

**What is it good for?**

**Protest Music in the  
Age of Trump**

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## A) What Exactly is “Protest Music”?

- The music of the “underdog”—Dorian Lynskey
- Political music?
- Topical songs
- “songs of persuasion” (aka propaganda songs)  
“magnetic” & rhetorical—Serge Denisoff
- “Hurt Songs”—Bryan Garman



## B) Workers, (More) Ghosts, Bob Dylan and Freedom Songs

### ➤ The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905

(aka the IWW or the Wobblies)

“One Big Union”

Little Red Song Book

Joe Hill (Joel Hagglund):

*“A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once,  
but a song learned by heart and repeated over and over.”*

e.g. “The Preacher and the Slave”

“I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night” – Pete Seeger



B) Workers, (More) Ghosts, Bob Dylan and Freedom Songs—cont.

- **Bob Dylan: impact and influence**
- **Freedom Songs & Civil Rights**
- **The Freedom Singers:**

Charles Neblett  
Cordell Reagon  
Bernice Johnson  
Rutha Mae Harris

*Activists:*

e.g. “public face” of SNCC

“singing newspaper”—Johnson

\$50,000 raised

Newport, 1963



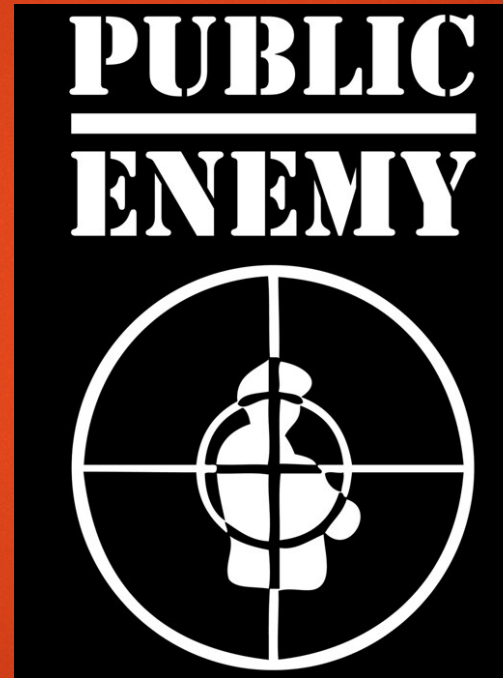
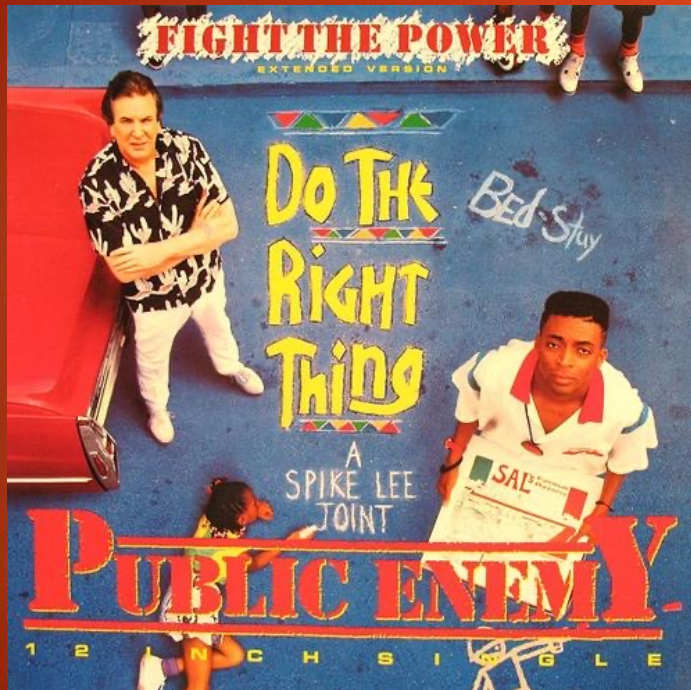


