Rage join them in the community,” wrote Eric Ares in an email to Street Sense, Street Roots sister paper in Washington, D.C. Ares is a community organizer and communications coordinator for Los Angeles Community Action Networks, which includes helping produce their street paper, The Community Connection. Like Street Sense and Street Roots, Community Connection is a member of the International Network of Street Papers.

“More than just a concert, this was an opportunity for homeless and extremely poor residents to unite in a call for an end to the criminalization of homelessness,” Ares said. “This wasn't about a publicity stunt; this was about solidarity and putting the issues facing Skid Row at the forefront. But, of course, the music was awesome too.”

Three weeks later, the band was scheduled to play for more than 700 inmates on “good behavior” at a California state prison. Plans to enter with the nonprofit Jail Guitar Doors were canceled last minute by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, reported the local CBS News affiliate. Working with what they had, Prophets of Rage set up a stage on the street outside the prison walls and played a truncated three-song set, loud enough to be heard inside. Plans were also made to donate



Prophets of Rage – from left, Brad Wilk (Rage Against the Machine), Chuck D (Public Enemy), DJ Lord (Public Enemy), Tim Commerford (RATM), B-Real (Cypress Hill) and Tom Morello (Rage Against the Machine) – are on tour, putting economic inequality at the forefront of their work. PHOTO BY DANNY CINCH

I kept hearing the Donald Trump campaign being referred to as ‘raging against the machine,’ and I was like ‘no, no, no, no, no, no, no.’

**We will show you what it is
to rage against the machine.**

TOM MORELLO, GUITARIST FOR PROPHETS OF RAGE AND FORMERLY RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

equipment to Jail Guitar Doors, which supplies instruments to inmates.

Two weeks later, on Aug. 19, Prophets of Rage kicked off a whirlwind North American tour at Fairfax's Eagle Bank Arena, just outside of the nation's capital. Between songs, Cypress Hill MC B-Real (Louis Freese) and Chuck D could be heard asking the crowd to “fight for your freedom,” “think for yourself,” and “throw your fists and your peace signs up in the air at the same damn time.” The 10,000-seat arena erupted in cheers when Morello announced mid-set that a portion of the night's proceeds would be donated to D.C.'s own Bread for the City, a nonprofit homeless service provider.

“Tomorrow, in your home, in your school, in your community, in your place of work, in your country and in the world at large – it's up to you, without apology or compromise, to fight for the world you really want to live in,” Morello said after describing Bread for the City's mission and before diving into the last five songs of the night. The same donation structure will be repeated for local homeless charities at every stop on the tour.

This is not a new commitment for any of the band members. In recent years, the musicians have participated in a number of efforts to benefit food banks and homeless services organization, including a 2010 campaign in which Rage Against the Machine raised more than £162,000 – about \$234,000 – for the homeless charity Shelter in the United Kingdom.

Hours before the Aug. 19 Prophets of Rage gig, Street Sense vendor and writer Ronald Dudley – a self-produced rap artist by the name Pookanu – sat down with Chuck D, Tom Morello and PE Turntabalist DJ Lord (Lord Aswod) to hear more about their motivation and views on homelessness.

Ronald Dudley: What inspires you guys?

Tom Morello: I know I've been inspired by a couple things. I didn't really choose to be a guitar player; that sort of chose me. Then once I was stuck being a guitar player, I had to find a way to weave my thoughts and feelings about the world into what I do for a living. So that's been my path.

R.D.: How has hip-hop changed since you started?

Chuck D: I think one thing that has affected hip-hop from being captivating in its original sense is the disappearance of groups in favor of individuals. In the beginning, hip-hop was a performance art as a priority and it was panoramically watched. I think record companies and business administrations have produced that because it's easier to renegotiate with one person. And that's kind of reduced it from being a “we” to a “me” type of thing.

And that's a little less attractive. Another thing that has disappeared from the soundscape and the sight scape is that there's more women today participating in rap music and hip-hop than ever, but they're not in the higher realm of what's going on, promoting and

projecting-wise.

R.D.: How do you guys feel about modern-day homelessness?

Morello: It's an issue that's near and dear to our hearts. So far we've played eight shows. One of those shows was on Skid Row in Los Angeles for the residents there. And every show that we've charged any money for, we've given 100 percent of the money away, from the ticket sales and the T-shirt sales, to homeless organizations in those cities. And tonight we've got a partner; part of the proceeds will go to Bread for the City.

R.D.: Have you or anyone close to you experienced homelessness?

Morello: I've worked for years with an organization called PATH in Los Angeles, People Assisting the Homeless, and I know many of the families there. That's where my family spent all of our holidays.

Chuck D: Black in America man, you'll find out that 60 percent of your extended family is on the cusp of being out. Lose a job and you have unforgiving banks; you have empty buildings and houses – more empty buildings and houses than you have people that are outside of them on the street; that's troubling. (DJ Lord nods in agreement)

R.D.: What should the next president do to put an end to homelessness?

Morello: Well I can tell you, if I were president, I would make it job one to have zero tolerance for homelessness in the United States of America. Homelessness is not something that happens; homelessness is a crime. It's almost a war crime, y'know, that there's almost this kind of disposable part of humanity.

We spend money on battleships, and we spend hundreds of millions of dollars on presidential and congressional campaigns while people live in the

Prophets of Rage – consisting of members of Rage Against the Machine, Public Enemy and Cypress Hill – want to end homelessness and economic disparity. They're on tour with a message: Create change.

street. It's outrageous. And I think that any decent society, any humane society, would first and foremost make sure that everyone has a place to stay, everyone has enough to eat, everyone has an education and that everyone has a chance.

R.D.: You have said that you are “making America rage again” and that it is not enough just to vote. What more can individuals do?

Chuck D: Making America Rage Again is making America think again and being concerned about everything outside of their individual self. And I think what each and every person can do is begin to think outside of themselves for what they can do to say something or do something to help somebody.

Usually for a person to say something of enlightenment to somebody, it doesn't take much. But in a time where perception and gadgets rule the roost, people feel that the currency of attention is low and that nobody is paying attention to them if they talk about helping somebody, especially if they're not known for it or not famous or don't get paid for it. “Each one teach one” is a real statement.

R.D.: Do you guys have a favorite charity?



Street Sense vendor Ronald Dudley spits a verse for Prophets of Rage, encouraged by Chuck D. PHOTO BY RODNEY CHOICE