

POTUS BARACK OBAMA VOICE OVER: Benjamin Franklin – who did pretty well for himself in his day – is quoted as saying that, “Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it...The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one.”

*[Acoustic guitar strumming fades in]*

Wise man, Mr. Franklin. Growing up in the '60s and early '70s, my family and Bruce's didn't have a lot. And didn't expect a lot when it came to money. But we had enough. American society wasn't so stratified then. Life was still a struggle for a lot of people, and the doors of opportunity were too often closed for women and people of color.

*[Acoustic guitar strumming plays under]*

But thanks to strong unions and government investment, upward mobility wasn't a myth. Hard work just didn't deliver financial stability and the promise of a better life for your kids, it also provided people with a sense of dignity and self worth. It's something that Bruce and I have both spent a lot of time thinking about: how the American economy changed, how America became more unequal, and how in the chase for the almighty dollar we lost some of the values of community, solidarity, and shared sacrifice that we are going to need to make us whole once again.

*[Acoustic guitar strumming fades out]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Part of your story about the draft is you suddenly realize there's a class basis to this entire thing. Where... How is it that the kids who are going to college don't have to go? And and and this is part of what separates World War II, that Greatest Generation, from the Vietnam Generation is suddenly that sense of, “We are gonna hook it up so that the privileged don't have to make sacrifices for bad decisions being made in Washington.”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I think there's a consciousness of that injustice that ends up disillusioning people as well.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: At that age, we just took that for granted.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That hey... We're not up there, we're down here. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And we're playing by the rules of down here.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know? And if we want... If we don't want to go, there are street prescriptions that you're going to have to follow to get out, and it's going to involve some crazy-ass shit, you know? And uh that was, you know, that nobody could afford the doctor's notes or the this... or the that...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Or or or getting back...getting into college. I barely got in the first time. I don't even remember feeling aggrieved by it at the time.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, You— You don't feel some class resentment.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No, no, you didn't...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You'd just be like, "Yeah, of course the rich kids are going to have a different deal than I."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah! Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Now... Do ya... But you don't think of that raising questions about the whole myth of the American Dream and upward mobility and anybody could make it?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I think, you know, you lost your faith in life, liberty and the pursuit of meaning for all. You lost your faith in that.

*[Acoustic guitar strumming fades in]*

And there was a little bit of, “Ooooh, it’s a little every man for himself. You know?”

The economic picture in Freehold, in my childhood, 1950s was a very, very different picture than the economic picture that runs across the country today. If you were middle class in Freehold or if you were the wealthiest people in Freehold, there was a street you lived on. I remember it was called Brinckerhoff Avenue. It was the widest, tree-lined street in town. And to— To find poverty, you had to really look for it.

*[Acoustic guitar strumming fades out]*

It was there, usually in the communities of color, but the difference of income equality felt so much less that it never... eh those ideas never entered your mind. I know my parents who lived hand to mouth. You know, I mean spent all the money they had this week until they had money next week and then spent all of that— I mean literally we all lived that way. We never thought of ourselves as struggling or... We were clothed, we had food, you know, and uh... we had a roof over our heads though our home was pretty funky but...

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: But... it was— It sat there in the midst of other homes that it wasn’t that dramatically different.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It wasn’t like you were ashamed of the house or you thought, “Man, we need to get like fancier curtains or—”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, ahh in our house I did have a little bit of that going.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Because for some reason, I lived in one of the oldest houses in town and for some reason ahhh...For some reason... Our house was... it got pretty dilapidated. You know? But even then... I didn't, I never thought of myself as a... as a poor kid. I lived in the middle of a middle-class neighborhood.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Part of what you're saying though is if you're growing up as a kid there and you're looking around, you think, "Alright, I'm pretty much on par with everybody else."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: With Bobby Duncan down the street or with you know with Richie Blackwell over here...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yes, and maybe his dad runs the bank uh whereas my dad, you know, works at the bank or works in the factory.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But... I don't feel as if I am somehow on the outside looking in.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No, you don't feel like you're a— You don't feel like you're victimized or a victim, you know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right, right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Ah you're aware of some class differences, of course. But it... it it seems much less dramatically than people are aware of it today.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But did— But did you have folks in the neighborhood, whether friends of yours or kids who said, "Man, you know, I'm getting out of here because I'm going to make a lot of money. You know, I'm gon get that new latest, you know, Chevy, and that's a sign...that's a marker of that I've made it." Just this notion that you needed to make a certain amount of money or have a certain amount of stuff because if not then you were... you were a failure or you were going backwards or you hadn't been ambitious enough. Was there any of that kind of sensibility?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: In my experience, it's a much more modern phenomenon. You know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I don't remember that being the huge, huge topics of conversation in high school. Er everybody wanted to make a living and uh—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: If you were going to do really well, you were going to go to college.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right. That—That that was a marker.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Big marker. Huge marker. Huge—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: If you went to college, that indicated something a little bit different.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You were special.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Mhmm.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know? But that changed dramatically in the United States in the '70s, certainly the '80s.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Gilded Age of the '80s.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So— So— Well, fast forward a little bit, and I'm in middle school and then high school in the '70s. And I see all this through the lens of my grandparents who I lived with most of the time. And they are Depression Era, World War II era folks.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right, as my grandparents were.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And we lived ah... in an apartment in Honolulu. Maybe 1,200 square feet? I remember as an adult going back to the apartment and just thinking, "Yeah you know, this is... really modest." But at the time I never, ever thought about, "Wow, I don't have much."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I didn't consider... the world foreclosed to me because I was not wealthy.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And my grandparents, they wanted me to go to college and and sacrificed for me to go to prep school that more or less assured, unless I got kicked out for drinking...

