

August 5, 2004

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Chords for Change

By **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

Anation's artists and musicians have a particular place in its social and political life. Over the years I've tried to think long and hard about what it means to be American: about the distinctive identity and position we have in the world, and how that position is best carried. I've tried to write songs that speak to our pride and criticize our failures.

These questions are at the heart of this election: who we are, what we stand for, why we fight. Personally, for the last 25 years I have always stayed one step away from partisan politics. Instead, I have been partisan about a set of ideals: economic justice, civil rights, a humane foreign policy, freedom and a decent life for all of our citizens. This year, however, for many of us the stakes have risen too high to sit this election out.

Through my work, I've always tried to ask hard questions. Why is it that the wealthiest nation in the world finds it so hard to keep its promise and faith with its weakest citizens? Why do we continue to find it so difficult to see beyond the veil of race? How do we conduct ourselves during difficult times without killing the things we hold dear? Why does the fulfillment of our promise as a people always seem to be just within grasp yet forever out of reach?

I don't think John Kerry and John Edwards have all the answers. I do believe they are sincerely interested in asking the right questions and working their way toward honest solutions. They understand that we need an administration that places a priority on fairness, curiosity, openness, humility, concern for all America's citizens, courage and faith.

People have different notions of these values, and they live them out in different ways. I've tried to sing about some of them in my songs. But I have my own ideas about what they mean, too. That is why I plan to join with many fellow artists, including the Dave Matthews Band, Pearl Jam, R.E.M., the Dixie Chicks, Jurassic 5, James Taylor and Jackson Browne, in touring the country this October. We will be performing under the umbrella of a new group called Vote for Change. Our goal is to change the direction of the government and change the current administration come November.

Like many others, in the aftermath of 9/11, I felt the country's unity. I don't remember anything quite like it. I supported the decision to enter Afghanistan and I hoped that the seriousness of the times would bring forth strength, humility and wisdom in our leaders. Instead, we dived headlong into an unnecessary war in Iraq, offering up the lives of our young men and women under circumstances that are now discredited. We ran record deficits, while simultaneously cutting and squeezing services like afterschool programs. We granted tax cuts to the richest 1 percent (corporate bigwigs, well-to-do guitar players), increasing the division of wealth that threatens to destroy our social contract with one another and render mute the promise of "one nation indivisible."

It is through the truthful exercising of the best of human qualities - respect for others, honesty about ourselves, faith in our ideals - that we come to life in God's eyes. It is how our soul, as a nation and as individuals, is revealed. Our American government has strayed too far from American values. It is time to move forward. The country we carry in our hearts is waiting.

Bruce Springsteen is a writer and performer.

[Copyright 2004 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Back to Top](#)