

POTUS BARACK OBAMA VOICE OVER: I've often said that what makes America exceptional isn't our wealth or size or skyscrapers or military power...

It's the fact that America's the only nation in human history that's made up of people of every race, religion and culture from every corner of the globe. And that we've had faith in our democracy, our common creed to blend this hodge podge of humanity into one people.

Nothing symbolizes this truth more than our music. The way that generations of Americans stitch together every imaginable tradition – from African rhythms to Irish ballads – to create something entirely new. Whether it was Jazz or the Blues, Country or Rock n' Roll.

At the same time, our music's often been a mirror into the fault lines of American society. And what gets played and who gets paid and the songs of those who have been relegated to the margins of society and in the songs of those insisting that their truths finally be heard. It's got a power to reshape social attitudes and make connections between people when mere words – even in good speeches – aren't enough.

*[keyboard plays]*

***[Bruce Springsteen plays Eric Clapton's Further on Up the Road on guitar]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - *[sings] Further on up the road... Dern nah dern nah... Someone's gonna hurt you like... [sings] Wait, we gotta get it on the right key. I got... I gotta get to your key.*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Let me hear where you're at.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - *[sings] Further on up the road... Further on up the road... [sings] Fur...*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – *[sings] Further on up the road...*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - *[sings] Further on up the road... You been laughing, pretty baby. Someday you're gonna be cryin'. [sings]*

***[Bruce Springsteen continues to play Eric Clapton's Further on Up the Road on guitar]***

*[sings] Further on up the road... [laughs] You... [laughs] I forget that last line. Uhh. Sounds alright though.*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – So, music.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - You ready?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA -Yeah, I'm... I'm ready man.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - So you're in Hawaii, you're a teenager... During what? The '70s?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – '70s.The '70s.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – You're a teenager in the '70s. What is the music that is catching your ear as you are becoming interested in music... Which is I would guess is around 14 er?

*[Bruce strums guitar]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - First album I bought with my own money – Talking Book, Stevie Wonder. I would sit with a banged up little old turntable, kind of plasticky looking turntable.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – Sure, yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I got myself some earphones so my grandparents would not complain.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – Yep.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And I would sing along to every Stevie Wonder song for... hours.

***[Stevie Wonder - You Are the Sunshine of My Life fades in: "I feel like this is the beginning...though I've loved you for a million years... ]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - You know, Hawaii was a place where you had Top 40. Casey Kasem was on.

***[radio dial turning + American Top 40 Archive clip -"Every week at this time on American Top 40. (Lou Reed - Walk on the Wild Side plays) My name is Casey Kasem and the countdown continues and doesn't stop until we get to the number one...]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Now I'm... I'm 10, 11 years old. You're listening to the radio and there's songs that I end up just getting really attached to...

***[radio dial turning + Marvin Gaye - Let's Get it On plays: "Let's get it on... Let's love baby...]***

You know you got a 10-year-old saying, *[sings] Let's get it on... [sings]*

***[Marvin Gaye - Let's Get it On plays: "Let's get it on...]***

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - *[sings] Ahhhh baby!*

**[Marvin Gaye - Let's Get it On plays: "sugah..."]**

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [sings] We're all sen-

BOTH - [sings]...sensitive people...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - [sings]...with so much to give. And you think... Yeah, and you know, your grandmother would hear. "What, what, what are you singing?"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

**[radio dial turning + Billy Paul - Me and Mrs. Jones plays: "Meeeeeee annnnd..."]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - There's another song by Billy Paul-

**[Billy Paul - Me and Mrs. Jones plays: Mrs.... Mr. Jones...]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Me and Mrs. Jones.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Huumuuuge. [skats] I don't know how it went.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - [sings] Mrs. Jones Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - [sings] We both know that is wrong, but it's much too strong. [sings]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - [/laughs] I mean, you know you're like 11, 11 years old.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

**[Joni Mitchell - Help Me fades in]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Joni Mitchell came out with Court and Spark.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Great record.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I was like 11, 12 years old.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Beautiful record, yeah.

