

## Billy Joel – We Didn't Start the Fire (1989)

Harry Truman, Doris Day, Red China, Johnnie Ray  
South \_\_\_\_\_, Walter Winchell, Joe DiMaggio

Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon, Studebaker, \_\_\_\_\_  
North Korea, \_\_\_\_\_ Korea, Marilyn Monroe

Rosenbergs, H-bomb, Sugar Ray, Panmunjom  
\_\_\_\_\_, "The King and I" and "The Catcher in the Rye"

Eisenhower, \_\_\_\_\_, England's got a new \_\_\_\_\_  
Marciano, Liberace, Santayana goodbye

**CHORUS:** We didn't start the fire

It was always \_\_\_\_\_  
Since the world's been \_\_\_\_\_  
We didn't start the fire  
No we didn't \_\_\_\_\_ it  
But we tried to \_\_\_\_\_ it

Joseph \_\_\_\_\_, Malenkov, Nasser and Prokofiev  
\_\_\_\_\_, Campanella, \_\_\_\_\_ Bloc

Roy Cohn, Juan Peron, Toscanini, Dacron  
Dien Bien Phu falls, "Rock \_\_\_\_\_ the Clock"

\_\_\_\_\_, James Dean, Brooklyn's got a winning team  
Davy Crockett, Peter Pan, Elvis Presley, \_\_\_\_\_

Bardot, Budapest, \_\_\_\_\_, Krushchev  
Princess Grace, "Peyton Place", \_\_\_\_\_ in the Suez

**CHORUS:** ...

Little Rock, Pasternak, Mickey Mantle, Kerouac  
\_\_\_\_\_, Zhou En-Lai, "Bridge on the River Kwai"

Lebanon, Charlse de Gaulle, California baseball  
Starkweather \_\_\_\_\_, children of Thalidomide

Oh, huh, ho  
Buddy Holly, "Ben-Hur", space \_\_\_\_\_, Mafia  
Hula hoops, Castro, Edsel is a no-go

U2, Syngman Rhee, payola and \_\_\_\_\_  
Chubby Checker, "Psycho", \_\_\_\_\_ in the Congo

**CHORUS:** ...

Hemingway, Eichmann, "Stranger in a Strange Land"  
Dylan, Berlin, Bay of Pigs \_\_\_\_\_

"Lawrence of Arabia", \_\_\_\_\_ Beatlemania  
Ole Miss, John Glenn, Liston beats Patterson

Pope \_\_\_\_\_, Malcolm X, British politician sex  
\_\_\_\_\_, blown away, what else do I have to say?

**CHORUS:** ...

Birth \_\_\_\_\_, Ho Chi Minh, Richard Nixon back again  
Moonshot, \_\_\_\_\_, Watergate, punk rock  
Begin, Reagan, Palestine, terror on the airline  
Ayatollahs in Iran, Russians in \_\_\_\_\_

"Wheel of Fortune", Sally Ride, heavy metal, \_\_\_\_\_  
Foreign debts, homeless vets \_\_\_\_, Crack, Bernie Goetz  
Hypodermics on the shores, China's under \_\_\_\_\_ law  
Rock and roller Cola wars, I can't take it \_\_\_\_\_

**vaccine, Disneyland, Pacific, television,  
Stalin, Communist, Alabama, Sputnik,  
homicide, Kennedy, invasion, Paul,  
Woodstock, suicide, Brando, South, queen,  
Rockefeller, Einstein, monkey, British,  
control, anymore, martial, Afghanistan,  
burning, turning, light, fight, Around,  
trouble, Belgians, JFK, AIDS,**

Though the lyrics are rapid-fire with several people and events mentioned in a single word each:

*Billy Joel captured the major images, events, and personalities of this half-century in a three-minute song... It was pure information overload, a song that assumed we knew exactly what he was singing about...What was truly alarming was the realization that we, the listeners, for the most part understood the references.*

The following events (with Joel's lyric for each appearing in **bold**) are listed in the order that they appear in the song, which is almost entirely chronological. The lyric for each individual event is brief and the events are punctuated by the chorus and other lyrical elements. The following list includes longer, more descriptive names for clarity. Events from a variety of contexts – such as popular entertainment, foreign affairs, and sports – are intermingled, giving an impression of the culture of the time as a whole. There are 118 events listed in the song.

