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ELEMENTS OF INDIVIDUALISM IN THE LIFE AND SELECTED WORKS OF WOODY GUTHRIE

A Thesis by

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Submitted to the Department of Music  
and the faculty of the Graduate School of  
Wichita State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Music

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## ELEMENTS OF INDIVIDUALISM IN THE LIFE AND SELECTED WORKS OF WOODY GUTHRIE

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Music in Music History.

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Silvia Carruthers, Committee Chair

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I ain't a Communist necessarily, but I been in the red all my life.

– Woodrow Wilson Guthrie

## ABSTRACT

Although the image of Woody Guthrie has often used as a symbol by collectivist leaning groups such as the Communist Party of the United States and the free love movement of the 1960s, and although he has been viewed by scholars as a dogmatic union supporter, an examination of several musical works characteristic of his creative oeuvre demonstrate individualistic traits. Guthrie's own life, his solitary travels, his lack of concern for the welfare of his own family, his attitude toward financial success, treatment of and by the Communist Party, marriages, military career and final years demonstrate this individualism. His writings, most notably *Bound for Glory* – his semi-factual autobiography – and *Woody Sez* – a collection of his articles for a Communist Periodical – also show clear signs of a focus on self-actualization and independence rather than a desire for a Communist Cockaigne. The lyrics of songs characteristic of Guthrie's preferred topical genres – “Jesse James” and “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave,” outlaw, “This Land is Your Land,” travel and “I Ain't Got No Home,” anti-organized religion – came from an individualistic paradigm. Guthrie's choices in crafting a musical idiom also reflect individualizing efforts. The easily played keys, chords, forms and rhythms allow a wide variety of individuals to take part in the music and also allowed for many variations on the music and lyrics while retaining the original message. Guthrie's purposeful crafting of his own image independent of the musical culture both in his hometown and around him also demonstrates his independence. The choice of ultra-portable instrument – guitar – supplemented Guthrie's rambling, self-reliant mystique.

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## CHAPTER 1

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM

Contemporary individualism was an outgrowth of Renaissance humanism which began in the early fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> As the Rebirth placed the emphasis on the good of the individual, society and politics evolved into a creature whose beneficent focus was no longer the church, God or aristocracy, but on the individual. Religious thought in the form of Pietism developed similarly over subsequent centuries, and would turn the focus from how a community could exalt God to an “exaltation of the individual's direct relationship with God.”<sup>2</sup> A personal bond between the creator and created took the place of the slave and master mentality of earlier generations. The power of the aristocracy would be turned over to politicians whose means of power lay in the people over whom they ruled, forcing them to focus on individual needs. The pace of change was often slow in the old world. Even into modern times the French word “*individualisme*” – the origin of the English, “individualism” – bears many pejorative connotations.<sup>3</sup> The vast lands of the Americas promised the freedom held by Rousseau's noble savage whose dignity was unfettered by the disruption of wicked society. During the colonial period of the region eventually dubbed the United States, when the kings of Europe maintained an autocratic rule over the settlers, the Atlantic Ocean provided enough distance to weaken those monarchs' mighty reach. For those more pragmatic than idealist the New World seemed simply a place of economic opportunity. Cheap land attracted families who had previously lived in feudalistic tenantry for generations. These families were less interested in lofty philosophical ideals than a chance for a better quality of life. Intent on eking an existence from whatever ground they could find, a sense of independence was awakened or strengthened by their isolation from regulatory bodies, particularly as settlement moved west, even further from established governing institutions.

Even as the poor classes of urban and rural Europe began to turn to their increasingly democratic governments for relief from difficult economic periods, the government of the United States relied more on

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1. Marvin Becker, “Individualism in the Early Italian Renaissance: Burden and Blessing,” *Studies in the Renaissance* Vol 19 (1972): 277.

2. William McLoughlin, “Pietism and the American Character,” *American Quarterly*, Vol 17, No 2 (1965): 163.

3. Steven Lukes, “The Meanings of Individualism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol 32, No 1 (1971): 48.

the untapped lands of the American west as a solution to economic instability. Instead of being forced to find solutions to urban sprawl, unemployment and food shortages, the United States could offer vast lands in the west of the country. Propaganda extolling the untapped blessings awaiting only the eagerness of the settler influenced the wavering and hesitant.<sup>4</sup> The new colonizers were forced to quickly adapt to a harsh, yet free environment. Families and lone pioneers relied on the government to fight Native tribes that disagreed with the settlers' land claims, but the colonists could not even in those instances solely trust the availability of the United States military. The individual had to rely on his or her own abilities to survive and thrive. This also allowed the individual more flexibility in terms of choice without the crush of humanity or watchful federal eye present in the urban areas of the East. Whatever the settlers' backgrounds, in the open, harsh, and very often lawless, lands of the American West a spirit of individualism, already present in the minds of many of the pioneers, was cultivated.

As urban centers grew, the lower east side of Manhattan, for example, became the most densely populated area in the world in the late 1800s. The Progressive movement of the early twentieth-century sought to initiate programs that would benefit society such as measures to insure the quality of food and guidelines for proper living conditions, but change was slow and the movement ended with the extremely laissez-faire, and popular, approach of the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover administrations. Though appreciative of the benefits of the increasingly socialized emphasis of the government, Americans seem to have been more interested in government staying out of the way than in a socialized state. Even in pre-Depression times, early topical lyricists, such as Joe Hill, tried to influence the sympathies of the American people toward the working class and their unions.<sup>5</sup> The American majority, particularly in the conservative west, rejected, or at least did not insist upon, government intrusion even in the form of assistance. This attitude towards governmental non-interference changed with the arrival of the Great Depression.

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4. Oscar Winther, "Promoting the American West in England," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol 16 No 4 (1956): 508.

5. Joe Hill was a union activist for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the "Wobblies" because of their emotional oratory. He penned many lyrics to already well-known melodies to spread the union message. For further information and a comparison to Woody Guthrie see Wayne Hampton, *Guerrilla Minstrels: John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee, 1986).

Americans rejected the indolent administration of Hoover instead turning to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Left. This change in attitude, however, was not universally adopted. A substantial portion of the country still felt strongly that governmental interference in personal economics was an attack on individualism. Even among the supporters of the New Deal individualism this would be a powerful idea and would influence their actions both because of personal conviction and public perception. For many Americans supporting government assistance the entrance of the government into the affairs of what had been a laissez-faire economy and lifestyle was at best a necessary and temporary evil in light of the catastrophes inflicting the pockets and stomachs of the public.<sup>6</sup> Ideas more associable with collectivism such as communism and socialism would find difficult pasture in the minds of the Americans, but the malaise of the Depression was a powerful catalyst.

The individualism that grew from the nineteenth century through the twentieth century in the United States was quite heterogeneous in its definitions depending on the philosophical associations of the partisan invoking the term. Individualism for a Social Darwinist would have different shades of meaning than it would for a Transcendentalist on Brook Farm, but both used the term as an instrument of praise.<sup>7</sup> For the Transcendentalist the term elicited a sense of self-reliance that led to a moral life and a sense of unity among others of like mind. For the Social Darwinist the idea of self-reliance remains, but it is set against a backdrop of constant competition in which natural inequality arises and society's weaker members perish even as the stronger thrive. These specific differentiations and emphases aside, the kernel of individualism for Americans in the first half of the twentieth century – who for generations had relied on the harsh, isolating and vast lands of the West for assistance in times of economic and political troubles, had immigrated from the humanistic intellectual milieu of Europe (in particular England), and whose population largely consisted of Protestant Christians with deeply ingrained beliefs in personal relationships with a supreme being – resulted in the utopian vision of “a spontaneously cohesive society of equal individual rights, limited government, laissez-faire, natural justice and equal opportunity, and individual freedom, moral development, and dignity.”<sup>8</sup> The “cohesive society” would arrive naturally with each individual seeking out his or her own good such that mutual competition would yield to mutual

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6. Albert Milbank, “Socialized Individualism,” *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly Bulletin*, Vol 11, No 2 (1933): 90.

7. Lukes, 61, 62.

8. Lukes, 59.

cooperation depending on the necessary approach for any given situation. The relatively weak government would treat each individual equally with no regard for birth, economic status, etc., and allow the free market to decide economic justice based on skill and hard work. Individual freedom translating into self-reliance would ensure the morality of the nation as idleness would be naturally punished and St. Paul's maxim, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat,"<sup>9</sup> would be vividly present in the predominantly and proudly Christian nation. Wealth should rush from the laps of the lazy to the hands of the industrious.

Even with the devastating effects of the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing decade of desperation on the part of the public the core ideals of individualism were difficult, if not impossible, to break, and the framers of the policies of the Left-leaning collectivists either consciously or subconsciously had to mold their proposals around the columns supporting the American consciousness. They did this in a variety of ways, attempting the difficult task of molding a psyche that had ingrained a sense of personal independence in itself over decades. New Deal programs such as Social Security, the Works Progress Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Tennessee Valley Authority, though providing much needed stimulus to the economy, grew the power of the federal government exponentially over what had existed during the Hoover administration. Such drastic change would have been impossible in wealthier times and needed convincing, pro-individualistic propaganda to ensure the support of the public.

One powerful element assisting the Left was the topical protest singer and songwriter. There were numerous political songwriters of the Depression Era and the tradition of combining leftist song lyrics using well-known melodies had a strong and recent history with the career of Joe Hill and other members of the Industrial Workers of the World, the radical labor union. According to Wayne Hampton, the "cultural guerrilla" tactics molded by the "Wobblies," as the IWW was known, and later by the loose confederation of Leftists ranging from Communists to Socialists to New Deal Democrats, relied on defiant art media such as music and poetry to insinuate their countercultural paradigm to a more conservative nation.<sup>10</sup> Yet even with these new, attractive media advertising much needed assistance provided by the government, the messenger, the "mind guerrilla," still retained many elements of his or her cultural

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9. 2 Thessalonians 3:10, New International Version.

10. Hampton, 61.

environment. In the United States, particularly the rural and semi-rural West and Midwest, the cultural undertones consisted heavily of individualism.

Woody Guthrie was one such topical songwriter born in rural Oklahoma who inspired generations of musicians years after his musical career was over. The adoption and adaptation of his work by such a great assortment of contemporaneous groups, from the government of the United States to the Communist Party, demonstrates the variability of the songs he wrote. This variability does not imply that Guthrie was a man who changed his musical/textual paradigm based on the specific desires of his public. Certainly he was a performer – not simply a musical performer, but a comedian, storyteller, call-and-response song leader, politician, philosopher and occasional (often in conjunction with his comedic talents) dancer.<sup>11</sup> Performers must cater their presentations to the aesthetic taste of their audience and this Guthrie did, but he did not need to sacrifice or change his core values to please the audience in Carnegie Hall even as he was writing articles for a Communist periodical. Among these core values was his inherent and culturally inherited belief in the importance of individualism in both its most positive sense, an ideal of self-reliance and self-realization, and, at times, in its least socially advantageous sense, a subordination of the general interest to the individual interest.