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That I'd get to college.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I'm— I'm saying all this, you know... I mean not, I mean—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I mean we sound like these old guys—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* It's terrible. It's so bad.—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Man, I used to walk to school barefoot," and blah blah blah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* It's so bad.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But but but I think you and I had the same sense that this shift took place. It's right around the '80s.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Early '80s. Right after Reagan gets elected, you know he breaks the air traffic controller's union. We've got stagflation.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right. And you have the beginning of the kind of media that "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" introduce, which brings the culture of materialism into everyone's home, 24-hours-a-day and suddenly they're being told, "You are not good enough unless you have this."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "This stuff."

*[Bright synth music fades in]*

This is right around the time I moved to New York. And New York was coming out of bankruptcy. But Wall Street is surging, right? And this is when the movie '*Wall Street*' comes out and 'Greed is Good.'

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Michael Douglass in the high collars.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm. And and and the—

BOTH: And the huge cell phones.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* The size of a backpack!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And—

***[Film Clip of 'Wall Street' Gordan Gecco: "Greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A. Thank you very much." (applause)]***

*[Bright synth music fades out]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Manhattan in '81, '82, '83 is this good perch to watch this shift in culture. It was sort of the epicenter of it. And as you said, it is suddenly in your face. Look, you you.. You know, it's a little bit like ah that ah David Mamet play, "Glengarry Glen Ross"—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Where you got a bunch of salesmen. The guy says ah, "First place, ah you get a Cadillac. Ah second place, steak knives. Third place, you're fired."

BOTH: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right.. thats...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: There's suddenly that sense of "Hey—" You know...

*[Bright synth music fades in and under]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: The... Merciless!—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "You you.. you are either going to win or you are going to lose in this capitalist game, and you don't want to be on the back side of that thing." What I saw then in my peers, because I did go to college, the shift in terms of young people thinking, "If I don't get to Wall Street or a white shoe law firm to punch my ticket, then I could start slipping down the scales."

*[Bright synth music fades out]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Let me give you a 'for instance'... my kids are going to school. Nice little co- school from across the street from my house. I go for first day of parents-

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: introduction.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Ah, I sit down. The first thing is the headmaster gets up and he says, "Now, I don't want you parents worrying that when your child has its first day at Bear Stearns..."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* This is the opening salvo.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: My kid is only 4! *[laughs]* You know? But that was... that was what was in the air at that point of time...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, you can— you can feel it. That anxiety and when I told people that I was going to work as a community organizer, the— the— the notion that...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, having graduated from this college that I would be taking an occupational path that nobody could really even understand what it was, made no sense. Now, you know, this is all happening again the backdrop of manufacturing moving offshore, unions getting busted, CEOs in the '50s and '60s are making maybe thirty times—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What the average guy or gal on the assembly line are making. Now, he's making 300 times.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So part of what happens is when suddenly in the 1980s... uh you have a politics, you know Ronald Reagan describing government being the problem. "Let's cut taxes, let's cut public services." It also means cutting public jobs, cutting union jobs, and that meant... you know, the combination of manufacturing going away and public sector jobs going away, decimates the the opportunity for Black men, in particular, but also Black women to get work. And just as they're finally about post-Civil Rights Movement you know cracking open the door to get—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Some of these jobs that previously had been banned to them, the rug gets pulled out from under. So there's a real shift in how capitalism operates and people's wages really are stagnating and the inequalities really are getting greater. So so this is just—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And the middle class—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: A change in mindset there is an actual reality—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Is now getting squashed.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yes.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: They're getting squeezed.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And so... the question is, or one of the questions is... were the '40s and '50s, and somewhat '60s, just a break in between two Gilded Ages?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And the answer is... a lot of its yes.

