



Working on a Dream: The Progressive Political Vision of Bruce Springsteen

David Masciotra

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For almost four decades, Bruce Springsteen's music has directly inspired, influenced, and uplifted millions of devoted fans, who hold a special place in their hearts and minds for his work. Springsteen's rise to the top of American music coincided with the triumph of American conservatism, and the veneration of marketplace values above democratic principles and humanistic priorities. Springsteen has consistently summoned his creative power and artistic vision to indict these political developments and demand the cultivation of a more compassionate and progressive society. And yet his often harsh critique of the status quo and radical ideas for reform have either been ignored or misunderstood, as a result of his "All American" image and his narrative storytelling style.

On nearly every major issue—poverty, racism, urban decay, war, and peace—Springsteen's music has offered a unique vision for moving forward with the agenda of creating the "country we carry in our hearts"—as he called it in an op-ed for the New York Times. Filled with provocative analysis of Springsteen's best known hits and his most obscure songs, comparisons to other important works of American culture—ranging from The Sopranos to Edward Hopper—and a wealth of information about the last fifty years of American politics, culture, and society, Working On a Dream is a powerful and engaging study of this songwriter and performer's art.

David Masciotra shows how Springsteen's music darkly comments on the increased isolation of Americans, and calls for a return to community living and values, based on compassion, empathy, and tolerance. He illustrates how Springsteen has forced listeners to wrestle with the facts of rising poverty rates in the world's richest nation, of wars with questionable justification, and of the continued mistreatment of racial minorities, arguing that Springsteen does this by emphasizing the suffering that everyday people - usually ignored in mainline political discussions - endure on a daily basis.

By using Springsteen's life and music to shine a light on the dark recesses of America's most important political and social trials and conflicts—race, religion, and working class hardship—Working on a Dream connects readers with the power, purpose, and promise of Springsteen's extraordinary and enduring music.

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