

**When They Said Sit Down, I Stood Up:
Springsteen's Social Conscience, Activism, and Fan Response**

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"Glory Days: A Bruce Springsteen Symposium"

Monmouth University, West Long Branch, New Jersey

September 9, 2005

Bruce Springsteen's increasing politicization from supporting other musicians' causes (No Nukes and Amnesty International) to social issues he personally embraces (food banks) inspires audiences to follow his lead with charitable causes. Whether donating food, money, or labor to community food banks, raising money for the Kristen Ann Carr Fund for cancer research, or saving the Tillie façade on Palace Amusements, Springsteen's fans draw inspiration from his example. Yet dissention among fans arose when Bruce joined Vote for Change to actively campaign for John Kerry. This paper explores the interplay between Bruce's activism and fan reaction.

From singing at the No Nukes concerts to food bank exhortations from the stage to actively campaigning for John Kerry, Bruce Springsteen has consciously and thoughtfully selected the causes he supports and speaks out on behalf of. Although Bruce played at a benefit for presidential candidate, George McGovern in 1972, he did not involve himself in politics or causes, keeping a low profile. Beginning with the Musicians United for Safe Energy (M.U.S.E.) anti-nuclear benefit concerts, September 22-23, 1979,

filmed and released as *No Nukes*, Bruce's association with grassroots activism and benefit concerts set the stage for his first phase of charitable work—showing up and playing music. By lending his musicianship to the benefit, Bruce implied that he supported the anti-nuclear movement yet he did not speak out on M.U.S.E.'s behalf either in the concert program or from the stage.¹ Fans did not associate him with a “cause” but rather came to see him as if it was any other concert. Bruce placed himself in the observer/commentator position after Ronald Reagan's election and re-election rather than as a pro-active campaigner for the opposition.

In contrast to Bruce's distancing himself from presidential politics, his awareness and activism for local charitable causes developed at the same time. Bruce's active relationship with the Vietnam Veterans of America, and the benefit concert in 1981 which raised \$100,000, was the first time he publicly explained why he was doing the benefit.²

The LuckyTown Digest and the Kristen Ann Carr Fund

The “pledge break” during Bruce's regular concerts starting with the Born in the USA Tour became a mantra repeated nightly to the crowd encouraging them to support the designated local charity. When Bruce agreed to meet with Ron Weisen, president of the United Steelworkers of America Local 1397 of Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1984 Weisen introduced him to the Steelworkers Food Bank charity and told him who to see if he's in Seattle and who to see in other cities. Thus began his affiliation with local food banks in cities wherever he performed.³ Bruce contributed over a million dollars to

community action projects in the cities he visited while on the 1985 leg of this world tour.⁴

Eric Alterman quotes Bruce as saying, “I set out to find an audience that would be a reflection of some imagined community that I had in my head, that lived according to the values in my music and shared a similar set of ideals.”⁵ Alterman has noted that “Springsteen’s relationship with his fans is, from a moral standpoint, his most sacred trust.”⁶ The online fans of one discussion group, LuckyTown Digest (formerly called Backstreets), repaid this trust a thousandfold when they took to heart the Kristen Ann Carr Fund as their personal charity. As a forum for discussing everything from top five favorite Bruce songs, to concert reviews, swapping bootleg concert recordings, and personal encounters with Bruce, Backstreets/Luckytown offered fans a place to meet online as individuals and as a community, and share their mutual love of all things Springsteen.⁷

On the LuckyTown discussion listserv (LTD) a group of fans responded to the charitable call. They took up the cause of the Kristen Ann Carr Fund (KACF), initially fundraising among themselves in an annual donation drive, then regularly auctioning concert tickets and memorabilia to raise money for cancer research to honor the memory of Dave Marsh and Barbara Carr’s daughter, a friend and fan of Bruce. At the last concert of Bruce’s Human Touch/Lucky Town Tour at Madison Square Garden, June 26, 1993, Springsteen told the audience:

