

## **Born in the U.S.A.**

(Bruce Springsteen)

[Verse 1]

Born down in a dead man's town  
The first kick I took was when I hit  
the ground  
You end up like a dog that's been  
beat too much  
'Til you spend half your life just  
coverin' up

[Chorus]

Born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A

[Verse 2]

Got in a little hometown jam  
So they put a rifle in my hand  
Sent me off to a foreign land  
To go and kill the yellow man

[Chorus]

Born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A

[Verse 3]

Come back home to the refinery  
I'm a cool rocking Daddy in the U.S.A

Hiring man says "Son if it was up to  
me"

Went down to see my V.A. man  
He said "Son, don't you understand"

[Verse 4]

I had a brother at Khe Sanh fighting  
off the Viet Cong  
They're still there, he's all gone  
He had a woman he loved in Saigon  
I got a picture of him in her arms  
now

[Verse 5]

Down in the shadow of the  
penitentiary  
Out by the gas fires of the refinery  
I'm ten years burning down the road  
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to  
go

[Chorus]

Born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A  
I'm a long gone Daddy in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A

"Born in the U.S.A." is a 1984 song written and performed by Bruce Springsteen, and released on the album of the same name. One of Springsteen's best-known singles, Rolling Stone ranked the song 275th on their list of "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time", and in 2001, the RIAA's Songs of the Century placed the song 59th (out of 365). The song addresses the harmful effects of the Vietnam War on Americans and the treatment of Vietnam veterans upon their return home. It is an ironic retort to the indifference and hostility with which Vietnam veterans were met.

This song was written in 1981 as the title song for a film that Paul Schrader was contemplating making and that Springsteen was considering starring in (*Light of Day* starring Michael J. Fox). Springsteen thanks Schrader in the liner notes of the album "Born in the U.S.A."

In March 1982, Springsteen revived the song with a different melody line and musical structure. A full E Street Band version was recorded, with much of the arrangement made up on the spot, including Roy Bittan's opening synthesizer riff and what producer Chuck Plotkin nicknamed Max Weinberg's "exploding drums". The famous snare drum sound on this record was obtained by engineer Toby Scott running the top snare microphone through a broken reverb plate which could only sustain four seconds of gated reverb. This is the version that appeared on the *Born in the U.S.A.* album, a full two years later. The studio recording also originally ended with a lengthy jam session, which was later edited for the song's commercial release.

Although a superficial listener might think the song a flag-waving paean to America, the song is actually a wry and somewhat caustic commentary on the hypocrisy of patriotism. The tune recognizes the plight of unfortunate foreign peoples suffering in a questionable war; while paying tribute to Vietnam veterans who served their country, some of whom were Springsteen's friends and some of whom did not return from the conflict; it also protests the hardships Vietnam veterans faced upon their return from the war.

The song's narrative traces the protagonist's working-class origins, induction into the armed forces, and disaffected return to the States. An anguished lyrical interlude is even more jolting, describing the fate of the protagonist's (literal or figurative) brother (in some recordings or live shows, the word "brother" is replaced with "buddy"):

I had a brother at Khe Sanh  
Fighting off the Viet Cong  
They're still there; he's all gone

He had a woman he loved in Saigon  
I got a picture of him in her arms, now

Springsteen wrote "Born in the U.S.A." about the working-class man, who in Springsteen's words was facing "a spiritual crisis, in which man is left lost. It's like he has nothing left to tie him into society anymore. He's isolated from the government. Isolated from his job. Isolated from his family ... to the point where nothing makes sense." Springsteen promotes the fact that the endless search for truth is the true American way.