**[Joni Mitchell - Help Me plays: "Help me, I think I'm falling... ]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - [sings] Help me, I... [sings]

BOTH - [sings] think I'm falling in love with you. [sings]

**[Joni Mitchell - Help Me plays: "...Are you gonna let me go there by myself? That's such a lonely thing to dooooo...]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA -Yeah. That's...that's pretty... I don't know what that feeling is, but it seems fascinating.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

***[Joni Mitchell - Help Me plays: "Both of us flirtin' around...Flirtin' and flirtin', hurtin' too. We love our lovin' (lovin')...fades out ]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - So the interesting thing was... that you had Top 40–

***[Earth, Wind and Fire - Fantasy fades in]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And you had these crossover artists like Earth, Wind and Fire...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Uh, but then there was other kinds of music that was much more – I wont say segregated but identifiable as Black or white.

***[Earth, Wind and Fire - Fantasy fades out]***

***[Ohio Players - Love Rollercoaster fades in: "Rollercoaster of love... Say what? Rollercoaster... (oohh oohh oohh)]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Like I loved Ohio Players or Parliament. That was not something you might find in some of my white friend's music library. Ah, and some of them might be into heavy metal and if I got into a car with them...

***[Ozzy Osbourne - Crazy Train fades in]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And they turned that thing all the way up– you know that could be a little painful for me.

***[Ozzy Osbourne - Crazy Train plays]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - So even though Top 40... it was integrated at least in Hawaii. Underneath, you can still see these distinctions uh between whose music was whose ...

***[Parliament - Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof Off the Sucker) fades in: "Oww, we want the funk, give up the funk! Oww, we need the funk, we gotta have the funk! La la la la Doo doo doo doo doo doo oww...]***

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - When you decided you were gonna to be a rock n' roll star...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - at the age of 15...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - or around there...

*[Bruce strums guitar]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - It made sense if you're going to be rock n' roll story going to play the guitar.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Well, ah guitars were cheap. So that helped. My first guitar was \$18.00.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Cheaper than piano.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Much cheaper than a piano, much cheaper than the drums.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – Is that right? Drum set was more expensive.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Yeah. So, I could actually work a job, which I did. I painted house, tarred roof, did some lawn work, saved up \$18.00, bought a cheap guitar at the Western Auto Store in Freehold, NJ.

So, my cousin Frankie had...was starting to play the guitar a little bit and he taught me a few chords and sent me home with a folk music book that had all the chords in it. So, for about a month or so I was strumming my way through folk music classics. You know, Greensleeves, and If I Had a Hammer. And shortly after that, somebody taught me to play Honky Tonk.

*[Bruce strums Honky Tonk on guitar]*

Honky Tonk, that's right.

*[Bruce strums Honky Tonk on guitar + Potus slaps hand drums on his lap]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Then I started to learn some Beatles... I learned Twist and Shout.

*[Bruce plays Twist and Shout on guitar]*

You know... *[sings] Shake it on baby! [sings]*

And you know, I just started getting up in my room and closing the door...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – Practicing...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - And just screaming my head off and strumming the guitar and standing in front of the mirror.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Did you folks say anything? It's like what, what? What are you yelling about?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Keep it down! You know the usual stuff.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Keep it down... *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Keep it down, man! Keep it down! And my mother was supportive. My father was kinda, like yeah, "What what's...what's going on now? I don't know what's this kid up to now I don't understand it," you know?

*[Bruce plucks guitar strings]*

And then I grew my hair and he really didn't understand that and and... but it was the course thousands if not millions of other kids were taking that exact same course at that exact same moment. So, the miracle is there's a million kids who pick up a guitar.

*[guitar strings plucking]*

You know, a certain amount of those kids learn how to strum a few chords. Certain amount of those kids learn how to play, play a few songs.

*[guitar chords playing]*

Few of those get into a little local band.

***[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '72 - Growin' Up: "This first song, that I would like to do" ...]***

Few of those getting a little local band that makes a demo.

***[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '72 - Growin' Up: "Song about growing up" ...]***

And then a few of those get into a little local band that makes a record.

***[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '72 - Growin' Up: "Well I stood stone-like at midnight" ...]***

And then a few of those get a local band that makes a record, and it sells a few copies.

***[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '92 - Growin' Up: "I combed my hair 'til it was just right. And commanded the night brigade" ...]***

And then even fewer of those make a record, get into a band where they have a short career. And fewer of those get in, and they have a band where, like they make somewhat of a regular living.