We're here tonight for the Kristen Ann Carr Fund. Kristen Ann was my good friend, and the daughter of my good friend, who died recently from a sarcoma

cancer that not that much is known about. We're here tonight, we're going to be raising some funds so we can hire a doctor to study that thing full time. I want to thank you all for your help, and tonight it's not so much that we're here tonight to mourn her loss, but to celebrate her memory, and all those who are out there tonight and out there struggling against this disease every day.⁸

Alterman credits Mary-Ellen Breton as the sole organizer of an ongoing annual online auction of Springsteenania to raise money for the KACF.⁹ For all the deserved praise, Mary-Ellen would be the first to acknowledge that she did not originate the idea on LuckyTown nor run the auction alone. How the LuckyTown Digest subscribers came together to support one of Bruce's personal charities demonstrates these fans' positive reactions to Bruce's exhortations.

Initial reaction to Bruce's participation in the KACF benefit ran along the lines of one fan who was more interested in getting to meet Bruce than caring about the charity.¹⁰ In an October 5, 1994 post, "Luckyman," later identified as Chris McCormick, offered up the idea of the Luckytown fans raising money for the KACF when he wrote:

Had a thought while reading Dave Marsh's post re the K.A. Carr fund. The digest has like 900 + subscribers, why don't we start a drive to raise some money for the fund, 5 bucks a head won't break anyone and would be a nice donation if everyone chipped in, hell we could even do a buck or two a head....most people have heard that show on boot, it's a great one so why not help out a little?

Lets everyone kick this around, I'm sure we could do something. I'd be willing to volunteer as a helper or whatever, and I'll start the ball rolling by pledging 20 bucks...less than a single CD boot, so who's game?¹¹

List administrator Kevin Kinder agreed that it was a good idea and volunteered to collect the donations. He realized the power of a group effort and suggested that if anyone wanted to participate, they could send contributions of any size to him. . . and he'd make a block donation from the LuckyTown list with all of the contributors' names listed, except for anyone who might indicate a desire to remain anonymous.¹² Bryon Jordan suggested donating time instead of money.¹³ After all the discussion, Kevin, feeling already committed to the idea, sent out a notice on LuckyTown, on October 14, 1994, officially launching the first KACF fundraiser, noting this was the first time that they've attempted such a group charitable effort.¹⁴

John Hocking, who is giving a paper at this conference, explained his reasoning for participating in the first LuckyTown Digest KACF donation drive:

Although I rarely give to non-local charities, here's why I made an exception. What have I done for Bruce? Bought all his records, attended every concert I could, and talked about him and his music to anyone who was interested, and a few people who probably weren't, for the last 16+ years. In short, I've been a good fan. Big deal. What has Bruce done for me? Given me tens of thousands of hours of pleasure and enriched my life immeasurably and irrevocably every day for the same 16+ years. So how does the balance sheet work out?.....Ok, Bruce, you owe me. Just kidding. Obviously, Bruce has done a thousand times more for me than I for him. So I'm sending a small donation (via Kevin) in

memory of Kristen Ann Carr, Bruce's friend, as a small gesture of sympathy to those who knew and loved her, but also as a symbolic gesture, at least in my mind, of acknowledgement and thanks, albeit in a **very** small and inadequate way, of what Bruce Springsteen has meant in my life.¹⁵

Kevin reported on the final total of donations and included a copy of his letter to the Administrator of KACF with the list of eighty-four contributors, including two speakers at this symposium, John Hocking and Matt Orel. The final tally on the KAC Fund drive was \$1,930.46.¹⁶ Dave Marsh replied with heartfelt thanks:

.. . I'm just knocked out—the amount of money is impressive (more-so to those of us who do this work regularly, perhaps) . . . the amount of dedication it represents is even more of a boon.¹⁷

Kristen's mother, Barbara Carr, added her thanks a few weeks later. Dave Marsh thought this donation set a precedent for online community contributions:

A while back, there was some discussion about “disappointment” that the KAC donation reached “only” a certain figure. So I wanted to tell you personally what the **impact** of this gift has been at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute. To the best of their knowledge, no other private foundation has ever received an Internet donation of this (or any) kind. They went into a complete dizzy at the concept; they're going on-line, they're trying to figure out what this means, they think Kevin Kinder is the fund-raising genius of the 21st Century.¹⁸

Kevin noted that the Neil Young, U2. and Debbie Gibson listservs and probably numerous others have also been raising money for charity and that what LTD did wasn't a new idea.¹⁹ But this was the first fundraiser on a Bruce Springsteen-related listserv.

