

# Politically Charged Music

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## “Burn”

Bruce Cockburn

Look away across the bay  
Yankee gunboat come this way  
Uncle Sam gonna save the day  
Come tomorrow we all gonna pay...

And it's burn baby burn  
When am I going to get my turn?

Something dead under the bed  
Local diplomats hang their heads  
Never mind what the government said  
They're either lying or they've been misled...

And it's burn baby burn  
When am I going to get my turn?

Philippines was yesterday [Vietnam was yesterday]\*  
Santiago and Greece today [Kabul and Baghdad today]\*  
How would they ever make the late news pay  
If they didn't have the CIA?

And it's burn baby burn  
When am I going to get my turn?

Here it comes, the loaded gun  
"Must keep the Commies on the run " [gotta keep the bad guys on the run]\*  
You'd buy or bury everyone  
For liberty and life  
And just plain fun

And it's burn baby burn  
When am I going to get my turn?

*\*Lyrics in brackets [ ] are ones Cockburn started using in June 2003 to reflect more recent world events. The song was originally released in 1974.*

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“...For instance, take an old song like 'Burn' . It's overtly anti-American. And it's trying to make the point Canada has very much the same client-state relationship that your average Latin American country has with the United States. Nothing quite as drastic is at stake. We're better off so there's no resistance to the relationship. We don't have a dictator; we don't have the military trip. But if we were ever to swing too far to the left it would Prague '68 revisited. That's what the song is trying to say in a very lighthearted way. Canadians relate to 'Burn' really well; we love to flirt with anti-Americanism in a humorous way because it makes us feel independent. But that's about as far as most of us take it.”

*Cockburn commenting on “Burn” in the winter of 1985*

## Questions

1. What makes “Burn” anti-American? Interpret the first stanza in the margins.
2. In the 21st century, we know about Vietnam, Kabul, and Baghdad.... what are the references to the Philippines, Santiago, and Greece?
3. Given the last stanza, what does Cockburn think about U.S. foreign policy?
4. What is Cockburn referring to when he mentions “Prague ‘68” in the interview?
5. How do you feel about Cockburn’s view of Canada’s relationship with the United States?
6. How do you feel about Cockburn’s comments on how Canadians treat Americans?