***[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '06 - Growin' Up: "Ooh, ooh, growin' up" ...]***

And then one night I was at the Rock N' Roll Hall of Fame and I was standing between George Harrison and Mick Jagger singing something. And I said, "OK? One of these *[laughs]* is standing tonight between George Harrison and Mick Jagger." *[laughs]*

BOTH - *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - It was both simple and complicated for me. One, it was the only thing I deeply desired to do. Two, it was an essential element in building an identity as a man, as an American, as a human being.

When I hold a guitar, I don't feel like I'm holding anything. It's just a part of my body, you know. It's just another appendage. That's how it feels, you know. When I strap it on it, it's like that feels like my natural state. And I also built a philosophy about performing. I'm gonna give my best to bring out the best in you.

And I'm going to send you home with a sense of community and a set of values that may sustain you past the concert. You know, I always make a joke. "I want to come out on stage and change your life." Except it's not really a joke. That is my purpose at night.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – It's your ministry.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – Yeah.

**[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '00 - Light of Day: "With the power! And the glory! With the power! And the glory! With the promise! With the majesty! With the mystery! With the ministry of Rock n' Roll!"...]**

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – I took my job seriously. I believe that I am involved in a ridiculous but noble profession–

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – at the same time. And...and that I know music had an impact on me, that changed my life, changed who I thought I was, changed who I became. I know that this is possible. I have an opportunity. God has given me the opportunity to come out at night and to have that kind of impact on some individual crowd member.

*[keyboard fades in]*

If I can do that, that's worth being on the planet for. You know, that's... that's something worth living for.

*[keyboard plays]*

**[AD BREAK]**

*[funky bass notes play]*

**[Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers - Why Do Fools Fall in Love? plays: "Oh wah, oh wah, oh wah, oh wah, oh wah, oh wah... Why do fools fall in love? Why do birds sing so gay?...]**

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I was a creature Top 40. First music I heard was my mother playing Doo-wop and Rhythm and Blues on the radio in the morning as I was eight or nine years old as a child.

**[The Monotones - The Book of Love plays: "I wonder, wonder who, who-oo-ooh. Who wrote the Book Of Love? Tell me, Tell me, Tell me" ...]**

So, and then you had to have, you know, you had the other hits of the day, which were Beatle hits and Rolling Stone hits and ah eh...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And where does... where does Dylan fit in in terms of how that influences you?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Eh Bob was funny though...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - 'Cause 'cause he's pulling in...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - He, he had hits.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - But he had hits but he's pulling from some different.. He's he's he's pulling from Woody Guthrie and he's pulling from...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Yeah, I mean I didn't. I didn't know or learn anything about that till I was 30. I never listened to Bob's early acoustic records.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - That's interesting.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I only listen to Hwy 61, Subterranean Homesick Blues. I played his electric material, and it wasn't until I got little in my late 20s and 30s that I went back and heard his acoustic music. And then went back and heard Woody Guthrie. So, I came to those forms late.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Fairly late.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Then came the country music in my late 20s and 30s. Looking for other solutions than Rock music provided. Rock music was a great music of there was some class anger in it and that agreed with me. Ah, then there was a beautiful romanticism and melodies, a lot of energy.

But as you were getting older, it didn't address your adult problems—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - So I went to Country music. Country music was great, incredible singing and playing, but it was rather fatalistic.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Hmm.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - You know? So, I said well, "Who's trying to play? Who..Where is a music of hope? And when you went to Woody Guthrie— Woody was doing and and Bob, you know... They were spelling out the hard world that you lived in, but they were also providing you somehow with some transcendence and some... and some actionable solution to societal and your own personal problems. You could be active.

That drew my attention because I was now a relatively big rock star. I was interested in maintaining ties to my community. I was interested in giving voice to both myself and folks in my community. I was also interested in being active to a certain degree, taking some of what I was earning, putting it back into the community. And that was it was 1980 and...

**[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '85 - This Land is Your Land fades in]**

I started to play This Land Is Your Land. That and through Born in the USA, was when what we were going to do, both as a band, a bit as a social unit, and as an entertainment unit, and how we were going to blend all these things together.

**[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '85 - This Land is Your Land plays:  
“Once I rode that ribbon highway... I saw above me the endless sky...I saw below me, a golden valley... Well this land was made for you and meeeee... I roamed and I rambled”...]**

And that was where I found my full satisfaction and that's how I put all the pieces together.

