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Michael Franti's Top Ten Protest Songs

Spearhead frontman Michael Franti explains his drive for social justice as his "need to be a participant in the world." Musically, he draws from a deep well of "participation" that includes his 2004 sojourn to play on the streets of Baghdad and for U.S. troops, from which he produced the inspired documentary, *I Know I'm Not Alone*. He also recently spent an off-day during his Japan tour in Hiroshima where he interviewed survivors. "One survivor told me the reason he doesn't despise the U.S. is that hatred only leads to more bombs. If this guy can think this way then what are the rest of us thinking?" He recently paused from his current U.S. tour to offer music that has helped shape his perspective.

By **Crai S. Bower**

Blender.com, October 2006

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[Bob Dylan, *Modern Times*](#)

"Get Up, Stand Up," **Bob Marley**

Burnin', 1973

Always inspiring, always danceable. The consummate rebel call to arms.



"The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," **Gil Scott Heron**

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised, 1974

This eerie premonition of Big Brother at 6 and 11 is Gil at his best. The confidence in his baritone lets 'The Man' know, 'not only am I badder than you, I'm smarter than you.'





"Sonny's Lettah (Anti-Sus Poem)," Linton Kwesi Johnson

Forces of Victory, 1979

The English/Jamaican poet's remorseful tale of self-defense in the face of police brutality is put to dub reggae so deep it lifts tears from the deepest well.



"Fight the Power," Public Enemy

Fear of a Black Planet, 1990

Boom box revolution in red, black and green. Don't try this on your iPod.



"Know Your Rights," The Clash

Combat Rock, 1982

This public service announcement with guitars carefully instructs the listener about each of his/her human rights, all three of 'em. The Patriot Act, twenty years in advance.



"Fuck tha Police," N.W.A.

Straight Outta Compton, 1988

When gangsta rap had something to say.



"Legalize It," Peter Tosh

Legalize It, 1976

Not only the best pot liberation song, but the best album cover to roll up on.



"De System," Mutabaruka

Check It!, 1983

Dub poetry telling it like it is: that the system is a fraud.



"Imagine," John Lennon

Imagine, 1971

The most eloquent song about the way the world should be, could only be believable because it came from the lips of the world's most searing musical satirist.



"Yell Fire," Michael Franti and Spearhead

Yell Fire!, 2006 A post 9/11 wake-up call for the masses.

Out Now:

Michael Franti and Spearhead, *Yell Fire!*