

As long as there have been voices and instruments, people have made music to express themselves. From odes to [trucks](#), [dogs](#) and [love](#) to songs about [Jesus](#) and [Allah](#), no matter the emotion, if it can be felt, it can be put into words and turned into music.

As many songs that have been produced about love, an equal number have been written about politics and struggle. For every movement that has risen up out of struggle and oppression, there have been songs created about those mêlées and subsequent movements.

We're experiencing an incredible time in both U.S. and world history. Not since the 1960s have voices been so amplified, speaking out against the subjugation of people and destruction of the environment. Back in the 1960s and early '70s, many disenfranchised groups were speaking up simultaneously.

[Nina Simon quote: "It's an artist's duty to reflect the times in which we live."](#)

Along with protesting the [Vietnam War](#), there was the [Black Power Movement](#), the [Native American Power Movement](#), the [Chicano Civil Rights Movement](#), the [Feminist Movement](#) and the [Gay Rights Movement](#).

What Was Happening in the 1960s and 1970s?

In truth, not much was different from today. The only difference is the method of reporting to you and me. We didn't have social media, so news was not instant and swirling around us 24-7-365.

I wasn't yet born in 1965, when the [Watts Riots](#) took place and Malcom X was assassinated; I wouldn't come to life for another year. At two years old, I was too young to remember when Dr. King was assassinated. I wasn't much older when [Fred Hampton was assassinated](#) by local Chicago police (on orders from the F.B.I.) or when the New York City Police raided the [Stonewall Inn](#) in 1969, arresting queer people who were congregating in private, minding their own business.

In the 1970s, Stevie Wonder released [several albums with songs about racism](#): 1972's *Talking Book*, 1973's *Innervisions*, 1974's *Fulfillingness' First Finale* and 1976's *Songs in the Key of Life*—the latter is arguably one of the best records ever recorded in the history of music. Fans and critics alike loved what affectionately came to be known simply as *Songs*. As [Rolling Stone Magazine](#) introduced *Songs* in their review, "How singer-songwriter returned from brink of retirement to create painstaking, groundbreaking 1976 release." Of *Songs*, Stevie has said, "Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision."

(At the end of this article, I provide a list of musical artists who've written protest songs. Some are my suggestions, and some are suggestions by friends and family of mine.)

I have long believed there was a short window of hope that came out of the mid- to late 1960s into the early 1970s. It was brief, and if you blinked you missed it. The United States used to be seen by people in other countries as the place where streets were lined with gold and where immigrants believed that if they worked hard enough, they could achieve the "American Dream." For anyone not White and middle class, the U.S. was and still can be a complete nightmare.

Between the 1960s and today, with more groups of marginalized people speaking out against the oppression they're going through, we have many more important movements that have been added to the voices from the '60s.

- The [trans movement](#)
- The [movement to end bullying](#)
- The [movement to end domestic violence](#)
- [Black Lives Matter](#)
- The [movement to end discrimination against Muslim people](#)
- The [movement to end gun violence](#)
- Along with the many others that have sprung up over the years, act in silos, giving rise to [identity politics](#)

And while all of these movements have been crucial, if there is any hope of the bourgeoisie relinquishing control and allowing others to have equal slices of the pie, not just White cis men, they speak to a larger problem. The United States is anything but united (have you ever heard a better example of an oxymoron?), and it has been allowed to exist and thrive precisely because of identity politics.

The more we rise up in protest but disassociate ourselves from other groups protesting their oppression, the U.S. actually wins. The best thing for an oppressive government is when disenfranchised groups protest in silos. Conversely, the worst thing is when people protest to achieve a common outcome for all.

We're seeing this with the recent #BlackLivesMatter and #JusticeforGeorge protests. This is the first time since I've been alive that I have had a glimmer of hope that all of us in marginalized communities can achieve equality with the mostly White bourgeoisie. I've always said there was no way Black people, who comprise a mere 13 percent of the U.S. population, can bring about lasting and meaningful change on our own. We need the help of White people, and [many are showing up and fighting right alongside](#) the most dehumanized people in the country. While my beliefs aren't shared by all of my brothahs and sistahs, I am trying to see things from a logical

perspective: We're outgunned and we shouldn't reject help if people want to offer it and are willing to stand with us.