In addition to popular notions of Guthrie as a Communist Party hardliner, there exists in much of the scholarly world an assumption that Guthrie was primarily interested in promoting Socialist, class-centered, collectivist doctrine. Though the biographies of Cray and Klein contain a great deal of factual information on Guthrie, they do not make a serious, concerted attempt to disprove or reassess his sympathies for seemingly anti-individualistic agencies.<sup>12</sup> In *Guerrilla Minstrels* Wayne Hampton argues Guthrie “perceived his life as a holy crusade, part of the eternal quest for the communion of the utopian One.”<sup>13</sup> Hampton goes on to argue that Guthrie's lack of financial success was out of an aversion to personal profit via communal folk songs.<sup>14</sup> For Hampton's collectivist folk singer, “the typical answer to almost any problem, and the only real hope for the people, was the union.”<sup>15</sup> D.K Wilgus, in a review of the release of his *Library of Congress Recordings* defines Guthrie's music as predominantly class

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11. Peter Frumpkin, *Woody Guthrie. Ain't Got no Home* (New York: PBS Home Video, 2007).

12. Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980). Ed Cray, *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004).

13. Hampton, 97.

14. Hampton, 117.

15. Hampton, 120.

conscious.<sup>16</sup> Contemporaries of Guthrie, particularly those of the Communist persuasion, saw in him a proletariat prophet who espoused the ideals of the Revolution above all else. Mike Quinn of the *People's World*, the periodical in which Guthrie penned his "Woody Sez" articles, said, "Karl Marx wrote it...and Lenin did it. You sing it, Woody."<sup>17</sup> These oversimplified views of Guthrie as a promoter of collectivist ideology fail to account for many of the decidedly non-collectivist, individualistic themes of his pieces. Rather than understand his many expressions of self-reliance and independence under the umbrella of a Communist/Socialist ideology, it is more accurate to view his support of communal organizations such as the labor union as a means to an end. The labor union, for Guthrie, was an institution necessary to ensure the well being of the individual rather than a positive end in and of itself. The actions of the powerful were so odious as to necessitate the creation of a body devoted to the preservation of basic rights and toward improving individual livelihood.

An examination of several pieces with lyrics authored by Guthrie and tunes borrowed and adapted by the song and dance man will reveal the strong individualistic tendencies present in spite of his associations with collectivist groups. The selected songs are characteristic of larger sub-genres in Guthrie's repertoire. "This Land is Your Land" exhibits the loner mystique, rebellion against unfair oppression and the championing of the unfortunate.<sup>18</sup> In "Jesus Christ" Guthrie examines the life of Jesus and both critiques and defends the Christian tradition. The song also exemplifies the hero worship sub-genre.<sup>19</sup> "Jesse James" is based on the same music as "Jesus Christ" and contains many of the same elements, though instead of organized Christianity, it is capitalism that is critiqued.<sup>20</sup> Hero worship is again a major theme, but instead of a holy man, the object of praise is an outlaw. Based on a familiar tune "I Ain't Got No Home" is characteristic of Guthrie's composition of satirical lyrics set to hymn

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16. D.K. Wilgus, "Woody Guthrie," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol 80, No 316 (1967): 204.

17. Quoted in Richard Reuss, "Woody Guthrie and His Folk Tradition," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol 83, No 329 (1970): 280.

18. Woody Guthrie and Huddie Ledbetter, *Folkways: A Vision Shared* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1989), "This Land is Your Land." The Woody Guthrie Foundation, "This Land is Your Land," [Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/this\\_land](http://Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/this_land) (accessed July 7, 2008).

19. Guthrie, *Folkways: A Vision Shared*, "Jesus Christ." Woody Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings: Woody Guthrie* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Rounder 1988), "They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave." Alan Lomax, *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 112. The Woody Guthrie Foundation, "Jesus Christ," [WoodyGuthrie.org/lyrics/jesus\\_christ](http://WoodyGuthrie.org/lyrics/jesus_christ) (accessed July 7, 2008).

20. Lomax, 112.

melodies.<sup>21</sup> The setting of a hymn tune attacks the church even without text that explicitly mentions organized religion and is reminiscent of the older generation of topical protest song writers led by Joe Hill and his settings of hymn tunes such as “Sweet By and By” to new lyrics e.g. “Pie in the Sky.” In seeming contrast to his communist and socialist associations, individualism was an important element in these characteristic selections of Guthrie's songs.

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**21.** Guthrie, *Folkways: A Vision Shared*, “I Ain't Got no Home in This World Anymore.” Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, “I Ain't Got no Home in This World Anymore.” The Woody Guthrie Foundation, “I Ain't Got No Home.” [Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/I\\_aint\\_got\\_no\\_home](http://Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/I_aint_got_no_home) (accessed July 7, 2008).

## CHAPTER 2

### INDIVIDUALISM IN THE LIFE OF GUTHRIE

#### Early Life

The creation of these pieces must be understood in the context of Guthrie's social environment. From the beginning Guthrie's life seemed a grouping of opposites. His parents were from disparate backgrounds. His mother, born Nora Sherman, was the step-daughter of a prosperous cattle rancher while his father, Charley Guthrie, was a jack-of-all trades, cowboy, "clerk, bookkeeper, and assistant postmaster" and eventually a schoolteacher specializing in handwriting when he met his soon-to-be wife.<sup>22</sup> Their influence on their son would prove to be powerful. Nora Guthrie's old-fashioned parlor ballads would enrich young Woodrow Guthrie's cultural familiarity while Charley Guthrie's activist role in the Democratic Party, though short-lived, would be reflected and magnified in Woodrow's later career. Likewise Nora's musicality, strong taste for the better things of life and Charley's jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none, mentality would in Woody create a character who was artistically creative, monetarily frivolous while at the same time occupationally flexible, and not tied down to any single form of support for himself or his family. The vocational freedom enjoyed by Charley, though many times met with difficulty, was in sharp contrast to many of the tenant farmers tilling the Oklahoma landscape for meager wages and sometimes living in debt peonage conditions. Charley's independence would be reflected in Woody's later nomadic lifestyle, which, matched with his creative resourcefulness – he could easily don the cap of painter, writer, musician and storyteller – allowed Woody to see the world and instilled in him a wanderlust so powerful that not even a wife, children, successful musical career or pressure from his family could quench. Genetic inheritance had a darker side as the disease, which resulted in the institutionalization and irrational mental state of his mother would appear in her son and result in his long-term hospitalization. It would also be the cause of the increasingly erratic behavior apparent in his later life, which was often mistakenly attributed to alcoholism.

Born Woodrow Wilson Guthrie, but choosing the nickname "Woody," the young man quickly found performing to be an easy method of garnering the attention of others. Dancing in school

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22. Klein, 7.

productions, on streets to raise money, playing the harmonica were all part of Guthrie's teenage years.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this was one of the few avenues of public recognition left to the increasingly poverty-stricken Guthrie clan. Even in his gradually worsening economic state young Woodrow still found value in, and actively sought praise or notice from others. Guthrie's individualistic desire to be appreciated would be realized many times throughout the performer's life.

His teenage years exhibit the first signs of the nomadic lifestyle he would later employ. His mother's mental state was rapidly deteriorating and after several suspicious immolations of family members – first her daughter Clara who died of her wounds, and second her husband Charley who later gave disparate accounts of the incident – Woody abandoned the family, though remained in the area, preferring to stay with friends with more stable households. Guthrie's independent streak is apparent even here when instead of handling, and perhaps helping with, difficult issues, he chose to leave, preferring a life of freedom to a life of responsibility. His preference for self-realization as opposed to suffering for what might have been the collective good of his family is an early example of his individualism. This behavior would be seen with his own wife and children.

His early wanderings were of necessity punctuated by a dependency on the kindness of others, but even here Guthrie's independence is to him paramount. The reliance on others was diminished by the fact that when one neighbor, relative or friend grew tired of him, or vice versa, there was always another he could quickly charm. In later reflections, Woody's sister Mary Jo referred to him as a "tramp."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, his lifestyle was outside the norm of the typical Oklahoman. While staying with one family in particular, the Moores, Guthrie showed both his independence and generosity. Having earned money through his musical performing, the Moore's patriarch suggested that Woody should buy himself some underwear. Instead Guthrie bought treats for the Moore children.<sup>25</sup>

Adolescent Guthrie's spotty academic career is another example of contradictions brought on by his strong sense of individualism. Though eager for books and learning, organized public education was of little interest to the young man. He preferred to study what pleased him. The subjects he studied were often those that received very little, if any, attention in public schools, subjects like mind control, mysticism

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**23.** Cray, 29-30.

**24.** Cray, 32.

**25.** Cray, 32.

and Eastern philosophies.<sup>26</sup> Rather than choosing the more logical path set forth by public school, Guthrie, still interested in learning, chose the less pragmatically useful, but more autonomous route. This would be a path he would choose for the remainder of his independent life before the effects of Huntington's disease became too much for him to cope with alone. The value he placed on knowledge even at that young age is exemplified in a manuscript he penned on the fundamentals of psychology that the friendly librarian thought enough of to put on the shelves.

Public education had more than simply other subjects with which to compete for the attentions of Guthrie. Music was having a profound influence on the life of the young man. Though offering few apparent economic benefits, the art form did earn money sporadically. Even ambition could not force his hand. Ambition would have meant an extended period of submission to wealthier or more powerful authority figures and this antagonism towards the powerful would remain a powerful theme in Guthrie's life. Music, along with his skills in painting, drawing and storytelling, relied on the audience or patron, but did not put the performer under inflexible bonds as farming did to the tenant. The performer, particularly the nomadic performer that Guthrie was and would continue to be, could easily move from venue to venue with his ultra-portable instruments in hand, usually the fiddle, guitar, banjo or harmonica. Guthrie's use of the guitar was opposed to the less mobile piano or organ used more often by musicians in the church whose character would have been closely scrutinized by members of the congregation. The roaming musician had little to worry about in disturbing the public's mores and the venues in which they played were often those where morality was more often ridiculed than enforced.

Living in Pampa, Texas as a young man in his early twenties Guthrie's choices in occupation, when he bothered to make them, were such that allowed individualism. As a sign painter Guthrie could finish a job and move on to other, more interesting applications of his attention. The jobs did not provide steady employment, but instead of this being a deficiency, it was a boon. Guthrie's more regular employment as a soda jerk/moonshine seller was itself flexible. Guthrie often left town for days not bothering to show up at work, but finding his employer to be relatively easily charmed.<sup>27</sup>

Music was another sporadic source of income. Forming a group with his friends Cluster Baker and Matthew Jennings, called the Corncob Trio, gave the young Guthrie time to hone his musical skills,

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**26.** Cray, 44.

**27.** Cray, 48.

while familiarizing himself with the fiddle from his uncle Jeff. Guthrie's musical abilities at this early stage were amateurish, but here he was forming the style that would stay with him in his trips across the country and from coast to coast, a style that was firmly ingrained and that would remain in place throughout his career. This is not to say that Guthrie was inflexible in learning new genres and forms. Blues and talking blues became integral parts of his repertoire and he learned many new songs and tunes in his travels. Guthrie's ties to his rural, Southwestern/Midwest lifestyle, however, would be central to his performance and public persona. Regardless of pressures from Communist Party leaders or commercial interests, Guthrie would follow his own conscience in his musical style and other affairs.<sup>28</sup> In general he refused to pander, but this was true especially concerning issues that were most important to him.

Guthrie's courtship of his friend Matthew's younger sister Mary Jennings began in typical fashion. Mary followed Woody to barn dances at which he played and a romantic bond took root. The young lovers' courtship continued in spite of Guthrie's perpetual unemployment, Mary's family's deep Catholicism and her father's strong opposition to their relationship.<sup>29</sup> The independent streak of Woody existed in Mary as well. On at least one occasion she, with three of her friends, had made an ill-advised journey in the middle of the day to the red-light district where Woody was playing. They were married October 28, 1933, in the heart of the Depression. Woody would say later that they had not entirely been aware of the Depression because times were always hard.<sup>30</sup> She had recently turned sixteen and Woody was twenty-five.