*[Bruce Springsteen picking guitar strings]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright, so I wrote this in 1982 or I guess '81. This is "Atlantic City."

*[Bruce Springsteen strums guitar]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[singing]* Well, they blew up the chicken man in Philly last night... And they blew up his house, too.. Down on the boardwalk, they're getting ready for a helluva fight... Gonna see what those racket boys can do... Now there's trouble busing in from out of state...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: In the early— In the '80s, there's a dread in the air.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

*[Bruce Springsteen performs Atlantic City underneath]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Really— Maybe you can trace it back to the end of the Vietnam war, and— and... But there's a dread in the air and in the idea of the American Dream that hadn't been present previously because ehh I... I wrote a very strange album in the early '80s called Nebraska—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, beautiful.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It was this very quiet record that dealt with all of these issues at that moment, you know? Now, I'm writing about these things when I'm not that conscious about them. You know? I mean I'm... I'm... I'm following what I'm feeling in the air.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

*[Bruce Springsteen blows harmonica]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[singing]* Well, I got a job and tried to put my money away... But I got debts that no honest man can pay... So I drew what I had from the Central Trust... And I bought us two tickets on that Coast City bus... Well, now, everything dies...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And that's just what I started to do. That and the combination of my father's life, my experiences in Freehold where I sort of saw what happens when there there's some union problems and suddenly the factory is moving down South and everybody is unemployed, sort of set— And and the cost that— that...

*[Bruce Springsteen performs Atlantic City underneath]*

And the cost that was paved by the families in town and my own, moved me in writing the direction that that that I became. And really, like I said, I didn't... I didn't write it with the idea of being socially conscious or or with any sort of awareness. I was just telling stories that I was feeling at the time. You know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[singing]* We're going out where the sand's turning to gold... So put on your stockings, baby, 'cause the night's getting cold... And everything dies, baby, that's a fact... But maybe everything that dies someday comes back...

*[Bruce Springsteen performs Atlantic City and fades out]*

**[AD BREAK]**

*[Warm piano chords play]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Alright, so here's— here's— here's, I guess, a question for both of us, which is... We start off not thinking a lot about money, but thinking, in your case, about music and your art, and I'm deliberately saying I'm not taking that path.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Now, that's a big choice to make coming out of the kinds of schools you came out of and given the opportunities—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That you would've had, how did you come to make that choice?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, part— part of it was I think because my mom was a little bit of a freethinker.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oh, yeah, Yeah, you're right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And she wandered around becoming an anthropologist—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Went into development work. You know, so I guess, you know, she was not all that practical to begin with and kind of a romantic. And I'm sure she got— put little bit of that into me. But part of it...you know, was... a recognition that the American Dream had never been fully available to Black folks. When I thought about what I should aspire to...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It wasn't... "Man, let me be Jay Rockefeller."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It was... "Look at John Lewis."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Look at Dr. King. Look...look at these folks who out there tryin' to make the world better and open up opportunities for people." So... so partly cause of my own need to figure out who I was as a...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Black American, that path looked to me like it was something necessary for me to do. My salvation was there.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: But that's... that's an interesting word, "salvation."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, well—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Because... it it turns what you're doing into a redemptive exercise.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right. And that's what it was for me.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I find myself in Chicago working with folks who are going through these struggles and asking these questions, and and in a very concrete way trying to figure out; how am I work and how am I going to get my kid work and how am I going to get my kid into college, uh or at least into a trade, what's happening to the value of my house, right? They're going through this stuff and I'm seeing it in concrete terms. And that does become redemptive for me because now my story merges with theirs—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And the larger American story. And if I can— If I can figure out to help that community that I've now become a part of, and as it turned out my wife, my future wife, grew up in...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Maybe I can redeem a piece of America, too, and make it my own. Right? That that becomes my mindset. And and so—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Those ahh ahh... are fundamentally my own motivations. And there's a deeper question of where that comes from cause it's a response to something.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: We're trying to figure out how do we feel whole... and make the world around us...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: feel whole, right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Well put.