Not only does the charity benefit from the money, but the friendships developed online form equally lasting bonds. Bill Alicandro wrote about 30 Springsteen fans in the Prodigy/Genie/AOL circle who made a substantial donation to the Kidney Foundation, in memory of another fan's mother. He thanked Bruce for introducing him to those who he considered to be his very best of friends.²⁰

Chris McCormick, ever the idea man, urged the online community to donate items for auction, something that would become a regular fund-raising effort on LuckyTown.²¹ The 1994 fundraiser was not a one-time event. Kevin started a tradition of calling for annual charitable giving to the KACF in 1995.²² Chris McCormick decided to broaden the net and encouraged Luckytowners to involve their employers in contributing to the KACF.²³ The second year, LTD collected \$6,625 from 155 people. Kevin quoted from several notes included with their donations:

“Not only do we love Bruce for his talent, but for his great humanitarianism, which hopefully rubs off on us, his fans.” and “It's good to have this way of channeling excess Bruce fervor into something so positive.”

Kevin noted that the fundraiser showed that LuckyTown, through its subscribers, could be a force for accomplishing a positive good, beyond just providing a forum for fans. It helped make it all worthwhile.²⁴

Adding some incentives to the 1996 KACF fundraiser, Rich and Mary-Ellen Breton donated Springsteen front row concert tickets, as the prize for the person who donated the most money. Lowell Kern, one of the organizers, announced that The Kristen Ann Carr Fund is the unofficial charity of the Luckytown Digest.²⁵ With tickets to

Springsteen concerts as the lure, LTDers increased the frequency of auctions to raise money for KACF.²⁶ Mary-Ellen noted they had raised over \$10,500 to fight cancer in the ten months through the auctions. And they wanted to push that total even higher with the Fourth KAC Fund Ticket Auction.²⁷

While LTDers were auctioning tickets for Springsteen concerts, Kevin continued his annual fundraising effort for KACF.²⁸ Chris McCormick increased his corporate fundraising efforts, soliciting corporate donations from 65 vendors and 34 customers his company did business with. In addition to these companies he requested contributions from companies that may or may not have a “Bruce” connection.”²⁹ Ticket auctions multiplied by the number of concerts on Bruce’s schedule.³⁰

The online auction fundraisers continued into 2001, with a special Web site set up, WWW.BRUCELEGS.COM, advertising: “The Summer 2001 Online Springsteen Community Auction to benefit the Kristen Ann Carr Fund of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.”³¹ Inspired by the generosity and creativity of fundraising by the LTDers, auctions for Springsteen concert tickets to benefit other charities soon followed, such as MACC Fund (Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer) for which Jon Landau Management donated a pair of prime seats for Bruce’s performance in Milwaukee.³² The MACC Fund auction astounded organizers with spirited bidding and a generous donation of \$11,900.³³

Additional charitable work was picked up by Luckytowners, with an auction for a fourth row Springsteen ticket for an Asbury Park rehearsal show to benefit the National Neurofibromatosis Foundation, Inc.³⁴ Individual ticket sales and spot donations caught on

as a way of supporting local charities at Bruce's concerts, with one fan donating the income from the sale of an extra ticket to whichever hunger or social service group was in the lobby.³⁵

The results from the third LuckyTown fundraiser for the KACF were disappointing. The funds raised were down 24% from the previous year, and the total number of donors was down 47%; the donation totaled \$4,116.00.³⁶ On the bright side though, separate ticket auctions organized by LuckyTown subscribers raised over \$12,000 for the KAC Fund in 1996.³⁷

The fourth LTD fundraiser for KACF, delayed until early 1998, started with Chris McCormick's plea for corporate contacts for donations.³⁸ Branching off into collateral fundraising for the KACF in partnership with another charity, Bill King donated a basketball package to CentraState Health Care Foundation in Freehold to auction and split the proceeds between the two charities.³⁹

