

Tom Morello's gratuitous response to Paul Ryan

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Musician and activist Tom Morello has gotten a lot of pats on the back for his [strongly worded rebuke](#) of Congressman Paul Ryan in *Rolling Stone* last week. And sure, it's hard to resist a hook that juicy: Morello's best-known project, the leftist and often polemical Rage Against the Machine, is one of Ryan's favorite bands. Here's a taste of Morello's response to Ryan's joining the Romney ticket:

Ryan claims that he likes Rage's sound, but not the lyrics. Well, I don't care for Paul Ryan's sound *or* his lyrics. He can like whatever bands he wants, but his guiding vision of shifting revenue more radically to the one percent is antithetical to the message of Rage.

I wonder what Ryan's favorite Rage song is? Is it the one where we condemn the genocide of Native Americans? The one lambasting American imperialism? Our cover of "Fuck the Police"? Or is it the one where we call on the people to seize the means of production? So many excellent choices to jam out to at Young Republican meetings!

"He can like whatever bands he wants"—how generous. While my political views often (not always) fall closer to Morello's than Ryan's, this seems pretty cheap. My dabblings in the music world have been quite minor, but it's pretty ingrained in me that if someone likes your music and pays to hear it, your response should be gratitude, full stop. That's true when your CD sales at the merch table are just enough to avoid using your personal credit card to put gas in the band van; it ought to be all the more true if you're fortunate enough to make a great living playing music, as Morello has.

A separate point: Morello's totalizing view of Ryan also highlights the narrow terms of U.S. political discourse. I don't mean by this that Morello speaks for the wider left, nor is my point to [bang the civility drum](#). I'm talking about the vast, almost absolute distance between an activist whose main tune is anti-establishment and a politician whose main rhetorical strategy is anti-government. Theoretically, the two should agree about some things and disagree (yes, vehemently) about others. In reality,

such nuanced conversations are largely confined to niches of the blogsphere. The big game is, as usual, simply left vs. right.