*[Electric guitar strumming plays]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But the interesting thing is... Michelle, partly because she was very clear about who she was, loving parents, you know, family, community, she doesn't feel like she needs to get redeemed. She feels like, "I just need some money."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So... So when I met... When I meet her, she is driving a Saab—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And she's joined a wine club.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Okay.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know..She, from her perspective initially, she punched her ticket.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And... Ah, I remember the first time, you know, she invites me to a party with a bunch of her, you know, friends and... and they're all these young professionals. I am very much the misfit, you know, because at the time I... one of my responses to this era...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I guess I left this part out, was I went in the opposite direction.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I was... I had—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You refused—*[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I had like three shirts. I had one plate. And I lived in these scruffy looking ah...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Apartments and all of my furniture was, you know, scavenged from out of the street.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Milk crates... I knew that... that there laid temptation. Like if I went down the path of starting to want stuff...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That that was a hamster wheel you never got off of.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So, I'm with all these young professionals. They're looking all like ah you know, Richard Gere in *American Gigolo* kind of—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That was the look! *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And ah... And I walk in, and I got kind of a— I had one sports jacket that didn't quite fit me right—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That I'd gotten off some discount store. Ironically, I do think it was part of my power as a politician. People could sense that Michelle and I had lived through and understood what it was like to have a whole bunch of student loans to pay, what it was... what it was like to have some credit card debt and what it was like to have to say no to things. And it wasn't an act, right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I guess the question, you know I'm interested in how you dealt with it, was you started off chasing music, but...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Uh uh I dealt with it really... very simply—First...*[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But by the time you are 27, 28, 30, there— there comes a point—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I was 30.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What... what's the point where you suddenly, "Shit, I'm rich."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: 30...I would..32, 33, what happened was I signed so many bad deals that for ten years after I recorded... I was... pretty broke, you know? *[laughs]* But then, several things happened. One, the in... the live concert industry began to become very—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Lucrative.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Lucrative. And ah, we went out and play a lot of shows, and I had finally paid off most of my my debts from all my stupid mistakes, and suddenly I came home one day and and and I said, "I'm rich!" – in the course of one tour. I went from I had \$20,000 grand in

the bank when I started, I'd spent all my money in 1980. That's almost ten years after I signed my record deal. That's what I had to my name. And I came home at the end of that tour with a lot more than that and I said, "Oh my god. As far as I'm concerned, I'm rich." Second thought, "I hate myself!"

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Because now I'm in a trap! You know before that..Ya know I'm— Now I'm— Now I'm there you know, and... and so my first luxury was the luxury of ignoring my money.

*[Electric guitar picking fades in]*

But I remember I bought one new thing. I bought a \$10,000 dollar Chevrolet Camaro. Every time I got in it, I felt like I was driving in solid gold Rolls Royce and I was embarrassed.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You didn't feel good about it.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You felt self conscious about it.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Very self conscious.

*[Electric guitar picking plays underneath]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Well, the other thing is it runs contrary to your brand.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: In terms of who you are thinking about both your audience and your subject.

*[Guitar picking fades out]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah! And who I who who who I feel like, you know? So, I don't want to... I don't want to settle for that. I want that wholeness that you were talking about.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Mhmm.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's what I'm after.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Redemption.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's correct. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Salvation.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: So I was very, and I consider myself healthily, skeptical when I started to change station.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know? And—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Even as this whole atmosphere because it just accelerates, right? I mean all through the '80s into the '90s—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, it is not only... are you making more and more money, but the temptations of how to spend your money become more and more lavish. And your peers, you know, folks in your musical stratosphere uh are not quite as restrained in terms of how that money is being spent.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Ahhh everybody... Everybody has a different attitude about it. And I don't you know really judge anybody, all I know is what—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I'm just wondering, I know I know— I'm not saying you judge them—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What I am saying though is during this period how are you... how are you thinking to yourself...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: How am I processing it all?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Why am I not buying a huge mansion?" Or—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I am thinking that, and I don't have the answer, which is a big problem because I got to a place where I said, "I want a home."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Mhmm.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: "A home is a part of that wholeness."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: "I can't find one. I can't get one. I can't buy one." Right? And I realized, "Oh, I get it. I get it. I get it. I can't buy one because I don't deserve one...you know? Ahh a car. Why do I feel bad in it? "I don't deserve it." Why don't I have a partner and a home life and children and satisfactions of my own? "Well, I don't deserve any of those." When I finally made some money, it forced me to interrogate myself about who I was...