Guthrie was not an attentive husband or father. His resolute individualism translated into a disheveled appearance, neighborhood disapproval and a restless wanderlust. Mary's passivity made married life more bearable. "Woody wasn't ever easy to live with," she is reported as saying, "He always more or less did what he wanted to do. I think, all his life."<sup>31</sup> The subsequent years of the Depression were the hardest, most terrifying yet with the great dust storm of 1935 called "Black Easter" and more and more farmers gave up and moved west. Guthrie, meanwhile, had taken up faith healing to support himself and his family. Corresponding to his earlier interest in psychology, Guthrie counted on the power of positive thinking to soothe and cure diseases. Often he simply provided a sympathetic ear to the plight

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**28.** Klein, 106,123.

**29.** Cray, 62.

**30.** Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*.

**31.** Cray, 67.

of the sick and desperate. While rarely profiting more than a few coins, Guthrie's concern for the plight of the poor would be a staple of his continuing career.

Guthrie's serious wanderings began in 1936 with a trip to Houston. The stated aim was to support the family through faith healing, but "the more of it I saw," he said, "the more I decided it was worse than a waste of time."<sup>32</sup> Staying with friends along the way he was often broke when he arrived to sleep on their couches or cots. When he found an odd job he was just as liable to give his money away as to keep it. One story told by an old family friend said Guthrie had given his first paycheck from the grocery store he had been working at away to an elderly man he met on the road.<sup>33</sup> Guthrie's philanthropic monetary choices demonstrate both his capacity for individualistic expression and concern for the well being of others. With a wife and growing family back home Guthrie decided on more than one occasion to forgo sending them support, but instead donate his money to those around him. Selfish individualism would have found Guthrie using his earnings for evident self-gratification. The opportunities certainly existed with bars and brothels often being the places most amenable to Guthrie's musical talents, but aside from accounts of alcoholism in later life – the "alcoholic" effects were more probably the symptoms of Huntington's disease – there is little evidence from friends or acquaintances that Guthrie used a substantial amount of money on drinking, gambling or sexual stimulation.

The philanthropy shows a concern for others, but also a lack of concern for the state of his family. Individualism and collectivism are here very closely associated, but it is in the decision-making process that we see Guthrie's core, individualistic approach. The counsel taken by the young man consisted of no one except himself. He made decisions based on personal convictions, not societal mores, concerning earned profits. Guthrie's charitable actions show he was not a collectivist waiting for others to join him in his crusade. As an individual he could contribute to the betterment of society one helped human being at a time. These same personal convictions would lead him to join causes more in line with collectivist sentiment such as the Communist Party and union organizations. Even then Guthrie would maintain and cultivate his individuality.

Guthrie's continued roaming demonstrates an individualism that was more concerned with personal self-actualization than with societal obligations. Townspeople and relatives of Mary Guthrie

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**32.** Cray, 78.

**33.** Cray, 79.

regarded Woody's excursions with disapproval. While Woody was traveling mysteriously through the country Mary was left at home to care for the children and herself. Woody would rarely return home with as much money as when he left. The community's criticism does not seem to have affected Guthrie either to change his behavior or to show any visible remorse. Mary was not a demanding spouse and accepted Woody back after each excursion without exhibiting the tension that began to accumulate beneath the surface. Meeting with those who were often termed "dust bowl refugees" satisfied Guthrie in a way that staying at home never could. Perhaps it was due to his wandering nature, perhaps due to his desire to help the least fortunate, but his journeys through the American countryside continued even after receiving a steady income from his music through radio broadcasts and the selling of sheet music – the sheet music consisting both of traditional and original melodies and song lyrics. It was at some point during these travels that Guthrie heard the Carter family rendition of "This World is Not My Home," to which he responded with the bitter "I Ain't Got No Home in This World Anymore."<sup>34</sup> Guthrie's social consciousness was deepening as his success was blossoming.

### **Musical Career**

This success occurred after another excursion, this one the furthest yet, to California. The cruel treatment by police of the thousands of migrant workers from the Midwest and South further instilled in Guthrie a sense that the state of society was not correct as it now stood and filled him with a desire to change it. Torturous travels eventually brought him to the home of relatives in California and to meeting Maxine Crissman with whom he began a musical partnership that resulted in a surprisingly successful radio program. When a more lucrative offer to work at XELO station in Mexico came, Guthrie moved himself and his family to Tijuana. The "X" stations could transmit their signals free from American regulations and could cover a large swath of the United States, reaching even to Canada. The stations hawked miracle cures and catered toward the rural crowd. Woody's chaotic organizational style was criticized by the station owner and continued meddling on the part of the boss stung Guthrie and the group. Yet it was only when an armed guard of Mexican officers ordered Guthrie and the band out of the country that they ended their trans-border occupation. Guthrie was welcomed back by his former employer in the United States, but his independent nature and wandering interests made even an

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34. Klein, 118-119.

apparent dream job – a job that allowed him to use his musical and charismatic talents for profit – unable to sustain his interest. His family again would suffer. His wife complained he was not doing the “manly thing,” by leaving his family to travel the countryside after only recently inviting them to join him in California.<sup>35</sup> Guthrie, loving of his family, but growing increasingly sensitive to issues of social justice, hopped a freight train to Northern California as a traveling “hobo correspondent” for the Socialist newspaper *Light* (though Guthrie, with his typically independent mindset maintained he was a Democrat).<sup>36</sup>

From these travels Guthrie came to see the plight of the vagrant Midwesterners. He came to view their struggles not as a result of unfortunate happenstance brought on by dust clouds, the industrialization of farming or years of drought, but as a result of the scheming of powerful banking institutions. “For every farmer who was dusted out or tractored out...another ten were chased out by bankers.”<sup>37</sup> Guthrie's evaluation was mostly correct. Many of the migrants had been sharecroppers and the landlords had simply refused to renew their leases, preferring to garner profits by other, more efficient means. The social consciousness continuing to develop in the Oklahoman was driven by a sense of individual rights rather than collectivist sentiment. Placing blame on a blanket collective – bankers – presented a clearer solution to a complicated problem. The catastrophe was not caused by nature or God, but by rich, greedy men looking to profit on the misfortunes of others. Guthrie would come to see the unions as answers to these problems as means to solutions, not ends in and of themselves. Guthrie was not seeking to return to an idyllic way of life via union assistance, but a way to reclaim the sense of economic independence the migrants had experienced before the Great Depression.

Returning to his home in California Guthrie met Communist Party member Ed Robbin, a fellow employee of the radio station. The station owner was pleased to have the folk singer back. It was not the Marxian politics of Robbin that drew Guthrie to him and thereby the Communist Party, but the story of Tom Mooney, a labor organizer who had been imprisoned for 23 years with weak charges and scant evidence.<sup>38</sup> For Guthrie the attraction began not because a grand social vision, but because of a personal story. The concern of the Communist party for the minority and the poor also attracted him.

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**35.** Cray, 132.

**36.** Cray, 127.

**37.** Cray, 134.

**38.** Cray, 140.

According to Robbin himself “Guthrie cared nothing for political theory.”<sup>39</sup> He was more concerned with explanations for and solutions to the plight of the indigent unemployed and underpaid. Unlike most members of the Communist Party he never praised the Soviet Union's practices in criticism of the practices of the United States. Now, as later, he would remain a firm patriot in spite of pressures to denounce the American government's foreign relations. Solutions that did not originate with the Party and that Communists regarded as foolish Guthrie often held as workable such as Socialist writer Upton Sinclair's “scheme of production for use, rather than for profit...[or] California-based pension movement that promised thirty dollars every Thursday to the poor and elderly.”<sup>40</sup> The Party viewed Sinclair's proposal as a capitalist gimmick and the pension as shortsighted. Though he was certainly at an intellectual disadvantage without a strong grasp of political philosophy, Communist dogma would not take a commanding hold in his personal ideology. He is reported to have fallen asleep regularly at meetings waking only when he was politely informed that it was his turn to go on stage.

He was also never officially a Communist Party member, in spite of his later claims to the contrary. According to Ed Robbin, the Party member who introduced Guthrie to the American Communist Party, Will Geer, the prominent actor and friend of Guthrie, and his own wife Mary, Guthrie was not deemed a good candidate for entry into the party, and understandably so.<sup>41</sup> His association with the American Bolsheviks was out of a desire to help the plight of the migrant laborers and the Communist promises of answers. Guthrie's individualistically independent open mind allowed him to consider the Communist Party without the specter of the post World War I Red Scare hysteria many Americans still associated with the Party. His open mind also allowed him to move away from the Party on the issues he felt they held incorrectly. “Woody Sez,” the title of the op-ed he would write for the Communist periodical *People's World*, was never as overtly Marxist as the rest of the paper. He was the only employee of the paper that did not go through a stringent weeding out in search of those not politically in line with the Party's decrees.<sup>42</sup> The Party's adoption of Guthrie was an attempt to Americanize Communism, by having it appeal to the masses, rather than recognition of Guthrie's orthodox acceptance of Marxism. Although Marx had envisioned the adoption of Communism among the industrialized societies of the modern world,

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**39.** Cray, 146.

**40.** Cray, 148.

**41.** Cray, 150-151.

**42.** Cray, 152.

here as in Russia and China, the attempt was being made to proselytize the rural farm worker. Guthrie, himself a member of the rural class, augmented his hillbilly credentials by purposeful misspellings and poor grammar in his "Woody Sez" column. In performances he acted less educated than he really was to fit the Left's stereotype of the American "noble savage."<sup>43</sup> The Party's sense that a person like Guthrie was needed to advertise Communism to the new influx of Midwestern and Southern agricultural laborers sped his acceptance into the Party's circle without the requisite hard line doctrinal beliefs.

After Guthrie moved to New York, success followed. There he met Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger and other Leftist intellectuals that helped further his career. Lomax recorded a session of folk and original songs by Guthrie. He then arranged for RCA to commission the songwriter, based on Lomax's recommendation alone, to put together a set of songs concerning the Dust Bowl and its effect on the population of the era, known as *The Dust Bowl Ballads*.<sup>44</sup> CBS hired Guthrie to perform several times on air over several months. Guthrie had never had so much success, notoriety, money and women fawning over him. It came as a huge surprise then when the restless individualist decided to take a vacation from his success yet again, preferring a life on the road to a comfortable life in the media. He was fortunate to later return to reclaim the momentum of his success.

Continued work for the network yielded incredible profits for the son of a business failure. With success came increasing responsibility including requests made by CBS executives concerning the songs, types of songs and even script Guthrie should use for the broadcasts. CBS was wary of associations with the Communist Party and favored an interventionist policy in Europe at the time, 1940. This was a policy the Party bitterly opposed. Guthrie was clearly more Red than CBS was comfortable advertising and the singer remained opposed to not only the then current war, but war in general. Pressure to keep the jobs CBS was willing to give him was compounded by the arrival of his family now consisting of a wife and three children. Guthrie's keen individualism would not be stifled, however, and he left a career that would have provided when calculated for inflation, well over \$100,000 a year. Characteristically independent, Guthrie would say later that year "I wouldn't take a penny's tip for singing a song I didn't like."<sup>45</sup>

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43. Cray, 170, 181.