In addition to donations and ticket auctions to benefit KACF, some LTDers decided to become involved in their local grassroots organizations. One woman began donating her time to a local organization, Gainesville Harvest, which "rescues" fresh food from restaurants and other institutions that is otherwise just thrown away and delivers it the same day to agencies that feed the hungry. She noted that she has gotten much more out of this experience that she had contributed, not least of which is the pleasure she felt at learning that Bruce works with a harvest organization in his own hometown.⁴⁰

Food Banks and World Hunger Year

Continuing his work since 1984 with community food banks, Bruce initially announced his dollar contribution and asked the audience to support the local organization. Onstage in Philadelphia in 1992, radio disc jockey and long-time Springsteen supporter, the late Ed Sciaky, presented a \$10,000 check from Bruce to the Greater Philadelphia Food Bank.⁴¹ In Pittsburgh, Bruce asked the audience to support the Rainbow Kitchen but didn't mention his own \$10,000 donation.⁴² In 1996, during the Ghost of Tom Joad Tour, Bruce invited the local food banks to set up tables in the theater lobby and donated the t-shirts sales proceeds to them.⁴³ On the *Devils & Dust* tour in 2005, Bruce continued to support local food banks and urged audience members to do likewise.⁴⁴

Mary-Ellen Breton, in response to Bruce's involvement in the late Harry Chapin's World Hunger Year (WHY), proposed to LTDers that they contribute to an auction to benefit WHY.⁴⁵ With support from Kevin Kinder, Mary-Ellen auctioned seventy-two Bruce-related items to benefit WHY.⁴⁶ Mary-Ellen announced the first "on-line Grassroots Springsteen Community / World Hunger Year / Hungerthon Charity Auction!" on November 10, 1997.⁴⁷ This was another successful auction, raising over \$4,600 for WHY. Mary-Ellen added in her email with the auction results, that they would hold another auction in the Spring to benefit another Springsteen-related charity and would repeat the World Hunger Year/Hungerthon auction too.⁴⁸

Springsteen has long been a supporter of the organization, which was co-founded in 1975 by late singer-songwriter Harry Chapin and Bill Ayres, a radio talk show host who is now WHY's executive director and here this weekend. Bruce donated all of the

proceeds from the *Devils & Dust* tour rehearsal show on April 21, 2005, in Asbury Park to World Hunger Year.⁴⁹ WHY's Web site lists all the local food banks and soup kitchens designated to receive funds from this tour.⁵⁰

The interplay up until now between Bruce and his online fans had been monodirectional. By all accounts, Bruce did not read LuckyTown Digest but fans presumed that because Dave Marsh was a member and he had close ties through his wife to Bruce, that some of the discussions filtered down to Bruce. The historic preservationist project to save Palace Amusements in Asbury Park reached worldwide coverage through the Internet. One thread of local activism that Bruce espoused from the stage soon became the inspiration for far-flung fans to coalesce around a cause to save a physical artifact memorialized in the songs of Bruce Springsteen.

Save Tillie

In an unusual turnaround, Bruce ended up supporting a fan-organized effort to save the face of "Tillie" (a caricature of George C. Tilyou, a Coney Island amusement park entrepreneur) on the façade of Palace Amusements in Asbury Park. The Save Tillie Foundation, started by fans on the LuckyTown listserv and eventually numbering more than 1,000 members including amusement park devotees and historic preservationists, succeeded in saving two partial façades in June 2004—local activism at its best started and orchestrated by out-of-state fans. Bruce supported the Save Tillie Foundation with publicity and cash, including "some of the proceeds from the Springsteen/Max Weinberg 7 Asbury Park Convention Hall Christmas concerts."⁵¹

Founded in July of 1998, the Save Tillie Foundation's original goal of saving the Palace Amusements changed in 1999 to an attempt to save the iconic Tillie image. Under the group's leadership, the Palace won an honored place on the New Jersey and National registers of Historic Places. Demolition of the Palace in June 2004 came over the objections of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Asbury Park Historical Society, Preservation New Jersey, and Save Tillie. In the end, they saved more than 125 internal artifacts from the Palace and the Tillie mural from the Cookman Avenue wall, and through their work the Bumper Car the murals on the Lake Avenue façade were also removed to storage.⁵² The redevelopment company is required to incorporate the murals into the new building on the site of Palace Amusements.

