

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Bruce and I closed out our conversations with a return to where we started, asking ourselves: “What will it take to restore faith in America’s promise?” “How to tell a new, unifying story about the country that is true to our highest ideals while at the same time doing an honest accounting of where we fall short?” It’s not an easy thing to do in these cynical times, especially when we’ve got a thousand different media outlets and internet platforms that figured out you can make lots of money fanning people’s anger and resentment.

[Organ keys fade in and play]

Somehow though, some kind of way, we both believe that such a story is still there to be told and that folks across the country are hungry for it. We are convinced that for all our disagreements, most of us long for a more just and compassionate America. An America where *everybody* belongs. We started exploring that spirit with the tale of an unlikely gift that a stranger gave to me on the campaign trail. And with Bruce explaining the story behind one of his most popular and misunderstood songs.

[Organ keys fade under and out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Tell me, when...when did you think you first might wanna...want to run for President? I mean...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Uh oh. *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: What was your ambition? *[laughs]* What made... *[laughs]* What made you want to do that? *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Somebody must’ve dropped me on my head.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I-t it traces back to everything we’ve been talking about...Ah this idea of bringing America into alignment with its ideals and that had been my work, that had been my purpose. If you’re...if you're doing it right, running for President is not actually about you. It is about... finding the chorus, finding the...the collective. Um early in the campaign I-I go to South

Carolina and I go to this town called ah Greenwood. The reason I go there is because I was desperate for the endorsement of this state legislator and she said, "I'll give you the endorsement if you go to this town."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "My town."

[Acoustic guitar strumming in and underneath]

I said, "Yeah." Turns out it's an hour and half from the nearest...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Okay.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Large city and it's at a time I'm down in the polls and we get there and it's pouring down rain, and ah there's a bad article about me in the New York Times. And you know, everybody is talkin' about how you know, "It looks like he was all flash and"—

Finally get there and... It's this little maybe a park center or something. And I walk in and I'm damp, I'm in a bad mood, and suddenly uh as I'm going around shaking hands with everybody you hear this—

[Archive audio of Edith Childs and President Obama Chanting: "Fired up!...Fired up!"]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Fire it up!"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: "Ready to go!"

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Ready to go."

[Archive audio of Edith Childs and President Obama Chanting: "Ready to go! Fired up! Fired up! Ready to go!" fades out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It turned out it was this *[laughs]* w-wonderful woman named Edith Childs.

[Acoustic guitar strumming underneath]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: She was like ah...a part-time private detective... *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Okay... *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And she had a...You know, she had a great smile and she had you know... a pretty flamboyant ah dress and hat on, and ah apparently she made a habit of saying this chant.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: of "Fired up, ready to go." And... and I had thought at first, "This is crazy."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But everybody was doing it, so I thought, "Well, I better do it. I'm here anyway," and suddenly I started feeling kind of good. And...and I-I just enjoyed—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's great.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: The eccentricity of...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Of spirit that she was showing.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: She was just a cheerful spirit.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right? Suddenly, I'm in a better mood. We're having a good conversation with a bunch of folks. When I leave, I ask my staff, "Are you fired up? Are you ready to go?" That's what you discovered when you're running for President is people would lift you up.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Sure.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It's...it's not... you. You're channeling their energy.

[Acoustic guitar strumming fades up and out]

Their hopes. Their power. Ah, their resilience. Now...th- that... What you would also discover is, you'd expect, is that some of those darker strains of American life are there. So you know when I go down to South Carolina, I have that great story with Edith Childs. I also have moments where I'll go into a diner... And start shaking hands with people and everybody's —

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: being very fr-friendly, and then you'd get to a table...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And they won't shake your hand.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Hmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know... And then you'll drive out and suddenly there will be a confederate flag being hoisted by a bunch of protesters. The message isn't that subtle. *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Overall though, for every one of those, you got 10—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: 15, 20, 30... moments of...of small glory, you know? There's no such thing as one way to be an American, and...and that's why when you see some of the politics that has emerged...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Crazy... so ugly man.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: when you...When you heard—cause during our campaign, right, you had Sarah Palin wh-who was sort of a prototype and...and.. and a precursor of...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What was to come. And she'd talk about real Americans and I, obviously, didn't qualify. And..and when I hear that I say, "You haven't been around much cause there—"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Americans come in every shape and every size."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And that's the joy of running for President. You know, you visit all fifty states.