44. Woody Guthrie, *Dust Bowl Ballads* (Washington, D.C.: Folkways Records, 1964).

45. Cray 197, 202.

Joining the Almanac singers reinvigorated his career, but his insensitive indifference to the group grated on their communal lifestyle.<sup>46</sup> His eating habits, rudeness to friends of the group and alarmingly regular states of drunkenness stretched the group's patience. Meanwhile the entrance of the Soviet Union into the Second World War ended Guthrie's activism as an antiwar songwriter. The focus of the songs remained populist, however, with the union becoming the redemptive centerpiece of his oeuvre. Often the subjects of these songs "Union Maid," "Song for Bridges," etc., were concerned with a single individual fighting against an overwhelming capitalist system. Even in the collective spirit of unionism Guthrie turned to the individual's heroics, integrity and sufferings for inspiration. The constant touring strained Guthrie's already tenuous marriage and a de facto split occurred in late 1941.

Despite the hard times the Almanac singers and Guthrie found success fairly soon. This quick success resulted in commercial interests clamoring for the group's services. Business executives demanded the group fit into rural stereotypes thereby catering to public perception of the folk. This was met with opposition from Guthrie and his group who feared compromising the group's core beliefs of unionization and social justice. Guthrie, though, was particularly belligerent and was reported to have once played a harmonica over the negotiations between the group and an agent.<sup>47</sup> Disgust over being asked to don bonnets and overalls to appeal to an audience expecting stereotypes rather than real people made work increasingly distasteful. Fortunately or unfortunately the group's past as anti-war protest singers with Communist leanings came to light and resulted in their blacklisting.

The communal lifestyle the Almanacs engendered living together in an apartment in Greenwich Village was not something Guthrie, ever indifferent to personal hygiene and the sensitivity of others, was well suited to. He would often have to be reminded or ordered by his second wife Marjorie to do such basic things as brush his teeth or bathe himself. His rudeness was also off-putting. Some openly wondered whether he did this on purpose to annoy the other tenants, his fellow musicians. Pete Seeger of the Almanacs told friends "He's a pain in the neck when you're with him...but I kind of miss him when

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**46.** The Almanac singers were a musical group with a liberal agenda. They were started in 1940 by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays, but the membership constantly changed, having as many as eight full members and even more associates. Guthrie joined the following year.

R .Serge Denisoff, " 'Take It Easy, But Take It': The Almanac Singers," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol 83, No 327 (1970): 21-32.

**47.** Cray, 237.

he's gone."<sup>48</sup> These strained personal relationships are examples of Guthrie's desire to remain independent. He wanted others to know he could leave the group at any time.<sup>49</sup> While Guthrie's musical career with the Almanacs was ebbing, his writing career was flourishing. *Bound for Glory*, his semi-factual autobiography, after being published was met with glowing praise from most critics.<sup>50</sup> He received a stipend from the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship through the influence of Alan Lomax for the purpose of writing, "books, ballads, songs and novels that will help people to know each other's work better."<sup>51</sup>

Guthrie's affair and marriage to Marjorie Mazia, who was married at the time of their meeting, continues the individualist theme central to Guthrie's life. Mary, Guthrie's first wife, was used to his dalliances with other women. She took the attitude of many women of the period. Infidelity was something that men did. The constant moving of her family, however, was cause enough for her to break the pact of marriage, in spite of Mary's strict Catholic upbringing.<sup>52</sup> Marjorie was by no means the first affair. Guthrie was unconcerned with the mores of the population at large and the liberal beliefs of his Leftist associates were a far cry from the conservative Midwest.

Guthrie's divorce and chiding from fellow musician Cisco Houston pushed Woodrow into joining the merchant marines in 1943. Being divorced meant Guthrie was legally single, and in spite of having fathered a total of four children, he was eligible for the draft.<sup>53</sup> Volunteering meant Guthrie could enter the military on his own terms and from the beginning he met it with enthusiasm and leadership. While the army may have been more focused on discipline, the merchant marine seemed to allow Guthrie enough leeway to flourish. A ban on personal diaries for fear of spying was ignored when it came to Guthrie's many notes concerning the naval way of life and actions of the fellow men. As had been the case throughout his life, Guthrie managed to disregard the rules, but thanks to his charisma and popularity with the other men, was not punished. Guthrie was a "continual source of wonder, a good luck charm, a mascot almost, but wilder and more unpredictable," and this sense of otherness contributed to the unprecedented freedom he received during his time with the merchant marine.<sup>54</sup> The freedom allowed

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48. Klein, 360.

49. Cray, 231.

50. Cray, 265-266.

51. Cray, 267.

52. Cray, 226.

53. Klein, 265.

54. Klein, 268.

Guthrie to overrule even the strict segregationist policies of the United States military. Guthrie had become acquainted with many African Americans in his associations with Communists, Socialists and other Leftists, and became close friends with Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Leadbelly. Aboard the ship while visiting with and exchanging music with African Americans in their segregated quarters, the captain of the vessel, acting in accordance with standard protocol, ordered Guthrie to return to white quarters. The ship was under attack and Guthrie's power to boost morale through song was not lost on his commanders. Guthrie refused until the colonel allowed fifty of the African American sailors to accompany Guthrie to the white quarters to perform together.<sup>55</sup> This incident demonstrates Guthrie's fierce independence, in contrast to the usual strict discipline needed during wartime for military personnel. Guthrie did not strike for equal rights so much as refuse to leave an area that was musically stimulating. Though the civil rights symbolism was patent, the individualism, in the midst of life threatening enemy operations no less, exhibited by Guthrie was an equal contributing factor to the incident.

Guthrie's commission ended and he believed himself to be free of the military when Germany surrendered, but was nevertheless drafted by the Army on the seventh of May, 1945, the day of Germany's surrender. Because of his small frame and relatively weak physical capacities he was assigned duties as a teletypist. Guthrie's aversion to the Army contributed to his joining the merchant marines and this had been a good choice. Guthrie did not fare well under the strict military discipline of the Army. Showing his independence, in rebellion of the Army's wishes, he purposefully lowered his typing score to spite the Army.<sup>56</sup> This was unsuccessful in all respects. It only resulted in the ire of his commanders. Guthrie's letters to Marjorie at the time show both his desperation and, for the period, a relatively deviant expression of sexuality consisting of masturbation, menage a trios and taunts concerning his sexual advances with other women.<sup>57</sup> The now 34-year old Guthrie was showing increasing reliance on his new bride, however, and these explicit letters were often followed by sheepish apology notes. The conflict of individualism and a desire for companionship is here more clearly seen than before. He had never been so forward *or* so apologetic to Mary.

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**55.** Frumpkin. Cray, 280.

**56.** Klein, 296.

**57.** Klein, 295ff.

The America at the end of the war was much different than the one suffering through the challenging times of the Great Depression. It was much more prosperous. The proletarian consciousness and criticism of capitalism proliferated by the Left was not as easily assimilated by the growing bourgeoisie and newly appeased working class. Communism in American was weakened beyond salvaging with the beginning of the Cold War. Seeger and others influential in the roots of the later folk revival began meeting with limited success, but Guthrie's performances would become exercises in audience stamina.<sup>58</sup> He would play the wrong chords purposefully, forget the words, stumble on stage, steal money and objects at the parties he attended and perform any number of offensive actions. Woody had always been independent, bordering on anarchic in his performances, but never to this self-destructive extent. Alcoholism was blamed, and although a life that sometimes involved excessive drinking may have been involved, there is little doubt the madness that had consumed his mother and would destroy his mind and body had already begun to become manifest. His sexual advances toward women had ceased to be threatening, but now only embarrassed his new wife.<sup>59</sup> He found it difficult to concentrate on his writing. Guthrie's manuscripts were a tangled, wordy mess caused by distractions that would not have affected his concentration in earlier times.

The death of his daughter Cathy wreaked further havoc on the precarious mindset of Guthrie. A new career writing children's songs had occupied much of the time of Woody and Marjorie. Cathy had been the inspiration. The attention he had neglected to give his other children was lavished on Cathy. After his daughter's death in a fire, a death so very similar to his sister Clara's, Guthrie's output lacked the inspiration of earlier years.<sup>60</sup> An enormous manuscript of his novel *Seeds of Man* was turned down because of its unwieldy size. Then he was charged with sending obscene letters through the mail by the younger sister of his former singing partner Maxine Crissman. He was typically unrepentant. He claimed he should have the right to say whatever he wanted to in a letter. He said if obscene "meant 'of the low and common people,' that was what he wanted to be."<sup>61</sup> The accused was sentenced to 180 days in jail, where he, ever the individualist, began to plan to put together a "pageant" to entertain the inmates. This

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58. Klein, 320.

59. Klein, 325.

60. Klein, 349.

61. Klein, 354.

plan would never see fruition, however, because, thanks to his lawyer, he only spent a few weeks incarcerated, much to his disappointment.

As his mind deteriorated his individualism remained. At the onset of the Korean War Guthrie decided to side with the North Korean Communists and even wrote a song praising the death of an American general.<sup>62</sup> From 1950 on his mental disease became more and more apparent. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see Huntington's disease begin to tear apart Guthrie's mental capacities, but at the time alcoholism was blamed for his erratic behavior. The level these actions were allowed to proceed to before serious help was considered is shocking and demonstrates the oddness and independence of Guthrie throughout his life. He would use spoonerisms in writing and speech. He would substitute vulgar language in place of names – Beach Haven became Bitch Heaven and New York City became New Jerk Titty. He would write his name over every page in a manuscript he was writing.<sup>63</sup> After physically attacking his wife who was in the process of divorcing him he checked himself into a mental hospital. He had not yet turned forty.

### **Final Years**

When he learned of the diagnosis, that he was doomed to live with a continually dying brain, at the most immediate opportunity he checked himself out and fled. His independence would not be cowed even with the specter of his mother's demise hanging over him. He met up with friends from his days in California and began a liaison with a 20-year old married woman that resulted in a divorce from Marjorie and marriage to Anneke Van Kirk. The marriage was typically Guthriesque in its uniqueness. They traveled the country finally settling in a Florida swamp at the home of a friend who was out of the country. The relationship was, of course, frowned upon by Marjorie, who considered herself Guthrie's real wife even if she had taken a lover.<sup>64</sup> An accident involving fire and a subsequent infection began Guthrie's decline again into the throes of Huntington's disease.

Variouly checking in and out of hospitals, Guthrie finally arrived at Greystone Park, a state mental ward in New Jersey, where he would be forced to stay – as a result of an arrest for vagrancy – for the next five years. In spite of his forced stay Guthrie retained an independent spirit, trying to find positive

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**62.** Klein, 359.

**63.** Klein, 363.

**64.** Klein, 391.

reasons for staying as if this sojourn was his idea, refusing to let others light his cigarettes – in spite of his uncontrollable, shaking hands – and maintaining correspondence with many of his friends and family members although his handwriting was now nearly illegible.<sup>65</sup> Alan Lomax on a visit exclaimed how strong Guthrie's pride and will remained even as his body deteriorated.

Throughout his life Guthrie maintained an independent and individualistic spirit. This spirit would translate into his writings and his music. In spite of pressures to accept responsibility placed upon him by others the songwriter's indomitable sense of freedom would not be compromised. This spirit would influence the northeastern-centered folk revival of the 1960s as many progenitors of the musical and cultural revolution, notably Bob Dylan and Rambling Jack Elliot, visited their idol as he slowly deteriorated in various hospitals. Even in this deterioration his individualistic personal freedom remained.

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65. Klein, 414.