The bulk of the work, spearheaded by Marylander Bob Crane, took place off the LuckyTown Digest as the Save Tillie Foundation developed its own identity. Crane posted updates to their progress on LuckyTown but the organization no longer confined itself to this online community. While Save Tillie was born on LuckyTown, it quickly grew and matured as a viable, independent entity—a fitting testament to “the majesty, the mystery, and the ministry of rock and roll.”⁵³

A Change is Gonna Come

With the demise of LuckyTown Digest in February 2003, the core community dispersed to other Springsteen discussion listservs that sprang up online, such as Bruce's Place on Yahoo Groups.⁵⁴ Some LTDers such as John Hocking joined Bruce's Place but the camaraderie among the members for charity auctions and fundraising for KACF

diminished. Notices on Bruce's Place in 2003 through 2005 announced that the Kristen Ann Carr Fund itself would auction Bruce-related items on eBay, and reminded group members of their annual fundraising dinner.⁵⁵ In addition to individual members of Bruce's Place contributing to the KACF, a representative from the Fund introduced the cause to the listserv and promoted online eBay auctions with messages to Bruce's Place to entice Bruce fans to bid with all proceeds to benefit the Fund.⁵⁶ Responses included a request for more information with a Web page link to the annual fundraiser, and another's note that he linked this cause a few times in his blog and will pitch the word whenever he can.⁵⁷ Bruce's Place listserv moderators allow a broad range of discussion and often the postings devolve into political rants, totally off the topic of anything directly related to Bruce Springsteen. The political discourse afforded members from all political persuasions to voice their displeasure with—and support of—Bruce's "coming out" in favor of John Kerry for president in 2004. Before this election, Bruce supported causes not candidates.

Vote for Change

The unwavering support that Bruce had received from his fans for his various charitable activities soon faltered when his public relations firm announced that he and the E Street Band would participate in partisan politics, joining Jackson Browne, John Fogerty, REM, and others on the Vote For Change Tour produced by MoveOnPAC to benefit America Coming Together.⁵⁸

On the tour Bruce spoke to the audience, explained the purpose of the tour, and the need to “fight for a government that is open, forward-looking, rational and humane.”⁵⁹ Even amidst the well meaning concert-goers who were there to support the cause, others viewed it as one more chance to see Bruce. In Cleveland, Jimmy Guterman heard one fan say, “I don’t give a shit about all that, I just wanna hear ‘Rosalita.’”⁶⁰ In addition to co-organizing the Vote For Change Tour, Bruce also actively campaigned for John Kerry for president in the waning months before the 2004 election. Springsteen joined Kerry at campaign rallies in Madison, Wisconsin, and Columbus, Ohio on October 28, and at an election-eve rally in Cleveland, Ohio, on November 1. Bruce spoke on behalf of the Kerry-Edwards campaign at the stops and performed some songs.⁶¹

In an interview in the *Detroit Free Press*, some fans who attended one of the Michigan shows were a mixed political group. They said they had agreed to not talk politics for the day. “It’s all about Bruce,” one chimed in. One said she would not have gone if the concert was benefiting Bush. The pro-Bush members of the group said they were not too conflicted about purchasing tickets for shows designed to hurt their candidate.⁶²

At the other extreme, Phil Kuntz, in the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote about his friend emailing him, “I never thought I’d see the day that I would trash my Bruce collection. Can’t they just play music without alienating their fan base? Springsteen’s partisanship will take a little bit of the joy away, and that hurts.” The message board on his official Web site, bruce.springsteen.net, was peppered with angry missives from self-described former fans. Kuntz believed the negative reaction illustrates how far rock and

its fans have strayed from the we-can-change-the-world roots of Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan and others.⁶³