1. **Harry Truman** wins the 1948 United States presidential election beginning his full presidential term; previously he was sworn in following the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt.
2. **Doris Day** debuts in film in *Romance on the High Seas*, featuring the popular song "It's Magic".
3. **Red China:** The Communist Party of China wins the Chinese Civil War, establishing the People's Republic of China on September 21.
4. **Johnnie Ray:** The rock and roll progenitor signs his first recording contract with Okeh Records, although he did not become popular for another two years.
5. **South Pacific**, the award-winning musical, opens on Broadway on April 7.
6. **Walter Winchell** was a radio and newspaper journalist credited with having invented the gossip column.
7. **Joe DiMaggio** signs a record-breaking \$100,000 contract with the New York Yankees on February 7.
8. **Joe McCarthy**, a U.S. Senator, gains national attention and begins his anti-Communism crusade with his Lincoln Day speech.

9. **Richard Nixon** is first elected to the United States Senate.
10. **Studebaker**, a popular automobile company, begins its financial downfall.
11. **Television** becomes widespread throughout Europe and North America.
12. **North Korea** invades **South Korea** on June 25, beginning the Korean War.
13. **Marilyn Monroe** appears in five films, including *The Asphalt Jungle* and *All About Eve*
14. The **Rosenbergs**, married couple Ethel and Julius, were convicted on March 29 of espionage.
15. **H-Bomb**: The United States is in the middle of developing the hydrogen bomb as a nuclear weapon; it would be first tested in late 1952.
16. **Sugar Ray** Robinson, a champion boxer, defeats Jake LaMotta in the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre".
17. **Panmunjom**, the border village in Korea, is the location of truce talks between the parties of the Korean War.
18. Marlon **Brando** is nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor for his role in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
19. ***The King and I***, the musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, opens on Broadway on March 29.
20. ***The Catcher in the Rye***, a controversial novel by J. D. Salinger, is published.
- 21. 1952**
22. Dwight D. **Eisenhower** is first elected as President of the United States, winning by a landslide margin of 442 to 89 electoral votes.
23. **Vaccine** for polio is privately tested by Jonas Salk.
24. **England's got a new queen**: Princess Elizabeth, Duchess of Edinburgh succeeds to the throne as Queen Elizabeth II upon the death of her father, George VI, and is crowned the following year.
25. Rocky **Marciano** defeats Jersey Joe Walcott, becoming the world heavyweight boxing champion.
26. **Liberace** first broadcasts *The Liberace Show*.
27. **Santayana goodbye**: George Santayana, philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist, dies on September 26.
28. **Joseph Stalin**, leader of the Soviet Union, dies on March 5.
29. Georgy Maksimilianovich **Malenkov** succeeds Stalin for six months following his death. Malenkov had presided over Stalin's purges, but would be spared a similar fate by his successor Nikita Khrushchev.
30. Gamal Abdel **Nasser** acts as the true power behind the new Egyptian nation as Muhammad Naguib's minister of the interior.
31. Sergei **Prokofiev**, Russian composer dies on March 5, the same day as Stalin.
32. Winthrop **Rockefeller** and his wife Barbara are involved in a highly publicized divorce, culminating in 1954 with a record-breaking \$5.5 million settlement.<sup>[8]</sup>
33. Roy **Campanella**, an Italian-American/African-American baseball catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers, receives the National League's Most Valuable Player award for the second time.
34. **Communist bloc**: The East German uprising of 1953 is crushed by the Volkspolizei and the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany.
35. **Roy Cohn** resigns as Joseph McCarthy's chief counsel and enters private practice with the fall of McCarthy.
36. **Juan Perón** spends his last full year as President of Argentina before a September 1955 coup.
37. Arturo **Toscanini** is at the height of his fame as a conductor, performing regularly with the NBC Symphony Orchestra on U.S. national radio.
38. **Dacron** is an early artificial fiber made from the same plastic as polyester.
39. **Dien Bien Phu falls**. A French/Vietnamese camp falls to Việt Minh forces under Võ Nguyên Giáp, signaling the end of French Indochina and leading to the creation of North Vietnam and South Vietnam as separate states.
40. **"Rock Around the Clock"** is a hit single released by Bill Haley & His Comets in May, spurring worldwide interest in rock and roll music.
41. Albert **Einstein** dies on April 18 at the age of 76.
42. **James Dean** achieves success with *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, gets nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor, and dies in a car accident on September 30, 1955, at the age of 24.
43. **Brooklyn's got a winning team**: The Brooklyn Dodgers win their first and only World Series before their move to Los Angeles.
44. **Davy Crockett** is a Disney television miniseries about the legendary frontiersman of the same name. The show was a huge hit with young boys and inspired a short-lived "coonskin cap" craze.
45. **Peter Pan**: A year after Walt Disney Animation Studios released an animated adaption of the play by J. M. Barrie, the 1954 stage musical of the same name starring Mary Martin is broadcast on NBC live and in color.
46. **Elvis Presley** signs with RCA Records on November 21, beginning his pop career, going on to earn a reputation as the "King of Rock and Roll".
47. **Disneyland** opens on July 17, 1955, as Walt Disney's first theme park.
48. Brigitte **Bardot** appears in her first mainstream film *And God Created Woman* and establishes an international reputation as a French "sex kitten".
49. **Budapest** is the capital city of Hungary and site of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.
50. **Alabama** is the site of the Montgomery bus boycott which ultimately led to the removal of the last race laws in the United States. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. figure prominently.
51. Nikita **Khrushchev** makes his famous Secret Speech denouncing Stalin's "Cult of personality" on February 25.
52. **Princess Grace** Kelly appears in her last film, *High Society*, and marries Prince Rainier III of Monaco.
53. ***Peyton Place***, the best-selling novel by Grace Metalious, is published. Though mild compared to today's standards, it shocked the reserved values of the 1950s.
54. **Trouble in the Suez**: The Suez Crisis boils as Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal on October 29.
55. **Little Rock**, Arkansas is the site of an anti-integration standoff, as Governor Orval Faubus stops the Little Rock Nine from attending Little Rock Central High School and