## CHAPTER 3

### GUTHRIE'S WRITINGS

Guthrie was a fairly productive writer considering his short life and roaming lifestyle. Two works in particular, *Bound for Glory* and *Woody Sez* are demonstrative of his writings. They represent an amalgamation of the types of literary works he composed. *Bound for Glory* is his autobiography as of 1940 and is a mix of factual, exaggerated and fictitious events. *Woody Sez* is a collection of his essays, published between May 12, 1939 and January 3, 1940, for the *People's World* a Communist Party periodical circulating in San Francisco. The literature authored by Guthrie further demonstrates the important role individualism played in his life and personal philosophy.

#### **Bound for Glory**

*Bound for Glory* begins in medias res. The reader meets Guthrie in the condition in which much of Guthrie's life was spent, traveling. The form of travel Guthrie uses in this account is rail. The use of the railroad is significant for several reasons. The railroad was a method of transportation that, when used as it was by Guthrie, did not involve reliance on another human being. Therefore it allowed independence not possible with hitchhiking, which depended on charitable motorists. Hopping the rails gave Guthrie free travel. This was not only necessary, because of Guthrie's minimal access to monetary resources, but also liberating. Guthrie certainly thumbed rides from motorists and made quick friends of necessity in order to transport himself, but the use of the rail is very prominent in *Bound for Glory*.

Guthrie often associated the railroads with the same characteristics he applied to bankers. What the railroad companies were in the nineteenth-century, bankers were in the twentieth: greedy individuals intent on eking every ounce of profit from the indigent farmer. By utilizing the services of the railroad, but not actually paying for the trip, Guthrie could take advantage of the railroad businessmen, and in some small way extract vengeance. Retribution against the powerful while offering understanding and forgiveness to the less fortunate would be a theme Guthrie ascribed to himself throughout the book. This sense of defying those whom he had no hope of defeating or really affecting, but defying anyway, was a theme Guthrie had applied to his own life as well as his writings.

Illegal railroading was dangerous not only because of its prohibition by the authorities, but because of the dangers inherent in riding on top or inside of a boxcar not made for human occupation.

Also dangerous was the type of individual riding the rails: criminals and the criminal minded. These dangers only played into the individualistic mentality Guthrie tried to associate with himself. The autobiography begins with a fight between Guthrie and one of these individuals in particular. Faced with a belligerent opponent Guthrie characteristically did not back down and managed to throw the aggressor out of the car with one hand while holding onto his guitar in the other. The fighting theme continues in his proud description of his father who he says “was a man of brimstone and hot fire, in his mind and in his fists, and was known all over that section of the state [Central Oklahoma] as the champion of all the fist fighters.”<sup>66</sup> For Guthrie fighting was a necessary part of life – not something to be glorified, but something that every man needed in order to survive, especially during difficult times.

The theme of the lone traveler continues throughout the book. Once, while traveling to the home of a wealthy relative, and after especially brutal traveling experiences left him exhausted and hungry, upon reaching his destination and seeing the comfort in which those inhabiting the neighborhood lived, he promptly decided the life of luxury was not for him. He left and returned via road and rail to the poverty engulfed Dust Bowl. In this case the concept of leaving a potentially comfortable lifestyle for the hardships of the road was certainly based on fact. The rambling personality so admired by Guthrie’s young fans during the folk revival period is here presented with very clear choices. In reality the choices were rarely clear. Guthrie often did settle down for months, even years at a time, but whether his personality made it impossible to remain static for very long or whether domestic conflicts and boredom were the catalysts for his frequent changes of location is not made clear in his autobiography which is more concerned with presenting a free image than with interpersonal relationships or the harmful effects of wanderlust.

Guthrie makes clear his affection for minorities, especially African Americans, a sentiment at odds with his rural, Southwestern background. During a fight on the train, Guthrie elicited the help of a young man whom Guthrie repeatedly refers to as “Negro.” The reiterations of the boy’s race are not needed. It is clear he is a minority after the first mention of the boy, but Guthrie wants to make clear his non-racist sympathies, which were in opposition not only to much of the conservative public in the domain of his youth, but much of the country in general.

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66. Woody Guthrie, *Bound for Glory* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 38.

Guthrie demonstrates his defense of the minority as a viewpoint he espoused even as a child. Guthrie sees this defense of the minority as a necessary step towards the minority achieving self-realization, a step the minority was usually too oppressed to achieve on his own. According to Guthrie neighborhood gangs and fighting were ways of life for the children in the boomtowns the boy and his family inhabited. The fights between gangs turned into a war between the children of the old and new townspeople. Guthrie had been considered a part of the older, established group of kids, but found the exclusion of the new children distasteful and left to join the newer kids. Though seemingly doomed to be an outcast among his former friends, Guthrie and the newer children launched a successful attack on the lair of the more established kids. This battle was symbolic of Guthrie's later struggles against capitalism's negative effects on society. The newer children symbolized unions. Never mind that in actuality Guthrie was a relatively mild-mannered child who was not considered a leader by his peers. In the reality composed by the folk-singer he was not only a strong leader, but also a leader who chose to fight for what was right in the face of tyrannical orthodoxy. In Guthrie's story it was the young Woody who composed the "war letter," basically a manifesto demanding equal rights and fair treatment by the boys of the old gang. For Guthrie standing up for what he believed was right was more important than remaining a part of a powerful group. Even as a child, according to the account, Guthrie expressed his own individualism to fight for what was right even if it meant going against those who had considered him a friend.

The subsequent union of the two gangs, former rivals, is analogous to the labor union movement promoted by Guthrie and his aims for self-actualization that could only be reached by using the gangs/unions. After winning the battle, peace was declared by the victors. The leader said, "Both gangs is one now. That was what we was fightin' for."<sup>67</sup> In the gang, as in the union, the fight was for the fair treatment of the individual whether he was a part of their collective or an unknown other. The unions offered this fair treatment by demanding better conditions and wages for the employees. Eliminating those who would not permit fair treatment from the leadership and replacing them with newer, fairer minded chiefs the gangs likewise created an egalitarian society. Here, as in other writings by Guthrie, it is those that have experienced suffering executed by those in control who offer the most enlightened

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67. Guthrie, *Bound for Glory* 167.

leadership. The collectivist actions were a means to an end in both cases, a necessary rather than a preferred action, in the case of the gangs, bloodshed (albeit on a relatively minor, childlike scale).

In the autobiography an older Guthrie in his twenties chooses a strange occupation as an amateur psychologist/superstitious medicine man/general advice giver. The choice of job shows more than Guthrie's wide-ranging interests, it also shows his fondness for self-employment. In his struggles to find his place in society Guthrie decided early, "I wanted to be my own boss. Have my own job of work whatever it was, and be on my own hook."<sup>68</sup> Guthrie did not want to have to answer to any authority, a difficult proposition considering his socio-economic background and the then-current state of the economy. The independent young man chose the more difficult route that led to independence rather than well-worn path of the follower-employee. Furthermore, Guthrie savored the idea of choosing his own destiny. "...wondered where was I bound for, where was I going, what I was going to do? My whole life turned into one big question mark. And I was the only living person that could answer it."<sup>69</sup> The questioning statements would bring worry to many with a family such as Guthrie, but the victorious concluding statement reveals the extent to which Guthrie appreciated this type of lifestyle.

Guthrie's intense interest in psychology may be a symptom of an obvious concern and curiosity for his mother's illness and insanity, but it also shows his desire to help the individual find self-realization rather than a more general concern for the group at large. The Guthrie character periodically revealed this interest by helping the person most in need of help, but least regarded by society at large. His unsolicited assistance of the police in the apprehension of a madman tearing apart the town is one example. After carefully listening to the man's story and befriending him Guthrie was surprised to learn that his new friend, Heavy Chandler, had been arrested and was being sent to the insane asylum from which he escaped. The mere mention of Woody's name was enough to relax Heavy's rampage, so powerful was the effect of the folk-singer/psychologist's attentions to the occasional maniac. Although Guthrie's attempts to help Heavy in a sense backfired – the sending of Heavy to the insane asylum was precisely the opposite effect desired by Woody – his attentions show his concern for the individual, no matter the status of the person.

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<sup>68</sup>. Guthrie, *Bound for Glory* 226.

<sup>69</sup>. Ibid.

Guthrie's speeches to his fellow hobos are filled with sentiments rife with individualism. In a trip to California a group of men surreptitiously traveling illegally via railroad were discussing politics, religion and the sour state of the economy. Being homeless and destitute the complaints concern the idea of a good God not taking an active part against the blatant evil in the world. It was an evil manifested in the delicious fruit growing right in front of their impoverished faces, yet out of reach. In spite of the audience's disapproval of Guthrie's solution to the issue, the ramblin' man said, "I dunno, fellers, just to be right real frank with you. But it's our own fault, all right, hell yes. It's our own personal fault if we don't talk up, 'er speak out, 'er something."<sup>70</sup> The complex and titanic problems of the poverty stricken masses were, according to Guthrie, their responsibility, implying that the solution also was within their grasp. This bypasses the problem of the role of God, and it also either absolves the deity of guilt, or dismisses his role in the world and existence itself as irrelevant. The problem was the lackadaisical, defeatist attitude of the individual and the solution was also within the individual.

### **Woody Sez**

The essays of *Woody Sez* were written for a Communist Periodical, but because of the relative leeway given to Guthrie in his composition of the essays, they are surprisingly individualistic and apolitical in tone. The statements Guthrie makes are generally simple as are the solutions he presents to complex political questions. As he reported in his column, when asked a question by two Communist intellectuals, whether policemen are hired to protect widows and orphans or the rich, Guthrie answers that they must be hired to protect rich folks' property because while a banker can easily "rob" a farmer, if a farmer ever robs a banker he will be punished.<sup>71</sup> His solutions to the national debt, or "debit" as termed by Guthrie, were equally simple.<sup>72</sup> These folksy observations are representative of many of the articles written by Guthrie. Combined with phonetic, purposeful misspellings and grammatical mistakes they reveal Guthrie's determination to affect not only the elite, but the masses as well by appealing to their moral sense. This was in direct contrast to the aims of much of the members of the Communist Party and columnists for the *People's World*. They were more interested in lofty political rhetoric and argument that was not focused on proselytizing the uneducated, but on converting the intelligentsia. Guthrie's concern

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70. Guthrie, *Bound for Glory*, 304.

71. Woody Guthrie, *Woody Sez* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975), 17.

72. Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, 21.

for the individual moved him to write in language more accessible to those with whom he associated on a daily basis. Guthrie wanted to reach the thousands of displaced workers unable to achieve what was to them an acceptable level of economic self-actualization. While the Party placed the emphasis on attracting members of the intellectual community Guthrie was interested in the inclusion of those who had been most affected by the economic crisis of the 1930s. The differences in political ideology reflect the disparity in personal philosophy. The Party felt power should be in the hands of a few. These elite would assist the masses through their benevolent guidance. Guthrie wanted the mass of nescient rural, migrant workers to understand the problems and work to find solutions.

Guthrie's views of other problems are similar. Instead of proposing a Communist Party panacea formulated under Marxist dogma, Guthrie suggests that a major problem was the passage of too many laws.<sup>73</sup> In excoriating the numerous laws and the resulting imprisonments of so many people Guthrie's sympathies seem to lie more with anarchists than with Communists. In Guthrie's view of prison, the only people the laws help are criminals with money, specifically gangsters and crooked politicians. The biggest help to the proletariat it follows would be to eliminate the laws. This was in contrast to the Communist model of viewing laws as a tool to guide people into a Communist Cockaigne. Guthrie wanted the power in the hands, not of a government that he felt could be too easily influenced by the pressures of the dollar, but in the hands of individuals to make their own decisions without unnecessary and corruptible interference.