Bruce told the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* that he “met some Republican fans who just said they stayed away from those shows or they didn’t agree.”⁶⁴ In an interview with CBS News this past May, Bruce commented that not everybody was happy with his performance. “I got a lot of nasty letters during the last election” including a box of smashed records.⁶⁵

The fans on Bruce’s Place were particularly vociferous and polarized. Not many agreed with William P. Howley, Jr. when he wrote:

I feel that you don’t need to agree with everything Bruce says or does to be a fan. I love his music, but do not necessarily agree with his politics all the time. Some people may take the ‘all or nothing’ view, but I don’t.⁶⁶

“John in the Heart of VA” responded to the Vote For Change Tour announcement, adamantly:

I already know how I feel about the War in Iraq and I already know who I’m voting for in November. As a veteran fan of 30 years, I will not pay \$ to see Bruce as part of any event related to politics. I have never gone to a Springsteen concert other than to enjoy myself. If I want politics, I’ll tune to CNN.⁶⁷

Roy Opochini perceptively asked if the critical fans would react the same way if he were playing for Republican causes.⁶⁸ Richard Whiting analyzed why he believed Bruce finally acted politically:

...Perhaps Bruce sees that this is an important election, maybe more important than any election since Nixon was in office. And perhaps Bruce has taken a look around the world, seen the attitude of many diverse people and cultures toward the USA and has said to himself that this election counts. And as a citizen perhaps he needs to get involved and do whatever he can. Perhaps it is a more mature Bruce, who sees his place in this world and knows that maybe he can make a change happen.

Bruce's music is political. Those of you who don't want to believe that need to take a step back and understand the themes he has been writing and singing about, especially since "Born to Run" (a political song). And whether it is losing the job in the song "The River," or the very political song of "Born in the USA" or "Youngstown" or countless others, he writes about political things. But those political things are within the context of everyday living. The problem with many of us Americans is that we try and separate politics from everyday living. And that is impossible. Everything from what you watch on tv to the billboards on the side of the road to the choice of what doctor you see to the price of gas to the cost of living, it is all political. Every single aspect of your life is political and to deny that is doing nothing more than staying uninformed and

letting life happen to you rather than make life happen for you. And just perhaps Bruce understands this. And perhaps he wants to make life happen, and perhaps it is this desire to make this happen that may drive him to do this tour.

As for me, I will watch Bruce in any context I can. But I do that because I have always had a sense that I share the same ideals as he does, even when his ability to share those ideals were mostly done in song as opposed to his early interviews or actions. If Bruce suddenly became conservative and went the way of Dennis Miller for example, then no I wouldn't see Bruce in the same light. His music would have lost its hold on me. Everything is political, even the music you listen to has that context. So bring on the concert. Bring it on because this election does indeed count.⁶⁹

John Hocking eloquently questioned the Bruce's Place subscribers who chose to quit the listserv in protest of Bruce's political stance:

I feel genuinely sorry for my fellow Tramps who are stepping off This Train because Bruce is not in agreement with what the Deserter [George W. Bush] has done over the last 45 months. You must be perplexed. Why would he turn on a man who has given him tens of millions of dollars in lowered taxes? But heck, why has he been quietly writing checks and publicly plugging food banks for 20

years. . .⁷⁰ I'm guessing that most everyone who announces they are leaving is a right winger who hates to read anything that doesn't support their views.⁷¹

Erik Johnson took a very personal approach to Bruce's songs and the context for their performance in his refusal to attend the Vote for Change concerts:

What will be most disappointing to me if Bruce does this is NOT the politics, but the shoehorning of his songs into a specific context, both historical and ideological. Seeing those songs ripped out of MY context and put into a specific context would be tough, very tough for me. Hence, I won't be going to any shows if they're nearby....I need my Bruce songs [more] than I need my Bruce shows.⁷²

Scott Peterson questioned Erik Johnson's ability to separate Bruce's songs from any performance whether it be Vote For Change, Amnesty International, Vietnam Veterans, or to save Asbury Park's boardwalk, and the political connotations surrounding the event, using "Born in the USA" as an example of contextualized meaning not only pertaining to the event but in juxtaposition to other songs.⁷³

Erik responded the next day with an explanation of his beliefs about Bruce and partisan politics:

Maybe it's me; I've always thought of Bruce as "above politics." Not above the issues of the day, but above politics. I just hate the idea of Bruce being so explicitly attached to a party or a candidate who will inevitably misuse his lyrics and ideas.