## C) Rapping, Singing and Voting for Change

### ➤ Public Enemy & the “Black Panthers of Rap”

anger; emotions; catharsis

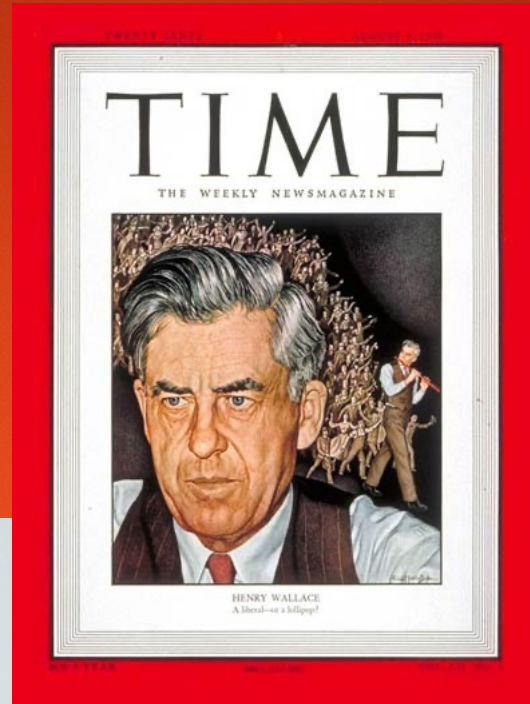
“Fight the Power”



C) Rapping, Singing and Voting for Change—cont.

➤ **The Vote for Change Tour**

- “President” John Kerry, 2004
- People’s Songs for Henry Wallace, 1948
- Obama 2008!



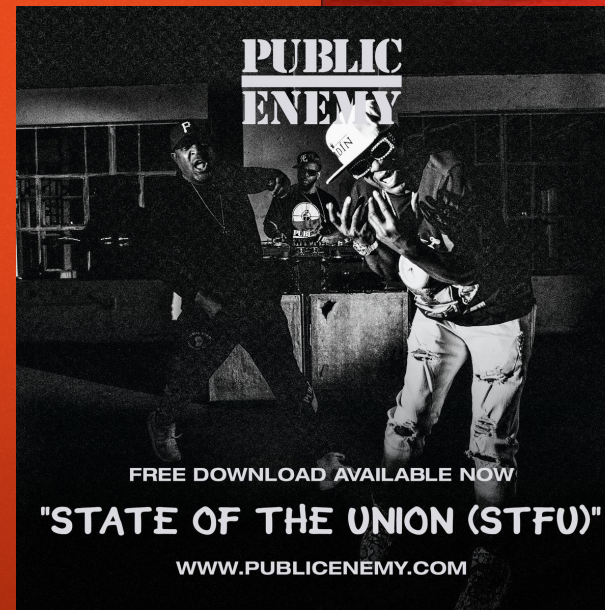
## D) Protest Music in the Age of Trump

### ➤ "Hands off my Music":

e.g. Phil Collins, Elton John, Adele, Queen, The Rolling Stones  
Beyoncé, John Fogerty, REM, Bruce Springsteen, Jack White  
Nickelback, Celine Deon, Neil Young, Rufus Wainwright  
& Leonard Cohen

### ➤ Songs:

e.g. A Tribe Called Quest's "We the People"  
Fiona Apple's "Tiny Hands"  
Ryan Harvey's "Old Man Trump"  
Pussy Riot's "Make America Great Again"  
Sloan's "Silence Trumps Lies"  
The Prophets of Rage's "Hail to the Chief"  
Finneas's "Where the Poison is"  
Public Enemy's "State of the Union"  
Demi Lovato's "Commander in Chief"  
Neil Young's "Big Crime"