President Eisenhower deploys the 101st Airborne Division to counteract him.

56. Boris **Pasternak**, the Russian author, publishes his novel *Doctor Zhivago*.

57. **Mickey Mantle** is in the middle of his career as a famous New York Yankees outfielder and American League All-Star for the sixth year in a row.

58. Jack **Kerouac** publishes his novel *On the Road*, a defining work of the Beat Generation.

59. **Sputnik** becomes the first artificial satellite, launched by the Soviet Union on October 4, marking the start of the space race.

60. **Chou En-Lai**, Premier of the People's Republic of China, survives an assassination attempt on the charter airliner *Kashmir Princess*.

61. *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, an adaptation of the 1954 novel, is released and receives seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture.<sup>[9]</sup>

62. **Lebanon** is engulfed in a political and religious crisis that eventually involves U.S. intervention.

63. **Charles de Gaulle** is elected first president of the French Fifth Republic following the Algerian Crisis.

64. **California baseball** begins as the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants move to California and become the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Francisco Giants, respectively. They are the first teams in Major League Baseball west of Kansas City, Missouri.

65. **Starkweather homicide**: Charles Starkweather's murder spree, in which he kills eleven people mostly in Lincoln, Nebraska, between January 25 and 29 before fleeing and being caught in a massive manhunt in Douglas, Wyoming, captures the attention of Americans.

66. **Children of Thalidomide**: Many pregnant women taking the drug Thalidomide had children born with congenital birth defects.

67. **Buddy Holly** dies in a plane crash on February 3 with Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper, in a day that had a major impact on rock and roll and youth culture. Joel prefaces the lyric with a Holly signature vocal hiccup: "Uh-huh, uh-huh."

68. **Ben-Hur**, a film adapted from Lew Wallace's 1880 novel *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* starring Charlton Heston, wins eleven Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

69. **Space Monkey**: Aboard the flight Jupiter AM-18, Able and Miss Baker become the first two animals to be launched by NASA into space that returned to Earth alive.

70. **Mafia** leaders are convicted in the Apalachin meeting trial, confirming the existence of the Mafia as a nationwide conspiracy.