See, the thing is, if Bruce gets attached -- by his own volition or not -- to a particular candidate or party, in this polarized age, it will inevitably lock out people from hearing what the man has to say. Not saying it's right or wrong, just saying, if someone thinks of Bruce as a Kerry man, and he's a Bush voter, he might not listen to the songs and be affected the way he would be otherwise. MORE people should not just listen to Bruce, but "get" him -- it's just that they have to listen first, and fewer people will if he get[s] too tied up in politics.⁷⁴

The discussion continued into November. It became clear that neither side could convince the other if Bruce should or should not take a political stand by aligning with the Democratic Party. But most seemed to agree that as far as Bruce's songs go, they stand on their own as testaments to his beliefs.

Conclusion

Bruce Springsteen and his fans have an interconnectedness that transcends the typical relationship between a performer and audience. Bruce has expressed his

commitment to his audience in terms similar to his lyrics “faith will be rewarded.” The fans, in response, respect his music and integrity. Bruce’s faith in his fans was tested when he took his politics into the partisan arena during the 2004 presidential election. Willing to accept or ignore (depending on whether they are “word” people or “music” people) the messages couched in the lyrics, the fans on the LuckyTown listserv absorbed the principles espoused by Bruce Springsteen and adopted the Kristen Ann Carr Fund as their unofficial “official” charity. As long as his causes had no partisan political overtones, they might embrace, tolerate, or ignore them. When the idealism turned to political reality, some fans could not accept Bruce’s activism. As a reflection of America’s split into hardline “red” and “blue” states, Springsteen’s online fan base on Bruce’s Place drew their lines in the sand and personalized their relationship with him—some people could not separate their distaste for his support of John Kerry with their love of his music.

An artist of the stature of Bruce Springsteen takes a risk when aligning with an unpopular or controversial cause. Seals and Crofts’ career nosedived into oblivion when they released their anti-abortion album, *Unborn Child*. Bruce Springsteen told *Backstreets* fan magazine:

I think if you followed us over the past thirty years, our positions on most social issues have been consistent and straightforward. . . . The show is a forum of ideas. That’s one of the things that we try to provide over the course of the evening. And as such, that’s part of what you’re getting when you walk through the doors.⁷⁵

- ¹ Charles R. Cross and the editors of *Backstreets Magazine*, *Backstreets; Springsteen: The Man and His Music*. New York: Harmony Books, 1989, p. 187; Dave Marsh, *Glory Days; Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s*. New York: Pantheon, 1987, pp. 29, 262; Dave Marsh, *Born to Run; the Bruce Springsteen Story*. New York: Dell, 1981, pp. 238-242.
- ² Gary Graff, ed., *The Ties that Bind: Bruce Springsteen A to E to Z*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2005, pp. 258-259.
- ³ Bruce Springsteen remarks onstage at Peterson Events Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, July 28, 2005.
- ⁴ Dave Marsh, *Sun City by Artists United Against Apartheid, the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa; The Making of the Record*. New York: Penguin, 1985, p. 94.
- ⁵ Eric Alterman, *It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive; The Promise of Bruce Springsteen*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 1999, p. 244.
- ⁶ Alterman, *It Ain't No Sin*, p. 242.
- ⁷ Kevin Kinder began the Backstreets discussion listserv in 1992, changed it to a Digest with No. 10, March 26, 1992, then changed the name to Luckytown on September 14, 1994; it ceased Feb. 19, 2003. The archives only go through Vol. 5, No. 17 February 20 [i.e., 27], 1998 on ftp://ftp.cs.tu-berlin.de/pub/doc/music/artists/s/bruce_springsteen/mail.list/
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- ²¹ chrim@ix.netcom.com (Chris McCormick), 27 Dec. 1994, Luckytown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
- ²² kvk@iexist.att.com, 4 Nov. 1995, Luckytown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
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