[Bruce Springsteen's Born in the U.S.A. fades in]

You meet people of every walk of life and of every station, and there is a running thread among us....errrrr or between us. There's..there's this link. There's this bond. Even you know, conservatives, the liberals, there's...there's a certain set of common assumptions, but they get

buried very deep. Part of the intensity of our argument is precisely because what we're arguing about are the contradictions in ourselves.

[Bruce Springsteen's Born in the U.S.A. plays under: "Boorn in the U.S.A... I was...Boorn in the U.S.A... I was...Boorn in the U.S.A....Boorn in the U.S.A..."]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And you know, there is one question everybody wants me to ask you: Tell me what was going on through your mind when you were writing, "Born in the U.S.A."

[Bruce Springsteen's Born in the U.S.A. fades out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright, so, Paul Schrader, who—

BOTH: Directed "Blue Collar."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Sends me a script called, "Born in the U.S.A."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Sits on my table. It's 198...2. I'm writing a song about Vietnam because I have met a vet named Ron Kovic who wrote a book called, "Born on the Fourth of July." I've met a veteran named Bobby Muller. Both of these guys have been sh-shot and confined to wheelchairs, veterans activists. I met 'em... just strangely. I was driving across the desert and I stopped at a little drug store and I picked up a copy of "Born on the Fourth of July." Drive the rest of the way to...to L.A. Book in a little motel, this guy in a wheelchair sitting by the pool. A couple of days... finally wheels up to me and says, "Hi, I'm Ron Kovic." I said... I started to think like "Wait Ron... that sounds familiar to me." I forget I just read... He says, "I wrote 'Born on the Fourth of July'."

I said, "My god, I finished reading this book like two weeks ago." So he invited me to the vet center in Venice, spent the afternoon there, just kind of listening, and learning. That set me off to write something about it. I got the script on the table. I got some verses, and then I look at the

script and it says, “Born in the U.S.A.” and I just go “Born in the U.S.A.” *[laughs]* I was born in the U.S.A., and I says, “Yeah! Yeah! That’s it! That’s it!”

[Bruce Springsteen’s Born in the U.S.A. plays under: “He had a woman and lived in Saigon... I got a picture of him in her arms” fades out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: This is a song about the pain, glory, shame of identity and of place. So it’s... a complex picture of the country. Our protagonist is someone who has been betrayed by his nation and yet... still feels deeply connected to the country that he grew up in.

[Bruce Springsteen’s Born in the U.S.A. plays under: “Born in the U.S.A. I’m a long gone daddy in the U.S.A now.... Booorn in the U.S.A....” fade out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Also it ended up being... appropriated as this iconic, patriotic song. Even though that was not necessarily your intentions.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: But I think why the song has been appropriated— One is because it was so powerful, ah two is because its imagery was so fundamentally American. But it did demand of you to hold two contradictory ideas in your mind at one time; that you can both be very critical of your nation and very prideful of your nation simultaneously. And that is something that you see... argued about to this very day.

[Bruce Springsteen’s Born in the U.S.A. plays and fades out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: When you play overseas, what’s different about it? Are you conscious about saying to yourself, “Man, I need to.. show myself as an American Rock n’ Roll balladeer.” Or— or or do you just kind of say, “Look, this is another audience and I’m just going to do me and- and ah—”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: “And and hopefully they respond but maybe they don’t.”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: A little bit of— A little bit of all that, you know. Ah, we have a funny situation where we have two thirds of our audience is in Europe. We have maybe a third of our audience is in the United States, so we have a much bigger audience overseas. And exactly why that is I'm not sure, but I know that people have been fa-fascinated over there in the American story, films, music for a long time.