**[Archival Concert Footage Bruce Springsteen in '85 - This Land is Your Land plays:  
“Through the sparkling sands of the diamond desert...And all around me, a voice was soundin'. It cried, “This land was made for you and meeeee...Well a sun came shinin'...”]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - So, I like Bruce how you're talking about blending it all together. Putting the pieces together. Cause you know that's been the essence of all great American musicians. And and you know, that's one of the reasons why Michelle and I thought it was so important ah during the course of our presidency – At a moment when the country felt so divided, ah to really put an emphasis on these music series that we did.

**[Archival Concert Footage Queen Latifah - I Can't Stand the Rain at the White House 2013: “When we were together ...Everything was so grand.”]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - You know, we would have a Motown night. But also a Country music night.

**[Archival Concert Footage Laura Alaina - Coal Miner’s Daughter at the White House 2014: “Well I was born a coal miner’s daughter.”]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Or a Fiesta Latina. Or a Broadway tunes night. Or a Gospel night.

**[Archival Concert Footage Cyndi Lauper - Try a Little Tenderness at the White House 2013: “Young girls they do get weary... Wearin the same ol’ shaggy dress.”]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Part of what we would do is draw musicians from various traditions to be a part of something that wasn't traditionally part of something they played. You know, you'd have the Country music singer ah in a Gospel concert. Or we'd have an R&B singer ah singing Rock to... to emphasize and underscore how all these traditions in fact do blend together once you start ah breaking down some of these silos and categories that we carry around in our heads.

**[Archival Concert Footage Cyndi Lauper - Try a Little Tenderness at the White House 2013: “While she’s there waitin’... You got to try a little tenderness...That’s all you got to do. It’s not sentimental... No no no...”]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Now Bruce, as you and Patti will testify some of the best music to happen in the White House happened... off camera during some of our parties. That was some fun.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Well, we're at a few and all I can say is they were historical and...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - And they're not gonna see another one like that at the White House for a loooong time.

BOTH - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - They will not... We had... we, we had some, some amazing moments. All right, let's, let's set the stage here.

I am in my last month of my presidency. There was something I specifically wanted to do for the staff that had been with me for the entire journey. And had gone through ah a really remarkable but grueling process. So, we get this idea.

Maybe we can just do something small and quiet and private - 100 people. And maybe Bruce will be willing to come in and just do a quick concert.

And ah you show up and we got like... about ten guitars sitting over there on a rack-

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And you got the piano. And Patti says to me, "Yeah, I don't really know what he's going to do..." 'Cause you hadn't really done-

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I'd never done it before.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - ...the whole thing for her either.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I'd never done it for anybody. I only did it for a few hours in this room-

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Yes, so...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Before I came down.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - So, so your wife shows up with you and she says-

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - She has no clue. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - "I don't really know what it is, but there's something going on here."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - You know, I got the invitation and I said, "Well, I am not - not gonna put the band together and make a big noise." And you know so, I said, "Well, I'll go down and play some acoustic songs." So I said, "Well, what could I do to make that a little different? Well, I'll read from my book and I'll play a few songs."

So, I came in here and I started to read from the book and play a few songs. And I realized reading from the book...was a little stilted because ah the way you write for your book is not the way you speak.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Yeah. The written word is different.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - And so I started to paraphrase all writings in the book as if I was just telling a story, and I literally spent a couple hours for two days in this studio and we came down.

**[Springsteen on Broadway - Thunder Road fades in]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And you essentially ended up doing – What would you say, maybe?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - 90 minutes of the show–

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Maybe 90 minutes of...

BOTH - What became the Broadway show.

**[Springsteen on Broadway - Thunder Road plays: “Chance to make it good somehow...And what else can we do now? Expect roll down the window and let the wind blow back your hair...Well the night’s busting open...These two lanes will take us anywhere...We got one last change to make it real...To trade in these wings on some wheels... ]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I get up on stage afterwards and I say, “Dude, you, you gotta... you gotta do that for some other people.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I–

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I..I can't be this greedy where we're the only ones who get to hear this?”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I have to give you credit because the two of you were sitting right in front of me and I was thrilled to be there, honored to be playing for you.