71. **Hula hoops** sales reach 100 million as the latest toy fad.

72. Fidel **Castro** comes to power after a revolution in Cuba and visits the United States later that year on an unofficial twelve-day tour.

73. **Edsel is a no-go**: Production of this much-advertised car marque ends after only three years due to poor sales, costing Ford Motor Company \$250 million.

74. **U-2**: An American U-2 spy plane piloted by Francis Gary Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union, causing the U-2 Crisis of 1960.

75. **Syngman Rhee** was rescued by the CIA after being forced to resign as leader of South Korea for allegedly fixing an election and embezzling more than US\$20 million.

76. **Payola**, illegal payments for radio broadcasting of songs, was publicized due to Dick Clark's testimony before Congress and Alan Freed's public disgrace.

77. John F. **Kennedy**, a senator from Massachusetts, beats Vice President Richard Nixon in the November 8 general election.

78. **Chubby Checker** popularizes the dance The Twist with his cover of the song of the same name.

79. **Psycho**: An Alfred Hitchcock thriller, based on a pulp novel by Robert Bloch and adapted by Joseph Stefano, which becomes a landmark in graphic violence and cinema sensationalism. The screeching violins heard at this point in the song are a trademark of the film's soundtrack.

80. **Belgians in the Congo**: The Republic of the Congo (Leopoldville) was declared independent of Belgium on June 30, with Joseph Kasavubu as President and Patrice Lumumba as Prime Minister.

81. Ernest **Hemingway** commits suicide on July 2 after a long battle with depression.

82. Adolf **Eichmann**, a "most wanted" Nazi war criminal, is traced to Argentina and captured by Mossad agents. He is covertly taken to Israel where he is put on trial for crimes against humanity during World War II, convicted in 1961, and hanged the following year, 1962.

83. ***Stranger in a Strange Land***, written by Robert A. Heinlein, is a breakthrough best-seller with themes of sexual freedom and liberation.

84. Bob **Dylan** (then known as Robert Zimmerman) is signed to Columbia Records after a *New York Times* review by critic Robert Shelton.

85. **Berlin's** separation into West Berlin and East Berlin is cemented when the Berlin Wall is erected on August 13 to prevent citizens of East Germany escaping to the West.

86. The **Bay of Pigs Invasion**, an attempt by United States-trained Cuban exiles to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro, fails.

87. ***Lawrence of Arabia***: The Academy Award-winning film based on the life of T. E. Lawrence starring Peter O'Toole premiered in the United States on December 16.

88. **British Beatlemania**: The Beatles, a British rock group, gain Ringo Starr as drummer and Brian Epstein as manager, and join EMI's Parlophone label. They soon become the world's most famous rock band, with the word "Beatlemania" adopted by the press for their fans' unprecedented enthusiasm. In 1964, their tour of the United States would mark the beginning of "the British Invasion".

89. **Ole Miss**: A riot was fought between Southern segregationist civilians and federal and state forces as a result of the forced enrollment of black student James Meredith at the University of Mississippi.

90. **John Glenn** flew the first American manned orbital mission termed "Friendship 7" on February 20.

91. **Liston beats Patterson**: Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson fought for the world heavyweight championship on September 25, ending in a first-round knockout. This match marked the first time Patterson had ever been

knocked out and one of only eight losses in his 20-year professional career.

92. **Pope Paul:** Cardinal Giovanni Montini is elected to the papacy and takes the papal name of Paul VI.

93. **Malcolm X** makes his infamous statement "The chickens have come home to roost" about the Kennedy assassination, thus causing the Nation of Islam to censure him; about fifteen months later, he himself is assassinated while preparing to make a speech.

94. **British politician sex:** The British Secretary of State for War, John Profumo, has a relationship with Christine Keeler, a showgirl, and then lies when questioned about it before the House of Commons. When the truth came out, it led to his own resignation and undermined the credibility of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

95. **JFK blown away:** President John F. Kennedy is assassinated on November 22 while riding in an open convertible through Dallas.

96. **Birth control:** In the early 1960s, oral contraceptives, popularly known as "the pill", first go on the market and are extremely popular. *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965 challenged a Connecticut law prohibiting contraceptives. In 1968, Pope Paul VI released a papal encyclical titled *Humanae vitae* which reaffirmed Catholic teaching that artificial birth control was a sin.

