

The Sad Self-Importance of Rage Against the Machine

☒ Conservatives like myself have long understood that people in the entertainment industry tend to subscribe to a different political view than we do. There's certainly nothing wrong with that. It shouldn't really matter whether or not we identify with the personal beliefs of those who entertain us. We go to their movies, watch their television shows, and buy their music because we appreciate their talents and enjoy their work. We don't do it to be in compliance with their world views. It's a consumer relationship.

Unfortunately, there are many in the entertainment industry who don't view us that way.

There seems to be a nearly endless supply of artists and entertainers who use the soapbox their careers have afforded them to sanctimoniously denounce conservatives. And while it may irritate and annoy us that our entertainment-driven society places greater value on the thoughts of celebrities than it does the common man, we still champion their freedom of speech to admonish us.

I've never quite understood what it is about the celebrity culture that makes these people think they're uniquely qualified to represent our country's moral compass and pass judgement on those who disagree with them. After all, the only real difference between us and them is the profession they've excelled at. It's an absurd notion that their opinions are somehow more deliberated and profound than those of us who have chosen to pursue a career outside of the performing arts.

Still, we often find ourselves bearing the vocal and sometimes vile condemnation of these people. They casually accuse us of intolerance and claim we don't care about the poor because we

believe in individualism. Some even go as far as to label us as bigots and racists because we embrace personal responsibility and don't share their vision of social victimization.

The sad reality is that celebrity rhetoric does indeed have an influence on public opinion. Why? Well, to put it in simple terms: A lot of Americans want to be celebrities themselves. That sort of notoriety is seen as the ultimate achievement these days, thus celebrities are held up on an unearned pedestal. It's that form of hero-worship that encourages a sense of celebrity self-importance. The result is the Sean Penns, Matt Damons, and Eva Langorias of the world spouting out their political censures of conservatism whenever they're given the platform.

Last week, we saw a bit of an evolution in the realm of celebrity self-importance. And boy, was it one sad step for mankind. We saw a celebrity actually take offense to someone on the opposite side of the political spectrum admitting to being a fan of his. I'm talking about *Rage Against the Machine* guitarist, Tom Morello, who didn't at all like the fact that Vice Presidential nominee, Paul Ryan, is a fan of his band. In fact, he seemed outright furious.

In a venomous blog entry he wrote for *Rolling Stone*, Morello called Ryan "clueless" for not understanding what his band was about and chastised him for not listening to their message. He wrote that the political activism behind *Rage Against the Machine* went against everything that Paul Ryan stood for. He called Ryan the embodiment of the metaphorical *Machine* of American imperialism itself, and offered an exhaustive list of things that he believes Paul Ryan represents. The list, of course, included every standard charge that knee-jerk left-wingers regularly accuse conservatives of: Greed, racism, bigotry, hating poor people, hating women, hating the environment, hating, hating, hating, blah, blah, blah.

Morello went on to explain that his band's music has changed the minds and lives of their fans, and has guided them to "work tirelessly for a more humane and just planet." And poor Paul Ryan... He just didn't *get it*.

I referred to this reaction as an *evolution* of celebrity self-importance because it really is groundbreaking. It marks the first time (that I can remember anyway) when a celebrity has held himself up to the level of an organized religion. Apparently, if you let *Rage Against the Machine* into your life, but don't accept their teachings as gospel, you are publicly excommunicated and shamed as a non-believer and a hypocrite.

I must admit that I laughed out loud as I was reading Morello's rant. Even coming from the entertainment industry, the sanctimony behind it was absolutely hysterical.

You see, like Paul Ryan, I too am a fan of *Rage Against the Machine*. I think they are creative, brilliant musicians with a great sound, great energy, and imaginative lyrics. However, their politics are no more profound and thought-provoking than the slogans written on t-shirts on the clearance rack at your local *Hot Topic* mall shop. Whining about social injustices inspired from collective guilt isn't a platform worthy of a spiritual connection. It's just overly simplistic, run-of-the-mill, dime-store liberalism.

It's impossible to take someone like Morello serious when he finds irony in the fact that a fan of his did not become a disciple of his band. His logic seems to be that if you like his music, but don't subscribe to his shallow political ideology, you're a hypocrite – or perhaps just too stupid to *get it*.

It saddens me to see a band, whose creativity and edginess led them to such great success, now come across so empty and egotistical.

Tom, we *get it*. We've just chosen not to *live it*. Growing up out of our adolescent years and entering the real world made that pretty easy.

It would be nice if Morello took a minute to step back and recognize the *real* irony here. *Rage Against the Machine's* political message has largely been about challenging conformity, yet he is the ultimate conformist. Only a conformist interprets an opposing viewpoint as disloyalty.

Likewise, in parroting the tired *One percent versus the 99 percent* mantra (as he did in his blog entry), Morello is conceding that he is a mere disciple himself – a disciple of the Democratic National Committee. You see, that mantra didn't stem up from some organic, social uprising. It came from some stuffed shirt, political hack at the DNC who wrote speeches for President Obama. The leader of *American Imperialism*, after all, is the President of the United States, aka *The Machine*. Who would have thought that someone of Morello's proclaimed philosophy would end up as an informal press secretary for an administration that escalated the war in Afghanistan, started a war in Libya, placed tough sanctions on Iran, kept the Guantanamo Bay detention camp open, continued the use of rendition, and presided over the highest U.S. poverty rate in several decades?

Of course, there's also that inconvenient matter of all the *evil* money that *Rage Against the Machine* has sewn into the pockets of the "super rich" or "privileged elite", as Morello referred to them. I'm not just talking about the corporate music industry, but also the band themselves. Unless they've all chosen to live modest lifestyles to funnel all of their excess wealth into feeding, as Morello put it, "the millions of children in the U.S." who "go to bed hungry every night", you've got to draw the conclusion that the man's a hypocrite.

It sure makes you wonder how much of the band's message is a philosophical commitment and how much is merely a marketing

brand. Personally, I'd rather not think about all of those inconsistencies because I like *Rage Against the Machine* for their music, even if the profound wisdom of Tom Morello won't allow for it.