There continues to be just a deep fascination about it. E Street band, we-we project drama, emotional power, rush of freedom, symbolism of equality, community, comradeship, pursuit of good times. We tr-ried to create a sound that felt as big as the country itself. We celebrate what's best about the country and we criticize the country's failings. And I think pep...overseas people respect that, you know.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That— That was the thing that struck me about first coming into office as President... was the degree to which even though... when I entered office, ah America's standing in the world had dropped pretty precipitously—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: A lot of it having to do with Iraq, um Katrina had hurt our reputation and then we were responsible for triggering a global financial crisis and a Great Recession... So folks were not in a happy place about American policy and the American government. But what people around the world know is this – America isn't perfect. It has had chronic racial discrimination, it is... violent, it has... ah a safety net that compared to...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Other advanced countries is lacking. Oftentimes is ignorant *[laughs]* of the rest of the world. All that stuff. You'll hear of all these criticisms of the United States...

But what everybody around the world also knows is this – That we are the only nation on Earth where we are made up of people who have come from every place... of every faith, every race, every background, every economic station. And what the world is fascinated by is “Can this work?” Right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mmmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Can— can can this experiment...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Where yo-you throw in all of us together... and you set up a democracy where everybody is supposed to have a vote, at least after the Civil War and the post-war amendments... And y-y-you claim that all men are created equal... And if it works, it might be the salvation of all of us.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I like that.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And sometimes we may be skeptical that it'll work, but... in...in the back of their minds what they're also thinking is, "Man, if they could get it right—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "That would be a good thing. The recognition and the dignity of all people, and everybody having opportunity and every child can be President and anybody can make it if you try—"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "And if-if-if that were true... Man, that would be great." You know, e-every so often we'll actually be who we s-say we are and...and when that happens... the world... feels just a little bit more hopeful. And the converse is when we don't...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah. It's dark. It gets dark.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Well because then people say, "Yeah, you know what? The world is what it is. Eh hh eh – "America is acting just like China" or "it's acting just like Russia" or "it's acting just like the old ah European empires" or it-it -it turns out that we're still trapped in this pattern of might makes right and the powerful—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Exploiting the less powerful.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And so...so people suddenly say, "I guess... I guess... I can't hope for much more in my country either." And... And...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I think you're right. Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: B-b-but when, it's right. It's right. And..and and that's why for all the times we've made mistakes, you have always seen us able to recover, and that is why by the way, our culture lives on even during dark times. That's why the French can have 80% disapproval of... you know, the Iraq invasion and still—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: 50,000 of them—

BOTH: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Crowd in to a Bruce Springsteen concert—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Putting their fannies in the seats the next day—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And singing "Born in the U.S.A."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

[Bruce Springsteen's Born in the U.S.A. plays and fades out]

[AD BREAK]

[Keyboard plays chords play]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Something we don't— We didn't talk about was... ah was Watergate, which you know...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Huge.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You..you-you were describing how... that Nixon idea of the 'Silent Majority' what internally they called the 'Southern Strategy', how that for you for the first time you saw a President specifically, explicitly, distinctively try to divide America.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Well you saw the division, you know, immediately. The town split into – I was describing it this morning as – there were men of the '50s, men and women in the '50s and folks of the '60s. And I got my...my lovely brother-in-law who married my lovely sister in 1968, one the hottest years of the Civil Rights Movement, was always a man of the '50s, you know.