Guthrie offered individual responsibility as a solution to war. In addressing the looming conflict with the Axis powers, the then peace-minded Guthrie (his pacifist views in keeping with the Communist Party) saw the root of war as a result of the class system. While this may be in keeping with the communal ideology of the Party, Guthrie's explanation of this system was in individualizing terms. The first statement appears to be an argument for equal distribution of wealth: "As long as the pore [sic] folks fights the rich folks wars, you'll keep a havin' pore folks, rich folks, and wars."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Guthrie went on to postulate, "do away with pore folks...rich folks...middle class folks. An' you automatically do away with wars." These statements – certainly attractive to not only the Party intellectuals and hardliners, but also to many of the less educated and unemployed laborers who were the core of Guthrie's audience –

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73. Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, 19.

74. Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, 63.

however, were more political rhetoric than pragmatic solution. Guthrie went on to say “I wood [*sic*] have a lots of fights if I had a nother [*sic*] feller to fight ‘em for me. But since I got to do my own fightin, I try not to have no trouble. Same way with everbody [*sic*]. Make ‘em do there [*sic*] own fightin’ – and you do away with fightin.”<sup>75</sup> Guthrie reduced inter-nation-state conflict into a dispute between individuals. The rich should not be able to send the lower classes into conflict. Conflicts should be solved by those involved in the conflict, and not by unrelated third parties. Responsibility does not rely on the collective state or union of the people but on individuals.

The utopian, communal fellowship the editors of the *People’s World* sought was in contrast to the simpler, more conservative and more individualistic goals set by Guthrie. When a Republican-backed article attacked government programs aimed at helping the homeless migrant workers, Guthrie viewed the government’s support as a necessary evil that has been forced upon people by the tremendous unemployment in the country. Communists and Socialists applauded many of these programs of Roosevelt’s New Deal. Guthrie would prefer that the poverty stricken receive “a chanct [*sic*] to work an’ earn our livin”<sup>76</sup> rather than these humiliating payouts. The government support Guthrie saw was such that living conditions were miserable – fit for animals, but not humans. The focus of the article, however, was not on improving these conditions, but on returning to a self-sustaining, independent lifestyle.

Guthrie’s writings demonstrate his individualism in a concern for individual rights that superseded more encompassing goals of fraternity and union. The fraternity and union Guthrie was a part of and often spoke in favor of was more a means to an end rather than an end in itself. A less charismatic columnist might have faced more pressure from Communist leadership, but Guthrie’s you-need-me-more-than-I-need-you attitude combined with the popularity of his articles gave him a job with such stability that it only ended when he wanted it to. Guthrie’s gift for writing translated into the composition of song lyrics laced with individualism.

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75. Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, 64.

76. Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, 30.

## CHAPTER 4

### INDIVIDUALISM IN THE LYRICS OF GUTHRIE

The lyrics set by Guthrie echo the individualism of their creator. Guthrie created many clearly topical songs for the purpose of a single performance or event. The following pieces are more general and representative of the spirit of his oeuvre. Although two pieces deal with specific characters, “Jesus Christ” and “Jesse James,” they do not focus on a single situation or action by the individuals. Rather, they offer a panoramic view of their subjects’ lives and highlight the emblematic deeds Guthrie wanted to be remembered most. “This Land is Your Land,” and “I Ain’t Got no Home” also reflect the individualism of Guthrie. An examination of the lyrics of each will demonstrate strong individualistic traits, even to the detriment of the community, in spite of the fact that many were written during Guthrie’s most active period in the Communist Party.

The 1940 Lomax/Smithsonian recordings are a vital resource not only in the recording of Guthrie’s songs, but in the corresponding commentary Guthrie supplies before and after many of the pieces in response to Alan Lomax’s questioning.<sup>77</sup> Oftentimes the 24-year old Lomax prompts the 28-year old Guthrie with questions and suggestions for song topics. Other times Guthrie moves to the next song with nary a pause. Both the hesitation on the part of Guthrie to play a song, as in “Railroad Blues,”<sup>78</sup> as well as his eagerness to play a song before Lomax can intervene, as in “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave,” are telling. The “live” nature of these recordings allow off-the-cuff, relaxed commentary by both Guthrie and Lomax. Several of the pieces contain alternative – perhaps improvised – lyrics and errors on the part of Guthrie such as the pronounced difficulty in maintaining a steady beat in “Railroad Blues.” The liveness is important because it reveals Guthrie’s immediate responses rather than the more thoughtful – perhaps, at times contrived – analysis expressed in his writings and lyrics. The one-take recordings also give a clearer example of how Guthrie performed. Multiple takes and over-dubbing would have allowed a more polished, less authentic – at least in terms of liveness – performance.

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77. Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave.”

78. Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, “Railroad Blues.”

## **This Land is Your Land**<sup>79</sup>

“This Land is Your Land,” while characteristic of Guthrie’s ballads praising nature as in “Roll on Colombia,”<sup>80</sup> is in several ways unique in Guthrie’s oeuvre. It is quite wide in its scope, focusing not on single personalities as the other selections, but on a vague sense of vastness and a loner mystique similar to “Goin’ Down the Road Feelin’ Bad,” only with a more positive slant.<sup>81</sup> The conclusion of “This Land is Your Land” ends defiantly optimistic while “Goin’ Down the Road Feeling Bad” simply ends with defiance. Another focus of the song is the oppression caused by private property when it is held in a manner that immorally prevents the use of that property for the benefit of individuals in need. The same selfish greed is criticized in “Do Re Mi”<sup>82</sup> when the people of California deny migrant workers from the Midwest use of the state’s fertile and unoccupied land. “This Land is Your Land” matches anger with sympathy for the homeless as in “Dust Bowl Refugee”<sup>83</sup> where the plight of the wandering, pitiful laborers is discussed in a state of hopelessness.

“This Land is Your Land” was written in 1940 to the tune of the Carter Family’s “Little Darling, Pal of Mine” which was itself set to an earlier southern hymn tune “Oh, My Loving Brother.”<sup>84</sup> It was originally conceived as a response to Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America.” Guthrie felt the sentimentality of Berlin’s anthem was artificial and saccharin.<sup>85</sup> Guthrie proposed a new examination of God’s gifts called “God Blessed America for Me.” Already in the title, through the use of the singular, first person pronoun “me,” Guthrie placed the emphasis on the individual rather than the collective American nation. Patriotism – a concept that is meant to unify a large group of heterogeneous peoples, particularly in the melting pot that was and is the United States – in “God Blessed America for Me” is replaced with personal ownership from the outset. The title did not keep for several reasons. The line “God Blessed America for Me” is found nowhere in the song. The incipit “This land is your land” is a memorable phrase, a complete thought and

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**79.** See Appendix A, pg. 62, for lyrics.

**80.** The Woody Guthrie Foundation, “Roll on Colombia,” [Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/Roll\\_on\\_Colombia](http://Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/Roll_on_Colombia).

**81.** Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, “Going Down the Road Feeling Bad,” The Woody Guthrie Foundation, “Going Down the Road Feeling Bad.” [Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/Going\\_down\\_the\\_road\\_feeling\\_bad](http://Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/Going_down_the_road_feeling_bad).

**82.** The Woody Guthrie Foundation, “Do Re Mi,” [Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/Do\\_re\\_mi](http://Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/Do_re_mi). Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, “Do Re Mi.”

**83.** Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, “Dust Bowl Refugee,” The Woody Guthrie Foundation, “Dust Bowl Refugee,” [Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/dust\\_bowl\\_refugee](http://Woodyguthrie.org/lyrics/dust_bowl_refugee).

**84.** Cray, 165.

**85.** Frumpkin.

short. Add to this the fact that as the refrain it was repeated after each verse and it is easy to see why this was a more readily adopted song title. Also, if seen as a negative response to the favorite "God Bless America" it would be difficult for the song to survive and thrive in the patriotic United States. While the title changed, the message remained. America was land that belonged to each person. Collective ownership too easily translated into ownership by the wealthy a concept that is expounded upon in a later and less well-known verse discussing private property.

The first verse, also the refrain, contains individualizing words on the first and last lines: "Your," "my," "you" and "me." The geographical regions describe the immensity of the country and highlight the freeness such a vast nation engenders. Guthrie, when understood in the context of his vision of California as a land of plenty reserved only for the rich, saw no reason for human beings to live in servitude to one another considering the vastness of the nation. There was plenty of land to go around. There was no need to call it "our" land because there was enough for each individual to collect or utilize. This was their native right. The mention of California twice in the first verse, once by name, once by association with the redwood forest, further emphasizes Guthrie's attention and accusatory insinuations to the land of plenty when this plenty is provided only for the rich. In "Do-re-mi" Guthrie criticizes the state for allowing into California only the wealthy established and turning away the "14,000" migrants that desperately need the work. California was a symbol of the both the fertility and beauty of the nation and the greed and cruelty of the rich, greed and cruelty that should have had no effect on the poor considering the vastness of the nation. This was a vastness that should have allowed individuals enough personal freedom to avoid enslavement, but something had gone wrong.

The second verse continues the theme of vastness begun in the first and combines a theme of travel hinted at in the refrain. The travel is reminiscent of Guthrie's own life of vagabondage. The enormity of the land seems to suggest an aimless wandering for the sake of wandering. The freedom experienced by the traveler, untouched by society, further expresses the idea of individualism. There is no need for cooperation in this land. Each person creates his or her own existence. The third verse reinforces the lone traveler theme mentioning the narrator as having "roamed and rambled." The first line continues with "I followed my footsteps." Here is an individual unconcerned about the needs of the community. There is not a country of brothers; instead it is a nation of one, a state of many individuals.

The mysterious voice “sounding” could be the voice of God, the voice of the people united as one, or the voice of another solitary individual confirming from afar the personal ownership of the land, a land so immense as to offer plenty for distribution to “you” and “me,” two individuals seeking self-realization.

The fourth verse continues the theme of the third: Wandering freedom. “Strolling” denotes a kind of aimlessness. The observant traveler of the song is meandering peacefully and freely through the countryside offering a very clear picture of individualism untouched by outside influence. The lyrical refrain – “This land was made for you and me” – returns again to confirm the personal ownership of the land for the speaker and listener.

The fifth verse introduces the first conflict of the song and as such was often removed from renditions of the song in later performances. The “No Trespassing” sign encountered by the traveler is so antithetical to the mentality of the narrator that he does not seem to understand the meaning except that he finds the other side more aesthetically appealing. This may be understood as an attack on property rights. The attack, however, is not so much on the ownership of property, but on the exclusion of its use to others when clearly the owner is not present. It may be more accurate to explain this as an attack on those whose holdings are larger than they can personally manage, e.g. the bankers who repossessed the Oklahoma farmers in the Dust Bowl. The problem was not private property itself, but an irresponsible ownership of the land that caused hardship to the less fortunate. The attack may equally be understood in light of Guthrie's disapproval of law enforcement. Without the law to force compliance the traveler is free to make his own decisions. These are decisions that hurt no one and that only the traveler, because he is present at that time and place, is equipped to make. The final line returns a modified form of the refrain. Instead of “this land,” the line reads “that side.” This makes more sense in light of the verse's text. It also sets up the even more modified refrain of the following verse.