97. **Ho Chi Minh:** A Vietnamese Communist, who served as President of Vietnam from 1954 to 1969. On March 2, Operation Rolling Thunder begins, with the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply line from North Vietnam to the Viet Cong rebels in the south. On March 8, the first U.S. combat troops, 3,500 marines, land in South Vietnam.

98. **Richard Nixon back again:** Former Vice President Nixon is elected President in 1968.

99. **Moonshot:** Apollo 11, the first manned lunar landing, successfully lands on the moon.

100. **Woodstock:** Famous rock and roll festival of 1969 that came to be the epitome of the counterculture movement.

101. **Watergate:** Political scandal that began when the Democratic National Committee's headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. was broken into during the 1972 campaign. After the break-in,

word began to spread that President Richard Nixon may have known about the break-in and tried to cover it up. The scandal would ultimately result in the resignation of President Nixon on August 9, 1974; this remains the only time to date that anyone has resigned the United States Presidency.

102. **Punk rock:** Backlash against the progressive rock of the early 1970s leads to the emergence of newly formed bands such as The Ramones (founded in 1974) and the Sex Pistols (founded a year later).

103. Menachem **Begin** becomes Prime Minister of Israel in 1977 and negotiates the Camp David Accords with Egypt's president in 1978.

104. Ronald **Reagan**, former Governor of California, begins his second presidential campaign in 1976. He eventually wins in the next election in 1980.

105. **Palestine:** The ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict escalates as Israelis establish settlements in the West Bank, previously held by Jordan for non-Jewish Palestinians after the 1948 war, beginning shortly after Begin's election.

106. **Terror on the airline:** Numerous aircraft hijackings take place, specifically, the Palestinian hijack of Air France Flight 139 and the subsequent Operation Entebbe in Uganda.

107. **Ayatollahs in Iran:** During the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the West-backed and secular Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi is overthrown as the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini gains power after years in exile and creates an Islamic society.

108. **Russians in Afghanistan:** Following their move into Afghanistan on December 24, Soviet forces fight a ten-year war up until 1989.

109. **Wheel of Fortune:** The hit television game show, on air since 1975, underwent several changes in the early 1980s, including the hiring of Pat Sajak as host in 1981, Vanna White as hostess in 1982, and a move to syndication in 1983, all three of which remain in effect through 2021.

110. **Sally Ride:** On June 18, she became the first American woman in space by flying aboard *Challenger* on the STS-7 shuttle mission.

111. **Heavy metal suicide:** In the 1970s and 1980s, heavy metal bands became popular. Ozzy Osbourne and Judas Priest in particular were sued for fans' suicides after listening to their songs "Suicide Solution" and "Better By You, Better Than Me", respectively.

112. **Foreign debts:** Persistent trade and budget deficits around the world, leading to a debt crisis that began a year before when Mexico declared that it would no longer be able to service its debt. This ignited a succession of sovereign defaults around the world, with one country after another declaring a similar inability to repay.

113. **Homeless vets:** Veterans of the Vietnam War, including many disabled ex-military, are reported to be left homeless and impoverished.

114. **AIDS:** A collection of symptoms and infections in humans resulting from the specific damage to the immune system caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). It is first detected and recognized in the 1980s, and was on its way to becoming a pandemic.

115. **Crack** cocaine use surged in the mid-to-late 1980s.

116. **Bernie Goetz:** On December 22, Goetz shot four young black men who he said were trying to mug him on a New York City Subway. Goetz was charged with attempted murder but was acquitted of the charges, though convicted of carrying an unlicensed gun.

117. **Hypodermics on the shore:** Medical waste was found washed up on the beaches of Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut after being illegally dumped at sea. Before this event, waste dumped in the oceans was an "out of sight, out of mind" affair. This has been cited as one of the crucial turning points in popular opinion on environmentalism.

118. **China's under martial law:** On May 20, China declares martial law, resulting in the use of military forces against protesting students to end the Tiananmen protests.

119. **Rock-and-roller cola wars:** Soft drink giants Coke and Pepsi each run marketing campaigns using rock & roll and popular music stars to reach the teenage and young adult demographic.