



ANTI-FLAG

Great rock n' roll doesn't have to be mindless and socially conscious tunes don't have to be dull. When art and entertainment devolve into mere commercial escapism, the status quo of an oppressive system and the empty banality of mediocre music will prevail.

ANTI-FLAG burst through the concrete wall of apathy like a proverbial desert flower. *American Spring* is an empowering, energetic antidote to the crippling cynicism that infects even the most dedicated of rabble-rousers. Co-produced by AWOLNATION's Kenny Carkeet, Jim Kaufman and the band, Anti-Flag's tenth studio album is both a shot across the bow of the political discourse and creatively challenging. *American Spring* is a stylistic leap forward that captures the essence of their dense catalog while conjuring a fresh new sound. Anti-Flag's commitment to high caliber neo-punk music remains as strong as their devotion to raising awareness. "I hope this record can be an encouragement to people to never give up," declares Justin Sane, guitarist/vocalist and cofounder of Anti-Flag. "I know that music changed my life." *American Spring* is the next natural step in a career that produced activist-punk classics like *For Blood and Empire* (2006), *The Terror State* (2003), and *Underground Network* (2001), and inspired international audiences to learn more about the Occupy movement, the anti-war movement, and the idea that "socialism" isn't a dirty word.

Drawing inspiration equally from political thinkers like Howard Zinn and Cornel West as from The Clash and The Dead Kennedys, Anti-Flag got going in earnest in 1993, a year before massive records by Green Day, The Offspring and Rancid pushed punk back into the spotlight. Anti-Flag hail from Pittsburgh, site of the Homestead Steel Strike in 1892 (one of the most serious labor disputes in history), Hill District riots in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination, in a state that helped birth abolitionism.

Anti-Flag attacks the issues head on. Anti-poverty and social justice coalition Oxfam projects the world's wealthiest 1% will own more than 50% of the world's wealth by 2016, a fact tackled in "The Great Divide." "There's a class war going on. The rich are waging it on the poor and they're winning in a staggering wave of crushing defeats, over and over again," says Sane. "Most wealth is concentrated in about 200 corporations, which are owned and run by a really small group of people. We're living in occupied territory. When the Germans in World War II occupied the French they had a resistance. It's up to all of us living in corporate occupied territory to be the resistance."

As detailed by the essays in the *American Spring* liner notes, Anti-Flag's lyrics are as socio-politically minded as ever, but through the lens of deeply personal experience. Drummer/cofounder Pat Thetic's uniquely identifiable rhythms and the dual vocals of Sane and bassist/vocalist Chris #2 ensure each song retains the sound Anti-Flag has established, even as Sane and longtime guitarist Chris Head unleash their heaviest riffs. "Sky is Falling" is one of the darkest Anti-Flag songs ever recorded, capturing the oppressive feeling of its subject matter, drone strikes. "All of the Poison, All of the Pain" lashes out against nihilism, offering empathy to artists who've lost themselves to hopelessness across the generations, but urgently insisting to keep up the fight. "The Debate is Over" owes a debt to Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. There's no more arguing to do about climate change. It's real. It's here.

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Tel. (+49) 511-30025455 ; Mobil: (+49) 176-63810875

Chris #2 ended a relationship that consumed a huge portion of his life during the writing for *American Spring*. When he watched the events in Ferguson, Missouri unfold on television, he immediately felt the same rage he had hearing a not guilty verdict after a year and a half of court hearings surrounding the murder of his own sister. On *American Spring*, he's connected his personal life to the bigger political picture like never before.

"I felt torn up, vulnerable, and unsure of my identity. I'd never had that experience before. So whenever I started looking at the politics of the world, I couldn't help but connect each thing that was happening to something that had happened in my life."

Punk icon Tim Armstrong (Operation Ivy, Rancid, The Transplants) guests on "Brandenburg Gate," a song Chris #2 envisioned as akin to Billy Bragg's "Socialism of the Heart" meets The Clash. "I've wanted to write a song with that sort of groove ever since I've known I can write songs."

"Without End" confronts the false doctrine of perpetual war, dismantling the idea that a military "victory" can be had over concepts like "terror," topped off with a blistering solo from Tom Morello of Rage Against The Machine.

The entire band shares a strong point of view when it comes to compromise, to surrender, to giving up on the promise of a better world. Chris #2 flies the flag for optimism in the face of cynicism in songs like "To Hell with Boredom" and "Believer," which declares: "Don't give up / don't give in / there's no peace in the end / the war worth raging is right here." Sane rails against apathy on "Low Expectations."

"We're coming up on a Presidential election where the choice could be between Hilary Clinton and Jeb Bush. So I get why people feel frustrated," says Sane, pointing specifically at the "corporatocracy" described by former CIA operative John Perkins in *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*. "We can count on whomever gets elected to placate the banks, Wall Street, oil interests, and the military industrial complex."

Unthinkable income inequality, militarized police, neo-colonialism, corporate oligarchy, apocalyptic environmental de-struction, loss of privacy and individual liberty, crackdowns on whistleblowers, perpetual wars on the tightening grip of mainstream media, the prison industrial complex, fascism and extremism of all stripes— there's plenty to feel defeated about today. But as "Believer" proclaims, that means justice is up to "Just Us."

"Change happens one person at a time. It takes time. But it's important for those ideas to be out there," Sane insists. "It's impossible to connect with every single person. When you're putting an idea out there, you're just hoping it will resonate with enough people that it has some kind of ability to affect their lives. But change does happen in incremental steps. The first part of being involved is being aware. Then beyond that, there are steps we can all take to become a more active part of progressive resistance."

Yes, thankfully there remain those whose resilience is assured, who fight harder against adversity and difficult odds. They are the proud torchbearers for progressive collectivism, radical change, and a free expression with heavy social responsibility. They are the artists with the talent to create works worthy of their message. Bessie Smith, Woody Guth-rie, MC5, Bad Religion, Boogie Down Productions, The Clash – and after more than two decades, Anti-Flag carries the tradition forward, injecting the underground and the mainstream with politically charged, deliberate, smart-but-no-less-visceral neo-punk.

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Justin Sane – Guitar/Vocals
Chris #2 – Bass/Vocals
Chris Head – Guitar
Pat Thetic – Drums

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