The sixth verse, understood in context of the fifth, explains Guthrie's dissatisfaction with the “No Trespassing” sign. With so many of “his people” standing hungry there was no reason for the land to be free and unused. The Christian Church is attacked by the mention of the “steeple,” a symbol of their religious buildings. Criticism of religious leaders was a theme of Guthrie's writings and other songs, notably “I Ain't Got No Home,” which explore the link between religion and barriers to self-achievement. The criticism lies in the attitude of the church leaders unwilling to help the poor and hungry, or to offer a

plan that would restore some dignity to the nomadic homeless, in spite of their proximity. The church refused to be an active part of the lives of those struggling to survive. With survival being such an uncertain commodity there was a minimal chance of reaching Guthrie's ideal of self-actualization. His criticism of municipal officials is equally biting. In the Folkways version instead of repeating "my people" twice in lines one and two, he replaces "in the square of the city" with "in the shadow of the steeple" and the first line's "I saw my people" with "in the shadow of a steeple." The mention of the city's squares as the location of these hungry homeless represented the city's refusal or inability to offer a lasting solution to their predicament. In Guthrie's eyes the secular and religious communities had failed in providing adequate care for their own people. Collective cooperation had failed and must be remedied to assist the individual. The solitary individual of the previous verses is disturbed by the abhorrent conditions created by the community which is unable to cope with the situation, a situation that did not exist in the open, free spaces the previous verses glorified. The final line of the verse is unique in the piece in that it is in the form of a question. It is the angriest point of the song and sets up the aggressiveness of the final verse. Without a doubt, as the previous verses stated, "this land was made for you and me." The injustice of the plight of the poor is therefore not only unacceptable, but is also a sin staining the American conscience.

The final verse is assertive in the traveler's autonomy. The challenge of the first line sets the tone. The certainty of the individual's overcoming of any obstacle shows the determination of the lone traveler to realize his desires. This certainty does not rely on a communal relationship or in working together for the common good. The places the traveler found the most joy, peace and promise of self-actualization lay in the vast stretches of land minus the presence of large groups of people. The political philosophy of this song then cannot be summed up in words such as Communist or Socialist, neither can it be ascribed to promoting a capitalist economic system. The language of the song is too simple for that. A more accurate label for the song would be individualist. The struggle for self-actualization is more important than a unity between individuals and in the world of this song, the grouping of individuals into larger blocs has met with only a general state of misery. The individual is the focus of the song and the community is seen only in negative terms.

## **I Ain't Got No Home<sup>86</sup>**

Similar to the origins of “This Land is Your land,” the roots behind the creation of “I Ain't Got No Home” were formed in reaction to a piece Guthrie felt was optimistic to the exclusion of reality. The Baptist hymn “This World Is Not My Home” focused on the promised joys of heaven: “My treasures and my hopes are all beyond the blue where many Christian children have gone on before.”<sup>87</sup> Guthrie's suspicious nature towards organized religion found the lyrics too dismissive of the then current state of affairs. In the notes to another song critical of organized religion “Pie in the Sky,” Guthrie lambastes those urging to wait until the afterlife for a better life. “Some fellers seem to say that if you work good and hard down here on earth you'll get a dam good meal when you're dead, too dead to enjoy it. Well, for me, I would ruther have my pie here while I can still taste it.”<sup>88</sup> “Pie in the Sky” was an old organizing song sung by the Industrial Workers of the World. Like “Pie in the Sky” – which was set to the tune of “Sweet By and By – “I Ain't Got no Home” was based on a hymn tune whose lyrics encouraged the faithful to look forward to reward in heaven. Joe Hill, the lyricist of “Pie in the Sky,” condemned the fatalistic attitude of the church in its dismissal of contemporary living conditions. This genre of setting satirical lyrics to well-known hymn tunes was known to Guthrie and is explored in “I Ain't Got no Home.” Concern for the individual, according to both Guthrie and Hill, should take place on earth where such action matters rather in the afterlife when according to Christian theology everything was decided anyway. Regarding the religious layperson Guthrie said, “give him groceries to take care of his stomach and his soul will take care of itself. If your soul is eternal, it won't git lost.”<sup>89</sup> For Guthrie, the religious exhortation to focus on the next life was only an excuse to avoid answering the difficult questions of this one.

Guthrie's piece is sung in the first person just as “This Land is Your Land.” The use of the first person is even more apparent in this piece than in “This Land” where the focus is mixed between the traveler and the vast and beautiful landscapes. The singer in “I Ain't Got no Home” is telling a story of the difficulties of his life, a story echoed by many of the people Guthrie had met while traveling on the road. The prominent use of the first person personalizes the song, making the journey of the individual all the more compelling.

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**86.** See Appendix A, pg. 63, for text.

**87.** Klein, 117

**88.** Lomax, 88.

**89.** Ibid.

The roaming quality of the first verse echoes themes from many of Guthrie's other songs and Guthrie's own life. It emphasizes the freedom the individual has on the road, although in this case this freedom is mixed with economic hardship. The wandering is more bitter than sweet because at its root is the search for employment. The police, the representation of society's laws, bring difficulty from the outset to the individual who is, as far as the listener is aware, only looking for a way to earn a wage. The group dynamic is presented negatively. The individual behaves in a responsible, positive manner, but the reaction by society is to hinder his actions.

In the second stanza the individual is joined in his hardships by those he calls "brothers" and "sisters." The familial language used by the individual brings those facing the same hardships closer to each other, personalizing the group dynamic. This collectivization of the group into a family relationship is the only place in the piece that the individual's contact with society is in any way sympathetic. The sympathy is impotent, however, because it does not lead to any positive action toward improving the situation. The "million feet" struggling through life lack the means or, more probably when understood in light of Guthrie's individualistic mentality, the will to accomplish the necessary actions to right the wrongs perpetuated upon them by the "rich man" of the third line. The actions of the rich man, also individualistic in nature, are to the detriment of the worker and his "brothers" and "sisters." While the rich man's individualism is exhibited in a negative light, this opposition to the rich man's actions are not in protestation of the rights of the individual, but in the interference of the rich man in the livelihood of another, equally important individual. For Guthrie the freedoms of the individual were absolute, until those freedoms conflicted with the life and quality of life of another. Extra power did not and should not prescribe extra rights. The actions of the rich man explain the refrain of each stanza's final line "I Ain't Got No Home." The symbol of economic and political independence for the rural laborer, the home, had been lost to the greed of those already in possession of much.

The third verse tells of two events in the narrators' life. The first event discusses the hard-working, honest nature of the narrator and the advantage the bankers took from his labor. Bankers here, as in Guthrie's other writings, represent the greedy, who will allow all types of injustices for the sake of wealth. This mysterious conglomerate repeatedly inflicts difficulties on any poor individual it can. The crops the sharecropper has grown are turned over to the banker who has done no work, but reaps the

most benefit. The capitalism Guthrie sees here is not the individualizing capitalism of the free person earning a living by his own sweat and wit. The practices of the bankers have turned capitalism into slavery. The sudden death of his wife is meant to elicit sympathy and its proximity in the song to the discussion of the bankers associates her death with their actions as a collective.

The subject matter of the first three lines of the fourth verse gives a more detailed explanation of the refrain. The difficult labor – mining and harvesting – the narrator has been forced to do has meant nothing as he loses his home. A powerful symbol of independence for rural workers at that time, the homestead, had been taken away though the narrator had been working harder than ever, and for as long as he could remember to keep it. The individual had lost the impossible battle to the bankers, and in return for all his labor all he had was worry about the next actions to take because of the loss of his habitation.

The angry tone of the piece continues in the last verse with a last piece of bitter irony. Guthrie makes clear that these observations of the state of things are obvious: “It’s mighty plain to see.” The simple language in which he wrote this and other pieces demonstrates his desire for his creative material to be comprehensible to a great variety of individuals with or without complex political and economic philosophies. His message was not to the elite, but to everyone. The injustice of the world had been made clear in that while the hard worker had lost everything, the symbol of ill-gotten gain, the gambler, had profited. This may be understood as a reference to land speculators who had bought farmers’ lands at basement prices and were now forcing them to leave for the purpose of building more efficient and more profitable industrial farms. Calling this situation “great and funny” highlights Guthrie’s sarcastic, yet homey wit. This was the kind of joke that could be ruefully appreciated by the listeners of the extremely catchy melody. The gloomy, one line refrain again ends the stanza and the song reminding the audience the injustice suffered by the individual, the loss of his home, still remained, and would remain unless something was done.

### **Jesse James and His Boys<sup>90</sup>**

Guthrie’s fascination with outlaws may have come from a variety of sources. Oklahoma and the surrounding areas had been considered the “Wild West” only a few generations ago and the memory of

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**90.** See Appendix A, pg. 64, for text.

outlaws' daring deeds was still fresh in the minds of many. Another possibility for Guthrie's interest may lie in the inherent individualism the outlaws possessed. Their calling was not to help society, but to take from it what they could. The romanticized outlaw was fiction, but many Oklahomans, Kansans, Texans and others of the West and Midwest saw criminals like the James brothers and Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd as brave heroes outrunning and outsmarting the law. The actual truth behind the acts of the outlaws would not be as important to the folk or folk artist as the public's perception of the outlaws. While Guthrie's exposition of the deeds of Jesse James cannot be understood as an attempt to relate factual events, it can and should be seen as an attempt at promoting Guthrie's own views concerning admirable actions in a daring, individualistic human being.

"Jesse James and His Boys" is an example of Guthrie's outlaw genre. The glorification of the outlaw is seen in several pieces by Guthrie such as "Pretty Boy Floyd,"<sup>91</sup> which discusses Guthrie's point of view concerning the outlaw. His outlaw had pronounced Robin Hood-like traits and a violent disdain for cursing. The amazing feats of the outlaw are expounded in "Pretty Boy Floyd" as well as in "Jesse James and His Boys." In "Philadelphia Lawyer"<sup>92</sup> the vindictive murder of the lawyer on the part of the cowboy is looked upon with approval much as the killing of "many a man" in "Jesse James and His Boys."

The focus on a single protagonist was an important device Guthrie used to individualize his songs. In "Jesse James and His Boys" the focus is very clearly on Jesse James. This brings the audience closer in sympathy with the outlaw. This empathy may entice the listener to apply a selection of the outlaw's actions to his or her own life. Guthrie does not attempt to discuss the "Boys" of Jesse James much except to mention his brother Frank in passing reference to their homestead and as background characters in the refrain. Jesse James is by far the most important figure in the song. The audience is left with the impression that it was Jesse James by his own will who accomplished the gang's many feats. Here we see Guthrie again choosing the power of the individual as the vehicle for progress as opposed to collective effort.

The first verse begins in medias res with Jesse James and his companions robbing the mail coach. The storyteller follows up the first two ambiguously positive lines with two lines that set the tone as a piece of praise for the outlaw. Jesse James's amazing ability to overcome the obstacles placed

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91. Guthrie, *Library of Congress Recordings*, "Pretty Boy Floyd," Lomax, 114.

92. Guthrie, *Folkways: The Original Vision*, "Philadelphia Lawyer."

before him in the form of the rich man's security guards – as Guthrie would describe policemen – was a testament to his skill and worthy of admiration.<sup>93</sup> Admiration was deserved not only because of the skills, but because of the audacious slap to the face of the impotent authorities. Here was the individual triumphing in spite of rich society's most effective means of quelling criminal individualism. Prison would never cage the spirit or the body of Jesse James. He would remain free and continue to cause damage to the property of others.