And you got up afterwards and you came... you were the first one on stage and you just kind of came over and leaned down into my ear and you said, “Hey look...I..I know you did this just for us, but this ought to be a show somewhere or something, you know.”

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - You got, you gotta share this.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]* And then one thing led to another - We said, “Well, I need a really small space because I need complete quiet for this to work out as we had in the East Room. And we went out and we found a little...that tiny theater 900 seats on Broadway and ah...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - You end up having to work a real job.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I ended up being there for five nights a week at 2 hours and 20 minutes a show– 2 hours and 20 minutes a night. One of the best times in my life.

**[Springsteen on Broadway - Dancing in the Dark plays: “This gun’s for hire. Even if we’re just dancing in the dark...Sittin’ around getting older...ah there’s a joke here somewhere... (laughs) when I figure it out, I’ll let you know... All I know is that it’s on me... Shake this world off my shoulders...Come on baby have a laugh on me”... ]**

*[keyboard plays]*

**[AD BREAK]**

*[funky bass notes play]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Are you a shower singer?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Absolutely.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I sing in the shower. I sing outside of the shower.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I am unembarrassed about singing. Umm, my daughters and my wife sometimes roll their eyes.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I have been known to have been scolded by my staff-

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - For doing some air guitar stuff on Air Force One.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - I'm sorry, I'm sorry I missed that. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And they're worried that the journalists are seeing...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Joe here is probably somebody who's kind of warned me off that.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - *[laughs]* Well, the, the reason I ask is 'cause, you did a pretty damn nice version of Al Green - Let's Stay Together. Am I right there? Is that the one?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – Listen here's the story– We're in the Apollo, the legendary Apollo Theater in Harlem.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - It's a fundraiser for me.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - At which Al Green has performed. But - as is always true - I don't get to see the act 'cause they've got me somewhere else. I'm getting there late after the performance.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – So, I'm sitting backstage with Valerie Jarrett. And I'm like, "Man. I missed Al Green!" And so, I start singing backstage.

[sings] I....So in love with you. [sings] A couple of the sound guys. Smart alecs say, "Mr. President. Why don't you sing that on stage?"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Yeah, baby. [/laughs]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And I said, "Well, you don't think I will do that?"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And Valerie says, "Uh, don't do that."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - 'Cause she, she's the surrogate for Michelle in these circumstances.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – I got you.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And I probably wouldn't have done it were it not for the fact that I think I was on my 5th event that day

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Mhmmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And I was a little loopy.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – Good for you.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - I was a little tired.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs] Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA – And Al Green was still there. He was sitting up in the lower seats.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – Oh man.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - So I got up and I said, "Ah, Al was here. I'm sorry I missed him."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - [/laughs]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And then I looked to see if the stage guys were watching. And I burst out into song.

**[Archival News Footage President Obama - Let's Stay Together: "I... soooo in love with you...(crowd cheers)... You ah...Those guys didn't think I would do it!"]**

[quiet synth plays]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - What I really want to ask you about, of course, is Amazing Grace because that really that shook the whole country. And how on that day, did you come to decide to ah to sing that song?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - That's an interesting story I ah... First of all, that day was a magical day that began in grief. Or, or we had anticipated would begin in grief, but it turns out that's

also the day in which the Supreme Court hands down the ruling saying that it is unconstitutional to not let lesbians and gays and LGBTQ-

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Partners get married, so that's a joyful moment. But we are traveling down to Charleston after this young... this young white man who's been filled with hatred-

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Guns down a Bible study class that had welcomed him in.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – Jesus.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And uh, I actually had met the Pastor, Reverend Pinckney, in previous visits to South Carolina. He had two little girls that were a little younger than Malia and Sasha.

And uh, and this was coming on the heels of just, it seemed like every three months some mass shooting.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And I would go after each of these mass shootings - And sometimes Michelle would go with me - although it was at a certain point became difficult for Michelle to just do this. And I would spend a couple hours with a family.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Hmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Who just had their child or their father or their brother, or their son gunned down senselessly for no reason. And I had...I had thought that after Newtown when 20, 6-year-olds had been gunned down in this fashion by a deranged young man - who had basically an arsenal in his house.