And perhaps the most exciting part for me is seeing how many countries have taken part in these protests. If you've ever heard the expression, "The U.S. coughs and the world catches a cold," I guess it applies to protesting as well as ups and downs in the economy. As Vox phrased the global response: "[The police killing of George Floyd has sparked a worldwide reckoning.](#)"

With every [fallen statue](#), odes to people who throughout history have perpetuated hate and with every multinational company giving in to the enormous pressure to change their [racist names and/or culture](#), it's truly exhilarating!

Out of Retirement and a Return to Activism

On June 25, 2020, the bluegrass and country crossover band formerly known as [The Dixie Chicks dropped Dixie from their name](#) and released their second single in 14 years. It's the only song I've ever heard and the only video I've ever seen that covers the plight experienced by most of the disenfranchised groups in the U.S. On top of that, the song *March March* addresses bullying, mass shootings in schools and global warming.

The Chicks certainly had this in them. In 2003, lead singer [Natalie Maines](#) told a sold-out crowd in England, "Just so you know, we're on the good side with y'all. We do not want this war, this violence. And we're ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas." The country music fans, and the industry itself, lost their minds and turned their backs on The Chicks. The message was clear: The U.S. may indeed have a serious problem when it comes to isms—both domestically and toward countries of Black and Brown people—but speak out against that hatred and you can find yourself dismissed and told to just "shut up and sing."

There's a lot going on in the *March March* video, so it may take you a few viewings to get it all. I've seen it maybe 35 times, and I keep spotting new things about it. Trigger Warning: it's got some very graphic and raw footage, but it's worth it. I have cried each time I've seen it.

Along with the graphic videos and stills from history and some from the current protests, The Chicks list the names of every Black person murdered by cops and that cop wannabe. In my opinion, if the first two minutes and 34 seconds didn't fill you with tears, reading the names will cause your entire body to sob uncontrollably—no matter how many times you see the video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwBjF_VVfvE

How You Can Protest Even While Maintaining Sheltering in Place

For many reasons, not everyone who wants to is able to participate in demonstrations. No shame or judgment by any means! Mad respect if you want to but you simply can't.

Many people believe voting in better politicians is the answer. When I look back at every single administration in U.S. history contributing to the erosion of civil rights for all but the bourgeoisie and the upper middle class and above, I'm not so sanguine that voting is the answer. And yes, I have heard the pushback from my friends and family about the [suffragists who fought racism and sexism so I could vote](#). And while I am grateful, I am also aware that my choices have always come down to evil and less evil: two candidates who are part of the same crooked capitalist system that oppresses Black and Brown people, members of the LGBTQ+ and women—both in the U.S. (and its colonies, one of which I live in) and around the world.

No, I say if you really want to effect change, you have to support whatever splinter group who's fighting for your rights. This allows them to keep protesting on your behalf. Keep them fueled and they'll continue fighting along with the other splinter groups. We are literally in the fight for our lives, people.

Along with listing many protest songs, I've also provided more organizations that you can donate to who are fighting for our lives.

Viva la Revolución!

Musical Artists Who've Written and Sung Protest Songs

In the years since activism was at an all-time high in the 1960s and '70s, across all genres of music artists have been speaking out against being maligned. I would have to write a book to cover them all, but here are a few of my personal favorites along with suggestions from friends and family of mine—artists I'd never heard of or had heard the band/singer's name but knew nothing about their music.

[Bob Marley](#)

[U2](#)

[Prince](#)

[Gil Scot Heron](#)

[Nina Simone](#)

[Sting](#) (this live version enlisted the help of the iconic Stevie Wonder)

[Bruce Springsteen](#)

[Mary J. Blige](#)

[Melissa Etheridge](#)

[N.W.A.](#)

[Everlast](#)

[Tracy Chapman](#)

[The Temptations](#)

[Meshell Ndegeocello](#)

[The Eagles](#)

[The \(Dixie\) Chicks](#)

[Stevie Wonder](#)

[Peter Gabriel](#)

[Aretha Franklin](#)

[Artists Against Apartheid](#)

[Van Halen](#)

[Against Me](#)

[Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five](#)

[Thomas Mapfumo with Acid Band](#)

[Jimi Hendrix](#)

[Galt McDermott](#) (the Broadway musical or the movie of Hair)

[Stiff Little Fingers](#)

[Neil Young](#)

[Black Sabbath](#)

[Simon & Garfunkel](#)