And he would've been a part of the silent, what Nixon was calling, the Silent Majority and, of course, I fell on....I feel on the other side. But it was the first time those sorts of strict divisions were...was deeply noticeable in society and totally tied to the Civil Rights Movement, race, an increasing role of Black voices in society.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah...you...Look, you've got race and to some degree you also have just relationships between men and women are changing too, right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Absolutely.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And...And to some extent, that '50s guy, that 'Silent Majority'... that—that... that solidifies. That hardens, right? And...and it continues to to characterize our politics. I mean Ni-Nixon sets the blueprint.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Although Nixon himself had gotten some of that from Goldwater—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: But he pushes it hard.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But Nixon...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: The Southern Strategy, Lee Atwater, and they take that to the bank as...as the way that they're going to hold onto power and—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And make...make the country work for them.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Now, part of the reason it works, when I thought about what it meant to be an American, part of it was there was an American culture that we share.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: The monoculture...what it did was it brought people together – except it excluded a big chunk of the country. A chunk of the country was invisible.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Period.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And then what happens is that part of the country that had been invisible, restricted to maids, porters, you know, villains, suddenly they say, “You know what...We're here. We want to be at the center of the story.”

And that's when all heck breaks loose. *[laughs]* That's when the 'Silent Majority' says, “Well, hold on a second. We..we were ff-eeling pretty good about this shared American story. We understood what it meant...”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: To define ourselves as Americans. You're saying you want to be a part of that... That's confusing to us.” Th-the reason it's important t-to recognize how important that cultural element was is it's also reflected in the news, right? If there's a FoxNews when Watergate happens, it's not at all clear that Richard Nixon ends up resigning—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Impeached—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Ah he'd...He would've been impeached but he might not have been...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right. Left office. Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Left office. And...and that I think is...it's a hard thing to figure out 'How do we reconstruct that sense of a common bond?' that you were talking about. That sense of... it's not blue or red, it's not black or white, it's America. How do you recreate that if you have a splintered culture? Th- the reason The Beatles, at some point somebody says, "Beatles are bigger than God or bigger than Jesus..."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Well, th- the reason is cause they were on the Ed Sullivan Show.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right? Elvis is on the Ed Sullivan Show. Ah, that was part of that common culture.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Absolutely. And I know there's been some debate over Elvis recently and ah... as far as cultural appropriation. But—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Go— Go ahead give me some— Give me the, the Elvis take right now. And I should say, by the way...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Big Elvis fan.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Okay! Well Elvis, you know, Elvis was part of my childhood, wasn't part of my teenagehood, was part of my childhood when I was 9. That's when he... I saw him on the Ed Sullivan Show.

[Archived Audio of Elvis speaking on The Ed Sullivan Show: (cheers) Ladies and gentlemen ah... Could I have your attention, please? Ah, I'd like to tell you we're going to do a sad song for you...]" continues underneath...]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You forget Elvis appeared as a novelty act initially. You could have mistaken him for... and a certain part of it was - he was a novelty act, you know? He challenged images of masculinity. Dyed his hair, wore makeup, moved, some said, "like a stripper, like a woman," right? And so, as a child he just capt – was like a cartoon figure. He captured your imagination.

[Archived Audio of Elvis performing on The Ed Sullivan Show: (cheers) "You ain't nothin' but a hound dog... Cryin' all the time... You ain't nothin' but a hound dog... Cryin' all the time... (cheers)]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And so, you know. Immediately went to the mirror and started to shake all around—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And, you know, grabbed the broom and started to strum the broom and "Mom, I want that guitar." And I had that guitar for two weeks and realized it was real and needed to be played. And that was that until The Beatles hit the shore.

And I learned that all of the music, particularly the earlier music of The Beatles and The Stones that I'd listened to, came from Black artists. Chuck Berry, ah Arthur Alexander, you know just too many to mention. You know. And so that... So I was sent backwards like that into the African roots— African American roots of Rock music. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Look I-eh... this...this whole issue of... I don't want to get waylaid, but... and we can pick it back up, this issue of cultural appropriation.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I have to say I'm not a believer in... ah narrowly defining who gets to do what.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I'm-I'm...I'm with you. I'm with you on that.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I think we steal from—

BOTH: Everybody, everywhere.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That's the nature of humanity. That is the nature of culture. That is how ideas migrate.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That's how music gets created. That's how food gets created. I— I don't want us to be thinking that there's this way of— is for that person—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And that way is for the other person.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I agree.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I think..i think what's always been relevant about cultural appropriation is if the Black person who writes the song and who performs it better can't also perform it and can't get the record deal. That's the problem. The problem is not... I've got no problem with white artists doing Black music cause I don't think there's such a thing as simply, exclusively Black music or white music—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Or Hispanic music. The...It's the economics and the power dynamics underneath it, which obviously Elvis was part of. He didn't create it. But the fact was that you had Black songs being written that the Black performers could not cash in on.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Now the only thing that could change my mind on... on this is Pat Boone doing Little Richard.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That's a problem.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It's brutal. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That's bad.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I got a few other questions. Can I go?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You..you are allowed!