I thought all right, well, Congress is gonna do something about this. And the most angry I think and disappointed... the closest I ever came to just losing hope about this country was probably after efforts for modest gun safety laws were defeated - weren't even really, never even really got called up in the Senate. After 20 children had been slaughtered like that.

The only time I saw a Secret Service person cry while I was speaking– was at Newtown. So, so it happens again, and I say as soon as it happens - In addition to making a statement from the White House - I say, "You know, I'll want to go to the funeral, but I don't want to speak. I don't have anything left to say. I feel like I've used up all my words."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Mmhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Nothing I've been able to say. Whether making practical, rational arguments, emotional arguments, I've shown anger in speaking about this. I've shown sorrow and nothing seems to have any impact. I'm out of words.

And of course, they ask that I speak, and I concluded alright, it was part of the job... I don't have the luxury, but I was stuck. I had nothing to say.

It just so happened at the time I was corresponding with a friend, Marilynne Robinson, who's a wonderful author, wrote *Gilead* and...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Uh huh.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And uh - one theme that she writes about is grace. And we have been writing about grace and just talking about the notion of...The notion of grace as a recognition that we are fundamentally flawed and weak and confused. So, we don't deserve grace, but we get it sometimes.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Mmhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And just as, just as she had been writing this, or we've been writing to each other about this, the families of the slain in Charleston during the shooter's arraignment...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Say we forgive you.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And it didn't click right away. I'm still thinking, "I don't know what to say." My head speechwriter Cody Keenan. I tell him. "Dude, you know, I don't know what's going to work here." He gives me something that is not, you know, it just doesn't meet the moment.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - Not because it's his fault. It's 'cause he's gone through the same thing I have. We've done this too many times. We were...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - We're out of... So, I'm sitting there about 10:00 o'clock at night. And I'm just stuck and there's I don't know what it is that I'm going to say tomorrow. This is going to be the next day. I think Marilynne's letters just sort of sitting on a desk and I... I just.. I see the word grace and somehow, I start singing to myself.

[sings] *Amazing Grace*...Right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN - Hmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And I thought about the families who said, "We forgive you." And I thought ummm... Well, maybe I can work with that. Suddenly, I write the speech in 10 minutes, maybe 20. Right? I mean the whole... I mean the eulogy. I... I just... it all just pours out of me.

**[Archival News Footage President Obama at the Funeral for Reverend Clementa Pinckney:  
"Anything is possible... If we can tap into that grace...Everything can change. ...  
(crowd claps)... Amazing grace... Amazing grace..."]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And you can see me pause...for a moment.

**[Archival News Footage of President Obama at the Funeral for Reverend Clementa Pickney: [begins to sing] "Amazing grace... (gasps and crowd claps and cheers)-- how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see. (Applause)...]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - It's interesting cause it's a moment where you just say, "Will words be enough?" And it would have been, but I thought the music, the song, the leap of faith, involved... Particularly because I know that it wouldn't sound like a professional singer. It would sound like somebody— just one other guy in the choir. That in some fashion, that's the thing that would be the grace note. That that would be the thing that drew people out.

**[Archival News Footage of President Obama at the Funeral for Reverend Clementa Pickney: "Clementa Pinckney found that grace. (Applause) Cynthia Hurd found that grace. (Applause) Susie Jackson found that grace. (Applause) Ethel Lance found that grace. (Applause) DePayne Middleton-Doctor found that grace.(Applause) Tywanza Sanders found that grace. (Applause) Daniel L. Simmons, Sr. found that grace.(Applause) Sharonda Coleman-Singleton found that grace. (Applause) Myra Thompson found that grace. (Applause)**

**Through the example of their lives, they've now passed it on to us. May we find ourselves worthy of that precious and extraordinary gift, as long as our lives endure. May grace now lead them home. May God continue to shed His grace on the United States of America. (Applause)....]**

**[Guitar strumming]**

POTUS BARACK OBAMA - And part of the reason I think that it somehow met the moment was because not only is it a beautiful song. But it also captures this unifying element in America represented in its music. You've got an old world English hymn that has been used by everybody. In every church, all across this country. White churches, Black churches, the Black Gospel tradition has transformed it. And it spoke then to the fact that underneath, even a tragedy like this, there's something that is there for all of us. Something that we share.

**[Guitar strumming fades 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 –**