

CONNECTIONS

ECONOMICS & SONG LYRICS

Directions

Read the lyrics of “Death to My Hometown” and “Talkin’ ‘bout a Revolution” by artists Bruce Springsteen and Tracy Chapman. Discuss these songs in the context of economic systems (capitalism, socialism, communism) by answering these questions: **a) What are the songwriters saying about capitalism? Cite and explain evidence. And b) How would Marx and Engels evaluate these songs – would they say the songs accurately or inaccurately describe the impact of capitalism on society? Why?**

Background

The Industrial Revolution of the 1800s and early 1900s – the growth of highly productive, privately-owned factories and businesses – produced a small group of extremely wealthy families who dominated the American economy of the late 1800s and early 1900s. As the gap between wealthy owners and common workers widened, some critics of capitalism started calling these elite business owners “robber barons.” The term “robber baron” refers to someone whose greedy lust for power and wealth causes him to seek his own success by exploiting, or taking advantage of, the workers beneath him.

Death to My Hometown (Bruce Springsteen)

No cannonballs did fly, no rifles cut us down
No bombs fell from the sky, no blood soaked the ground
No powder flash blinded the eye, no deafening thunder sounded
But just as sure as the hand of God
They brought death to my hometown
They brought death to my hometown, boys

No shells ripped the evening sky, no cities burning down
No armies stormed the shores for which we’d die
No dictators were crowned
High off on a quiet night
I never heard a sound
The marauders raided in the dark
And brought death to my hometown, boys
Death to my hometown

They destroyed our families’ factories and they took our homes
They left our bodies on the plains
The vultures picked our bones
So listen up, my Sonny boy
Be ready when they come
For they’ll be returning sure as the rising sun
Now get yourself a song to sing and sing it ’til you’re done
Yeah, sing it hard and sing it well
Send the robber barons straight to hell
The greedy thieves that came around
And ate the flesh of everything they found
Whose crimes have gone unpunished now
Who walk the streets as free men now

They brought death to our hometown, boys
Death to our hometown, boys
Death to our hometown, boys
Death to our hometown



Talkin' 'bout a Revolution (Tracy Chapman)

Don't you know
They're talkin' 'bout a revolution
It sounds like a whisper
Don't you know
They're talkin' about a revolution
It sounds like a whisper

While they're standing in the welfare lines
Crying at the doorsteps of those armies of salvation
Wasting time in the unemployment lines
Sitting around waiting for a promotion

Don't you know
Talkin' 'bout a revolution
It sounds like a whisper

Poor people gonna rise up
And get their share
Poor people gonna rise up
And take what's theirs

Don't you know you better
Run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run
Oh I said you better
Run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run, run

'Cause finally the tables are starting to turn
Talkin' 'bout a revolution