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Because what the hell. Go ahead...What else...what else you got?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright. Um... Just a...there were just a few fun things, one was your American heroes.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Oh man! Yeah, we were going to do that.

[Acoustic guitar plays underneath]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Okay, want me to start?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, go ahead. What do you got?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Muhammad Ali.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Ali is... that's— that's— That's a solid.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: He's...he's..he's way way at the top.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]* If we are... working off sports initially, you got to go with Jackie Robinson.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Absolutely.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Not only does Jackie Robinson make all of Black America proud to see him compete and excel in the face of the most vicious treatment and threats, but he also changes the hearts and minds of white America through the process.

[Acoustic guitar plays underneath]

The...the number of white guys of a certain generation who will tell me how that changed them or their dads—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What it meant for an 8-year-old kid...white kid in the stands to be rooting for a Black guy.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

[Acoustic guitar plays]

[Archived audio of final public appearance of Jackie Robinson: "I'm extremely proud and pleased to be here this afternoon, but must admit I'm going to be tremendously more pleased and more proud when I look at that third base coaching line one day and see a Black face managing in baseball. Thank you very much." (applause)]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Music. You ready?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What do you got?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright. I got my man Bob Dylan.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Dude, y-you can't argue with Dylan.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No! *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And he keeps on going!

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: He— He— He's a little bit like Picasso in the sense that he will just come up with different phases...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Just great.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And he just keeps on cranking out innovation.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And he...he seems to do it for himself...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: As much as for anybody else. He can't help himself but just...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No, he's an artist. He's doing what he got to do. That's all.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: He's this font of creativity.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I got James Brown.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No hip hop without James Brown.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Musically, who do you got?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Ray Charles

.BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Without a doubt.

[Ray Charles performing 'America the Beautiful': "Oh, now wait a minute, I'm talking about America, sweet America..."]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: America is actually the national anthem.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I believe... I believe you're right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: No offense!

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No, no, no.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: To the other one.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* I got you.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Don't don't wanna...don't wanna, you know, to suddenly be getting a bunch of email...

[Ray Charles performing 'America the Beautiful': "Yes he did, in brotherhooood....From sea to shining sea...you know I wish I had some help..." fades out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Aretha Franklin.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Boom. Huge hero.

[Audio of Respect from Aretha Franklin plays under]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I... You know...If-if-if I think about American music that could not come from any place else... you know, when I listen to anything Aretha is singing, I-I- I feel America.

[Aretha Franklin performing Rock Steady: "Let's call this song exactly what it is (what it is, what it is, what it is) It's a funky and lowdown feeling (what it is) In the hips from left to right (what it is) What it is I might be doin' (what it is)....This funky dance all night...Ahhhhhhhhhhhh (Let me hear ya gotta feeling in the air)...fades out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Who were some of the other Americans that inspire you?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So not surprisingly what comes to mind first for me is..is Dr. King and Malcom X, ah sort of the yin and yang of the liberation movement ah in this country that helped shape me so much.

But sometimes those feel like larger than life figures, and..and oftentimes the..the folks that inspire me most were the less famous ones. Ah, not just John Lewis but Dianne Nash and Bob Moses and Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Joseph Lowery, C. T. Vivian, Fred Shuttlesworth. Eh you know, people who ah never achieved that same kind of fame, uh might not have had those same extraordinary gifts and yet because of their doggedness and courage... ah achieved extraordinary things. Um it...They're..they're heroes on a human scale.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: This was— I guess... the early '60s was ah...that I wanted to mention was, was Ruby Bridges

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know, I mean 6 years old. First Black child to desegregate the William Frantz Elementary School in... Louisiana. Goes to school. Federal marshals take her to school alone.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: As part of the White House collection, we were given the opportunity to hang the Norman Rockwell painting of Ruby...