Ahhhh, I was very conscious about remaining at least... I remained physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually a part of the community that I came from. That was really important to me. I stayed in New Jersey. I hung out in the same bars. I played in the same bars on the weekends when I could, you know. I had the same group of friends, and I probably took it to an extreme. But looking back on it, I would rather have taken those things to an extreme than gone the other

way. I'm I'm interested in the story I want to tell, and I know that that story and my very self is inexplicably connected to the community, the people and the place that I came from.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And if I sever that connection...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I've lost something, and I've lost something essential. So I'm skeptical moving forward, very, very carefully and tiny steps by tiny steps until, I I remember, I bought a house in in in the most exclusive community in this little part of New Jersey.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And I felt terrible about it.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right? I go. First night I'm in that house I'm like, "What the fuck!? Have I lost my fucking mind?!"

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: "Have I gone crazy!? What am I doing in this place!?" You know? But what I realized was, looking back on it now, if you drove by the house, it's a nice lawn and it's a nice sort of upscale, middle-class house. We raised our kids in it for 30 years.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right. But it's not the Hearst Castle.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No! It's not. And— And— And so.... And I realized that part of it, it was a big house, but what did I hope to do? Fill it. That was why I got it. I got it to fill.

*[Soft keys fade in]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: To fill that wholeness that I was searching for.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know?

*[Soft keys play underneath]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, I know it's true for you Bruce and certainly true for me that you know, we're always questioning in this culture... "Ah am I losing touch? Am I falling prey to this huge consumer engine that's being.. You know, fed to us every single day?" "Ahhh am I forgetting what's important?" And and that requires you sometimes to step back and reflect and and and maybe um, get that perspective.

*[Soft keys fade out]*

You know, last year, my Christmas present to Michelle... we were in Hawaii and I arranged for us to have a dinner on the top deck of this hotel overlooking Waikiki. Left the girls behind. Some friends arranged this Hawaiian trio.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Played some songs.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: OK. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know? Had the the ... had the torch light.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It sounds good! *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It was a good set up. Watched the sun go down. I was quite pleased with myself.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oh, well done.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That best part of the evening, right at the beginning, we started tracking all the places that we had stayed over the 20 years that we had been coming to Hawaii.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Ohhh.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Starting with the first when we slept on my grandparent's couch.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Then the second we got actually a motel room, it was like five miles from the beach. *[laughs]* And then we moved to a legit hotel that had a pool in the general vicinity of the beach. Then we went to like a Sheraton, you know, and and and this is over the course of 10 years—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You're gettin' there! *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And then there was a place, you know, with the girls and there was a separate room that's sort of like ah a junior suite I think is what they called it.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So that you can close the door, and the kids outside so that it's possible a little bit of privacy—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Very nice. Yes, very nice! *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: When you go on vacation with your spouse.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You can track, sort of, our economic status, right, over the years—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Okay.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: ...through our vacations. You can almost see every place that we had stayed, but the pleasure of it was reminding ourselves that we were just as happy in each of those places.

*[Acoustic guitar strumming plays under]*

The constant was our time together, and the setting really had not made any difference.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Initially, there had been a little burst of excitement, “Oh you see they got the little shampoos in the..in the bathroom—”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, then you go to a place that actually has like a robe, you know like, “Man, try on the robe.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* A robe...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: This is something.” Right? After that initial moment, it was still the sunset that mattered and you holding hands. It was still the sound of the girls laughing as they were running after each other in the sand. It was the free stuff that had nothing to do with the places you were staying at.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Those are the elements of joy.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That was what made you whole.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right? And— And I think communicating that as part of our politics, our stories, our songs reminding ourselves of that is how you then get to the point where you can build a coalition to actually change the policies.

*[Acoustic guitar strumming plays and fades out]*

**[AD BREAK]**

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: This is a... ready? Here we go. This is “Used Cars”. “Used Cars” was a song, it probably captured the feeling of my family life, my childhood and my neighborhood as good as anything that I’ve ever wrote. The thread bareness of a lot of our lives. Ah, because all I remember was when... when my dad drove in that driveway with that new used car *[laughs]* it may have been a freaking Lincoln Continental brand new off the show floor was how excited we got.