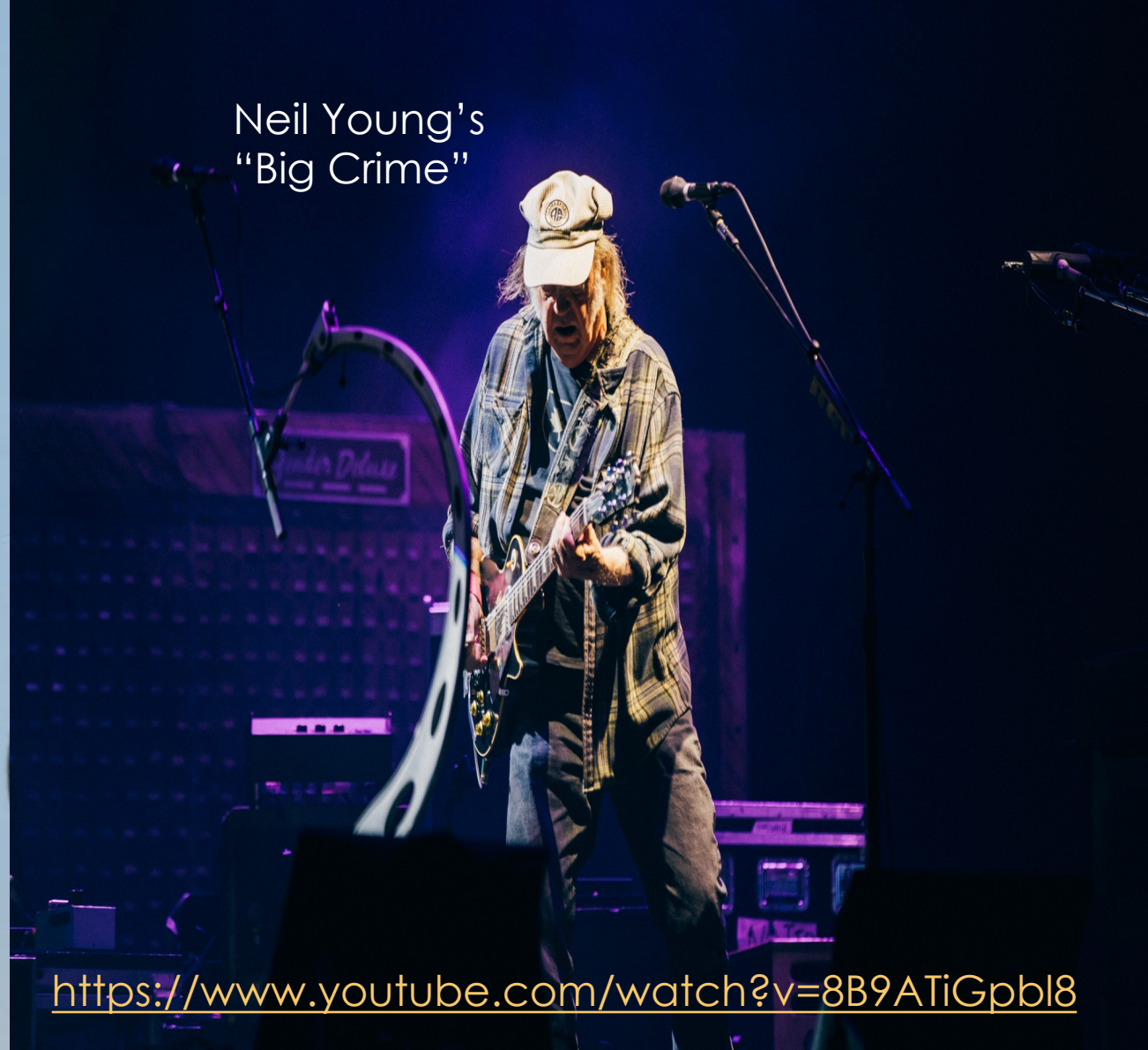
D) Protest Music in the Age of Trump—cont.

➤ Why?

- The internet & social media?
- The devaluation of music?
- conservatism & neo-liberal capitalism?
- The decline of broad-based social movements?
- Apathy, indifference & defeat?
- Less gifted, less engaged artists?



is Everything Gonna' be "Alright"?



Neil Young's  
"Big Crime"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B9ATiGpb18>

## Selected Further Reading:

- Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs from Billie Holiday to Green Day* (2011)
- R. Serge Denisoff, "Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song," *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol 9., No. 2 (Spring 1968): 228-247
- Bryan K. Garman, *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero From Guthrie to Springsteen* (2000)
- Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie: American Radical* (2011)
- Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America* (2010)
- Alec Wilkinson, *The Protest Singer: An Intimate Portrait of Pete Seeger* (2010)
- Craig Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America* (2006)
- Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005)
- David Masciotra, *Working on a Dream: The Progressive Political Vision of Bruce Springsteen* (2010)