[Piano chords play underneath]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Just outside the Oval Office. So, I'd see it all the time.

[News Footage of Ruby Bridges' first day of school: (sirens) "United States Marshals protect six-year-old Ruby Nell Bridges from the crowd..." fades out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And this painting depicts Ruby, this tiny little thing with pigtails and white socks and, and all you see is the huge bodies of these federal marshals and in the background ah you can see faintly...ah this graffiti scrawled with the N-word on the wall.

[Piano chords play underneath]

Ruby came by. She's about my age now. Um, we stood next to the painting and..

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Really?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: She kind of described the scene—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And how she had felt. And you know, she was a great representative of that kind of quiet heroism that happened so frequently during that era.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Um, the absolute grace, you know, you could still see it!

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's incredible. At 6 years old.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: At 6 years old.

[Piano chords play underneath and fade out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: As we broaden it, Lincoln still...is at the center of...of what I think about as...as as America.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Um, the, the log cabin stuff is not a myth. He is a broke-ass...

[laughs]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, growing up in a... very m-meager, limited circumstances, rough-hewn, n-not much formal schooling, teaches himself essentially by reading the King James Bible and Shakespeare to become one of the greatest American writers of all time.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Has an entire career before... eh anybody knows who he is. Riding circuit in Illinois. Teaches himself enough to pass the bar, become a lawyer, is, is riding around making jokes and telling stories and doing business and making money. And yet somehow there is this deep morality and melancholy and depth that emerges out of him.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And he... he finally then is, is... is at the crossroads of this central question about America, which is... you know, "Are...are are we going to be a truly free nation or not?"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And he grapples with that in the most profound way. And he never... wavers in his hopes but he never takes his eye off the truth, including the truth about himself, right? And...and the, th-the bitterness of war and and the uncertainties and the doubts, and what I'm.. What I'm always struck by is, is the fact that... that he did not break under that strain.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And it was an enormous strain. And... and my reverence for him does not mean that I don't recognize— Look, I... he didn't necessarily think Black people were equal. He just thought, "I shouldn't be ah taking bread out of that Black man's mouth who's doing all the work. I should do the work and be responsible for my own bread." So, I don't over romanticize Lincoln—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I guess part of what I think are...one of the hardest things, whether it's as an adult in our own individual lives or as a nation – figuring out it is possible for you to see the wrong in people without negating everything about them.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It's possible to to look at our Founding Fathers and say, "Yeah, they were slaveholders" and then also say, "But man, that Declaration of Independence is something."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Be-because in the same way I want to be able to... appropriate any kind of m-music I want or any tradition I want or ah any cuisine I want... If it's good, I want it.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I also want to be able to appropriate and claim for myself the example of the good things that other people have done even if they weren't perfect.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I like that.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I-I, I want to be able to read the..the... Lincoln's Second Inaugural and just revel in its majesty.

[Bruce Springsteen softly plays guitar and harmonica under]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *"Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk...and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."*

With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

[Bruce Springsteen plays guitar and harmonica under]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I'll bet that sticks.

