

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

How Popular Music is Fueling the Black Lives Matter Movement

By Deonna Anderson
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LONG BEACH, Calif – I still remember the first time I heard Lupe Fiasco's "All Black Everything." I was in my apartment in Davis, Calif., where I attended college. When I heard the words, I was reminded of the history of Black people in America. It made me want to learn even more about my history. Everyone has a sphere of influence, and the music made me ask myself: "How am I using mine?"

Since August 2014, when unarmed teenager Michael Brown was killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Mo., young people have rallied in the streets of Ferguson, New York, Oakland, Los Angeles and other cities across the nation and the world. In Long Beach, young people recently began organizing around the slogan #BlackLivesMatter, a campaign born in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted of murder charges.



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J. Cole, shown here in London in 2011, released "Be Free" six days after Mike Brown's death. He joins a growing number of recording artists providing a soundtrack for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Throughout, music has been an undeniable part of the protests, the latest reminder that when used the right way, music can inspire social change.

"Music can be considered the heartbeat of social movements," says Eric Tandoc, a DJ and a

community organizer at the Filipino Migrant Center in Long Beach. Tandoc regularly uses art to inspire youth to take action on social and political issues.

"Not everyone is going to listen to a speech or read a book, but people will listen to a three-minute song," he says.

Nationally, respected musicians such as Questlove of the hip hop group The Roots have urged musicians to create more protest songs, and artists are responding.

The truth of the matter is, musicians have more influence than I do, and even more influence than they had in the 1980s or 1960s. In the age of social media, the possibility of communication between musicians and their fans has been brought to an all time high. If young people see their favorite musician talking about social change, they might pay more attention to what is happening and be inclined to get involved

they expect respect and non-violence/I refuse the right to be silent." Fellow Long Beach rapper Crooked I, recently going by Kxing Crooked, released "I Can't Breathe" in which he raps, "So, no, I can't buy that pellet gun/They might try to Tamir Rice you."

(Tamir Rice was a 12-year old Black boy who was killed by a police officer in Cleveland)

But lyrics about the current events aren't just happening locally in Long Beach. Let's go down the list:

- Six days after Brown's death, hip-hop artist J. Cole recorded and re-

leased "Black Rage," which she released a couple weeks after Brown's death.

- The Game brought together over ten hip-hop and R&B artists including Rick Ross, 2 Chainz, Wale, Swizz Beatz, Curren\$y, and TGT to produce "Don't Shoot."
- Tink sang and rapped on "Tell the Children" a few days after the grand jury decided not to indict Wilson for the murder.
- Rapper Dizzy Wright also released a song called "I Need Answers."

These songs are the

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in making a positive impact.

In his song "Hands Up," north Long Beach native Vince Staples raps, "Raidin' homes without a warrant/Shoot him first without a warning/And

leased "Be Free."

- Lauryn Hill belted out the lyrics, "Black rage is founded on two-thirds a person/Rappings and beatings and suffering that wors-

21st century protest songs. While each of these songs were created as a response to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, they

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