*[Bruce Springsteen plucks guitar strings]*

And looking back at it now, you know... I guess there’s a happiness and a sadness to it, but anyway this is “Used Cars.”

*[Bruce Springsteen plucks guitar strings]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[singing]* My little sister's in the front seat with an ice cream cone... Ma's in the backseat sittin' all alone... As my Pa steers her slow out of the lot for a test drive down Michigan Avenue... Now my Ma she fingers her wedding band... And watches the salesman stare at my old man's hands... He's tellin' us all 'bout the break he'd give us if he could but he just can't... Well if I could I swear I know just what I'd do...

*Now mister the day the lottery I win I ain't ever gonna ride in no used car again... Now the neighbors come from near and far... As we pull up in our brand new used car... I wish he'd just hit the gas and let out a cry and tell 'em all they can kiss our asses goodbye... Mister the day the lottery I win I ain't ever gonna ride in no used car again...*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: There's the very real economic inequalities that have arisen that have to be fixed.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

*[Bruce Springsteen performs Used Cars underneath]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: If we don't fix those, the country is going to fall apart.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Well well... Because when folks lose that sense of place and status, when suddenly steady work alone isn't enough for you to support your family or to be respected when you have con...chronic insecurity. Tho—There's a bunch of policy stuff that has to be fixed.

*[Bruce Springsteen performing Used Cars fades out]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But the policy fixes are going to come in part because the country starts telling a different story about what's important. That shift that we were talking about in the '80s, that "Greed is Good", that never really went away.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It accelerated. And... the argument between conservatives and liberals, left and right, a lot of times the argument had to do with how much redistribution, you know, how much taxes there should be, ah but never really got to some of the core issues about... why is it that we're measuring ourselves just with how much stuff we got?

And is there a way for us to think about that differently because if... if we're thinking about it differently, then now it becomes easier for those who have a lot to maybe give some up *[laughs]* in order to make sure that those who have a little have enough—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right. You know, I think that... there's been this rush of information, of a certain life-distort-life distorting information...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright? And... it's not going away. Ever. So... it's going to call on people for both, as I said, have interpretive abilities that possibly generations before us did not need to have. But they're going to have to make decisions about what's valuable. What's truly deeply valuable.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And and and I guess that's...that's the point I'm...I'm trying to get at is... there..there's a story, a collective story we tell about what do we value.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: There it is.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And... A part of what I tried to do in my political career, part of what I'm trying to do post-politics is... tell a story that is counter to the story that has been told that says, "The American Dream is defined by you ending up on top of that pyramid that's gettin' steeper and steeper, and ah the more people below you, the better off you are" because and and this sounds—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And that's become the prime story where I don't believe that was the prime story 40 or 50 years ago.

*[Electric guitar strumming fades in]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Exactly. Our expectations and taste in terms of what it means to have made it have shifted, um and then obviously it's in our politics, right? Ah which is how you get somebody like a Donald Trump elected because he represents in the minds of a lot of folks...

BOTH: Success.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN:I guess so.. Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right? Everything is gold plated. You got.. You got the big plane with the big name. And you got the buildings with your name on it, and...and and you know, you're going around firing people and that must be...

And particularly for men, that is a sign that you have succeeded, right?

*[Electric guitar strumming plays on]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And one of the things that I never understood is why people would want an individual success and the exclusion of other people. You know there's entire communities that are premised on living behind a gate, cut-off from the larger community. Isolated. Maybe resented by neighbors. And and that just always felt lonely to me. Felt empty. You know, eh it's like ah Citizen Kane sort of rattling around in his big mansion, you know muttering about Rosebud. But that is the attitude of so many in power. That's that's the model of success. That is the end point of the culture we so often promote.

*[Electric guitar strumming plays on]*

The good news is it's actually a place where I think you can see a convergence, a potential convergence among the religious impulses that are in the church and, you know, are oftentimes thought of as conservative...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And the... the the spiritual impulses of a lot of young progressives who say, "Look, you know, I want to preserve the planet. I believe in sustainability. I believe in equality." Ah, you know there is a spiritual dimension to our politics and how we define success and our connection to each other and status in our society that is... is... is out there waiting to be tapped and...and and and that's, I think, a big part of the work we got to do to to make America feel whole again.

*[Electric guitar strumming fade out]*

*[Credits music comes 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.

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This is Renegades: Born in the USA.

*[Credits music fades out]*

**– End of Episode –**