[Sony Okosun](#)

[Maggie's Dream](#)

[Mariam Makeba](#)

[Rush](#)

[Peter Tosh](#)

[Childish Gambino](#)

[The Beatles](#)

[Les Nubians](#)

[Peter, Paul and Mary](#)

[Public Enemy](#)

[Billy Joel](#)

[The Isley Brothers](#)

[Pearl Jam](#)

[Youssou Ndour](#)

[Janelle Monaé](#)

[Marvin Gaye](#) (also suggested by Patrice Brown, Stephen Young and at least 20 other people)

[Donnie Hathaway](#)

[Cultura Profetica](#)

[The Cranberries](#) (also suggested by Joanne Machin)

[Fela](#) (also suggested by Zjien Relician and Ozovese Okerele)

[Queen Latifah](#)

[The Clash](#)

[Matabaruka](#)

[War](#)

The next list includes artists and songs I hadn't considered that were suggested to me by friends and family when I told them I was writing this article:

[Pete Seeger](#) (Steph Bader)

[Stone Mecca](#) ([Tauhir Jones](#))

[Mavis Staples](#) (same song, Carolyn Briggs)

[Sam Cooke](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Rage Against the Machine](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[What's I've Done](#) (Hiba Berytus)

[Nas](#) (also Hiba Berytus)

[Les McCann & Eddie Harris](#) (TaRessa Stovall)

[Erykah Badu](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[A Tribe Called Red](#) (Charlene Mattson)

[Kendrick Lamar](#) (Alec MacLoed)

[Gracie Petrie](#) (Racheline Maltese)

[Dennis Brown](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Phil Ochs](#) (Another Steph Bader)

[Curtis Mayfield](#) (Anthony Raidge Burton)

The Temptations' [Ball of Confusion](#) (Richard J. Cunningham)

[Ten Years After](#) (Scott Ireland)

[Janis Joplin](#) (Amanda Kreklau)

[Joni Mitchell](#) (Also Jonquil Garrick)

[The Coup](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Barry McGuire](#) (Terry Shepherd)

[Roberta Flack](#) (Barbara Johnson)

[For What It's Worth](#) (Bridget Adams-Brewer)

[Pink Floyd](#) (Scott Ireland)

[Common](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[The Beat](#) (Kate McKinley)

[The Roots with Bilal](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Dead Prez](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Brandi Carlile](#) (Cook West and Janet Ferguson)

[Elvis Costello](#) (Fritz Capria)

[Linton Kwesi Johnson](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Anderson Paak](#) (Karla Shay Smith and Joby Morrow)

[Blackstar](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Andre Cymone](#) (Karla Shay Smith)

[Alicia Bay Laurel](#) (Alicia Bay Laurel)

[M.I.A.](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[John Coltrane](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Ben Harper](#) (Zjien Relician)

[Joan Baez](#) (Susan Kerstein)

[Coven](#) (April Schoenleber Gozalez)

[KRS 1](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Malvina Reynolds](#) (Also Susan Kerstein)

[X Clan](#) (Rachel Hagen)

[Tupac/2Pac](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[More Prince](#) (Dre Hill)

[Georgia Anne Muldrow](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Burning Spear](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Bob Dylan](#) (Liz Sherer)

[Bad Brains](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Damian 'Jr. Gong' Marley](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Iggy T and The Crazy-makers](#) (a band I'd never heard of who was suggested by Sara Elizabeth Grossman, but if you like them you might like to know [proceeds from their songs are going to the NAACP](#)).

[James Brown](#) (Tauhir Jones)

[Helen Reddy](#) (Brenda Copeland)

[Ana Tijoux](#) (Cory West)

[4 Non Blondes](#) (Marie-Francoise Theodore)

[The Specials](#) (Tina Price-Johnson)

More Organizations to consider donating to or volunteering for:

[Headcount](#)

[Human Rights Campaign](#)

[American Civil Liberties Union](#)

[Supermajority Education Fund](#)

[March for Our Lives](#)

[Fridays for Future](#)

[Mi Familia Vota](#)

[Native American Rights Fund](#)

[Planned Parenthood](#)

[White People for Black Lives](#)

[Innocence Project](#)

[Proclaim Justice](#)

[Marsha P. Johnson Institute](#)

[Advancement Project](#)

[United We Dream](#)

[Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

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