[AD BREAK]

[Funky bass strumming in]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Here's what makes me optimistic and and and uh see if you agree with me on that because...cause I... since we're, we're both... you know, I'm the 'hope guy'—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You are.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You're... you're the—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I thought I was but you're better than me. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: No, no, no, no. Come on, man. You're the rising guy.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So...So we end on an upnote, right? Which...The question is "What...what makes us think that we can get through this out on the other side with an America that is whole and is true and is better than... then where we're at right now?" And, and we touched on this, what makes me optimistic is this generation coming up and you saw this even in this election... overwhelmingly... the 35 and under crowd...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: They believe in a unifying story of America. Overwhelmingly, when you look at that younger cohort...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Our kids, their peer group, across the country— they believe, almost as second nature, that people are equal.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: They do not believe in discriminating on the basis of someone's skin or their sexual orientation or their gender or their ethnicity or their faith. They do not believe in economic order that is so grossly unequal that you can have a handful of people worth more than millions of their fellow citizens. They do not believe in a society that ignores the desecration of the planet. They reject the idea that we have no responsibility at all to future generations—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: When it comes to issues like climate change. So... the good news is those are the folks coming up. The question is, “Can we hold this thing together long enough—

BOTH: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: To...“So that when they are old enough to be in charge—”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Waiting for the calvary! *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: We have screwed things up so bad that it’s too late?” And— And— And, and you know I have to believe that we can do that. Our job is to help create that bridge for that next generation.

[Electric guitar strumming plays under]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And and your songs and my speeches or books or this conversation... I think is just to... to let that next generation know, “You’re on the right track.”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You gotta keep the lantern lit, my friend.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yes! Exactly.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That’s the bottom line.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right. That— that— that America is true and real and available to you. I know it doesn’t feel like it right now,

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But it’s there.

[Electric guitar plays under]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* I-I agree. It's... it's corny but your children make you optimistic, you know. They- they force you to be optimistic. It's... it's their world that you're handing over now. I don't want to know a pessimistic parent. If that's who you are, you've done it wrong. *[laughs]* My children, I say with God's thanks, are solid citizens *[laughs]* who's character at barely the 30-year mark far outstrips my own. *[laughs]* So they... they humble me and ah... Patti and I we, live in their grace and are thankful.

[Electric guitar plays and fades out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Thank you—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I think we've done some good work today, brother.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: We did. Yeah, thank you, brother.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I learned something.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: So did I. *[laughs]* Woo!

[Bruce Springsteen plays Born in the U.S.A. on acoustic guitar]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[singing]* Born down in a dead man's town... And the first kick I took was when I hit the ground... You end up like a dog that's been beat too much... Til you spend half your life just to cover up... I was born in the U.S.A.... Born in the U.S.A.... I got in a little hometown jam... So they put a rifle in my hands... Sent me off to a foreign land... Go and kill the yellow man... I was born in the U.S.A.... Born in the U.S.A.... Come back home to the refinery... Hiring man says, "Son, if it was up to me"... I go down to see the V.A. man He said, "Son, don't you understand?"... I had a brother at Khe Sahn... Fighting off the Viet Cong... They're still there, he's all gone... He had a woman he loved in Saigon... I got a picture of em in her arms... Down in the shadow of penitentiary... Out by the gas fires of the refinery... I'm ten years burning down the road... I've got nowhere to run, nowhere to go... I was born in the U.S.A.... Born in the U.S.A.... I was born in the U.S.A.... I'm a cool rockin daddy in the U.S.A...

[Bruce Springsteen plays Born in the U.S.A. on acoustic guitar and fades out]

[Credits music fades in]

ANNA HOLMES: Renegades: Born in the U.S.A. is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio: Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes, Mukta Mohan, and Joe Paulsen are executive producers. Carolyn Lipka and Adam Sachs are consulting producers.

Janae Marable is our Editorial Assistant.

From Dustlight Productions: Misha Euceph and Arwen Nicks are executive producers.

Elizabeth Nakano, Mary Knauf and Tamika Adams are producers. Mary Knauf is also editor.

Andrew Eapen is our composer and mix engineer. Additional mixing from Valentino Rivera.

Rainier Harris is our apprentice.

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This is Renegades: Born in the USA.

[Credits music fades out]

– POST CREDITS STINGER –

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I think there's something in there that's worth listening to! Shoot...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Something! Somewhere!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Somewhere.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What do you think, guys? Something?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Somehow.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: We'll be able to edit out a bunch of what Bruce said but...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, all my stuff, clearly is gold.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Just leave my guitar playing.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

– End of Series –