The refrain confirms the daring of the two brothers and praises them for their actions. There is not an ounce of fear felt by the James brothers in the refrain. The attacks on the railroads were treated as minor, everyday, occurrences. Their criminal activities are also softened by a worthy vendetta. Their mother was killed, as the listener soon finds out, by a railroad employee intent on removing the James family from their land for use by the railroad companies. In discussing the murder of their mother in the same context as robbing trains the narrator praises not only their righteous mission, but the bravery it had taken to attempt the execution of such a task as well. Robin Hood, a powerful archetype for outlaws, is in this case not a good comparison to the James character. Robin Hood, like James was an outlaw who robbed from the rich. Robin Hood, however, was still subject to the mores of society. He donated his excess, the better part of his earnings, to society's most desperate. While James had a moral argument in favor of his illegal activities, it was immeasurably more individualistic than social justice. It was a personal vendetta. Other songs by Guthrie, notably "Pretty Boy Floyd," drape outlandish acts of charity on the backs of mostly unworthy criminals, but this is not the case in the James piece. James actions are individualistic to the exclusion of any form of collective consciousness.

In the second stanza the storyteller introduces the audience to the bloodiness of the James lifestyle. The brothers are said to have killed many men. Murder was the most final of all crimes and the most serious. It shows a personality more concerned with details of its own comfort than with the existence of another and those to whom that other is related by blood, mutual reliance or friendship. The narrator, however, does not apologize for James's destruction of life. Instead she explains that they did this in spite of their character rather than because of it. They were forced with the choice of surrender to the dictums of the forces in power or to blaze their own path irrespective of the mores of society. The

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93. Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, 14.

choice of the latter garnered them praise from Guthrie and many others interested in the individual's perseverance and success in the face of insurmountable odds.

The bucolic start of the following verse is a shock when compared to the violent themes of the previous stanza. The pastoral, familial utopia reveals some of the narrator's individualistic bias. Isolated and undisturbed by the presence of society, the James family lives an ideal existence. When the demands of the collective whole deem the James lands better suited for railroad use than farming, Jesse and Frank are expected to hand over the property as many others of the period did. Also like others subjected to the same request, the James brothers declined. The refusal, though not specified, probably stemmed – at least in the song – from an understanding and respect for personal property rights. Whether the property belonged to the James family from time immemorial or from last week, the idea of personal ownership superseded logical sense, the type of sense that suggested capitulation rather than protestation. The James brothers probably would have known that resistance to the whims of the railroad juggernaut could only have been met with their own annihilation. In spite of this they made decisions based on their own, individual moral sense of rightness, and not on conventional wisdom.

The treachery of the railroads is exposed in the fourth verse. A railroad scab, like a union scab, should be understood as an individual who, for his own gain, harms the well being of another through helpful participation with the powerful bloc of the wealthy. The incongruent irony that the railroad's destruction of the life of Mother James parallels the James brothers' own destruction of the lives of others is not satisfied except by understanding that the actions of the James brothers were always against the odds and more daring than the actions of the railroads. The bravery of the James brothers is highlighted even more in light of the treachery of the railroad hoodlum. Jesse James met overwhelming adversity face to face while the thug surreptitiously killed a sleeping old woman with a bomb. The radiant individualism of Jesse James is thus all the more apparent in contrast to the actions of the railroad scab. Immediately after the murder of his mother James prepared to satisfy his blood lust. He did not seek assistance from society's authorities. He sought to mete out justice on his own terms rather than those of the society whose alpha members had brought about his mother's death.

The narrator's disapproval of the cowardice of the railroad scab was similar to the introduction of the listener to Robert Ford, the murderer of Jesse James. The sneakiness of Ford to feign friendship was

compounded by his affair with Jesse's wife. Ford espoused a great deal of individualistic sentiment by taking the life of James in return for unknown gain, perhaps supposed reward or out of jealousy for James's wife. His cowardice and murder of a man that had exhibited a drive for self-realization unlike any other condemned Ford to a reputation steeped in infamy rather than laud. Cowardice was a character flaw Guthrie would not forgive. It implied that there was something wrong with one's actions or uncertainty in one's abilities. Guthrie would accept neither. The individual must strive to achieve and overcome, and if she fails, she must do so in pride knowing she had accomplished as much as possible. Ford's achievement must be noted, however, in contrast to the railroad's impotence. Only a self-minded individual could hope to defeat one equally independent.

The murder of James by his *faux amis* heightened rather than quelled his legend. The combined might of societies' elite could not bring down the outlaw. Only by a cowardly sneak attack by a fellow bandit, who was thought to be a friend, could the demise of James be accomplished. Though James had been killed, he had also won by defying the forces determined to bring him to their form of justice. James would never be caged. He had made his own rules from beginning to end and had paid for it with his life. He had won the respect of the society he had so long riled against. In the final stanza the respect the townspeople or gravediggers demonstrate to James is clear in the dismissive manner they treat the murderer of a man deserving more honor than his inglorious death garnered.

### **They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave<sup>94</sup>**

Guthrie had a complex relationship with Christianity. Although he disdained the trappings of organized religion – finding churches eager to accept offerings, but hesitant to dispense their wealth to the needy – he was, toward the end of his life, a practicing and apparently sincere believer in Jesus Christ and Christianity's redemptive power.<sup>95</sup> Guthrie saw his own relationship with organized religion reflected in the life of Christ and Jesus' relationship with the religious leaders of his day. The unwillingness of the churches to help the poor in Guthrie's day was foreshadowed by the “preachers” of Jesus' day. Though “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave,” like “Jesse James and His Boys,” “Pretty Boy Floyd” and “Philadelphia Lawyer” should be classified in the outlaw genre, it is unique in the religious nature of its

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94. See Appendix A, pg. 65, for text.

95. Klein, 408.

subject. The “socialist outlaw”<sup>96</sup> Guthrie saw in Jesus was a character he could relate to and he implanted individualistic traits in his vision of the messiah. In the Lomax recordings Guthrie was eager to share this song in particular. Many of the other songs were drawn out of Guthrie through Lomax’s questioning. “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave” was one piece that Guthrie performed soon after the previous song. Guthrie allowed Lomax no time to comment on the previous song or to suggest the subject matter of the next. Lomax in fact seemed to find the religious subject matter uninteresting or uncomfortable because his follow up question after the performance of “Jesus Christ” focuses on bankers, a subject the song referred to only incidentally.<sup>97</sup>

The piece begins with an often-repeated theme in the songs of Guthrie: Wandering. The Christ found in the gospels did indeed travel through much of Judea, but the focus on this wandering by Guthrie elicits an image of a roamer free from the constraints of society. Travel in Guthrie's own life and in his songs was a very powerful symbol of freedom and independence. Throughout the song Christ is referred to mostly as a solitary figure. There is no mention of the disciples, only the more generic followers, and the only mention of the community as a whole in a positive light occurs after Christ's death as they wonder about his demise. Christ represents the individual who is unafraid to speak the truth in spite of society's lukewarm acceptance of his message. The positive traits Guthrie chooses to adorn Christ with are individualistic traits rather than communal traits. Calling Jesus a “Hard-working man and brave” denotes independence. The hard work shows him to be a man who is self-sufficient and his bravery hints at his willingness to face the ire of the community for what he knows is right. This bravery is exhibited in the third line where he tells the rich to give their money to the poor. Social justice was an important element in the teachings of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. His command to a young ruler to sell all of his possessions to give to the poor is one example of Christ's teachings on wealth.<sup>98</sup> This message of generosity, though important to the gospel account of Christ's ministry, was only part of his teachings, yet in Guthrie's account Christ’s message is exclusively concerned with economic redistribution. For Guthrie this raises the individualistic determination of Christ. Now the Messiah must

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**96.** Klein, 157.

**97.** For more information on perceived bias in the field research of Lomax see Benjamin Filene, “‘Our Singing Country’: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past,” *American Quarterly*, Vol 43, No 4 (1991): 602-624.

**98.** Luke 18:22.

not only deal with religious leaders, but with bankers and sheriffs, the villains present in many of Guthrie's other songs.

The mention of Christ's occupation as a carpenter in the refrain is important because it labels him as one who did not rely on the generosity of others, but earned wages through the "hard-work" mentioned in the previous stanza. The criticism Guthrie aimed at the religious leaders often sprang from their participation in non labor-intensive jobs while their parishioners toiled in factory and field. Christ remained independent of the labor of others in order to sustain himself. The similarity between "Jesus Christ" and "Jesse James" already patent because of the use of the same melody and harmonies,<sup>99</sup> becomes even more clear in the description of the traitors: "Bastard and a coward called little Robert Ford" and "dirty little coward called Judas Iscariot." Both lay their respective leaders "in the grave." The outlaw theme also ties Jesse James and Jesus Christ together in Guthrie's song. In both cases the murder comes as a result of community pressure administered by the powerful (although Jesse James was murdered by an individual, this was the result of assumed public pressure and a promised reward). The community then has blood on its hands while the individual's only crime was an attempt to achieve better lives for that very community's most indigent. This condemnation of the religious society of Jesus' day by Guthrie was an act more extreme than even the gospel writers were willing to bring forward. John's gospel describes a prophecy the high priest had concerning the immanent and necessary death of Jesus for the sake of the Jewish people.<sup>100</sup> The priests plotting Christ's crucifixion are often described as seeking to preserve peace with Rome. The outspoken healer was preaching a new kingdom from heaven that superseded the power of Caesar. In light of the sensitive political situation and the repressive nature of the Roman authorities, the actions of the priests and people are not as surprising, and less abhorrent. Guthrie is not as kind. He views the community's murder of Christ as a method of silencing a lone voice demanding justice for the poor.

The following strophe describes Jesus' journeys to the sheriff, perhaps a contemporary reference to the Roman government, and to the preachers, representing the Pharisees. Guthrie is kind enough to use clear non-metaphorical language. Instead of having the Roman authorities represent the civil authorities in his present day, Guthrie uses the present day term for the authorities and has them stand

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**99.** To be discussed in Chapter 4.

**100.** John 11:51.

for the Romans. Guthrie wanted there to be no ambiguity in his message. He wanted each individual who listened to understand that the same forces Christ fought against were still present and Christ's example of individualism and resistance should be reiterated to fight the current foe. Again the message of wealth redistribution is clear. Guthrie's Christ did not ask for a portion of the jewelry of the rich, but all of it to create a more egalitarian society. The brashness and bravery of the Guthrie's Christ demonstrates the character's utter contempt for the practices of society and a wish to redefine it according to Christ's own moral compass.

Jesus' leadership is obvious in the third strophe as he gains the support of the "working folks." This support is not enough, however, to escape from the clutches of the "bankers and the preachers." Though not explicitly criticizing the impotence of Christ's followers their support is argued to be ineffective. The individual could not rely on the support of even an amiable collective group. The only source of reliability was the self. The mention of "bankers" in line three is another example of Guthrie's anachronistic language for the purpose of clarifying meaning that might be less translucent in the form of a metaphor. This was a song meant for the individual rather than for the elite leaders of a collective. The simplicity opened up the meanings to the less educated more quickly than more symbolic language might. The "bankers" described by Guthrie may be referring to the moneylenders in the temple whipped by Christ in an uncharacteristic fury.

The impotence of Jesus' followers, the community, is implicit in the following stanza. Christ's crucifixion can only be met with disappointment and shock. There were none either willing or able to stand up to the political might of the Romans and Jewish leaders. Only Jesus did, and because of the moral weakness of his followers and the fear of the religious and political leadership he was murdered. The powerless masses could only "wonder why." The "big landlord" mentioned in line three of the third stanza tied the experience of Christ with the experience of the many laborers who had been forcibly removed from their former domiciles by the owners of the land. The individualism espoused by the landlord is not positive although it is powerful. Guthrie recognized the evil that a quest for self-actualization above all else could achieve, but also the results such personal greed could accomplish. The soldiers, another generic collective, were only pawns in the hands of the landlord. The individual could manipulate the amoral group to his or her own ends.

The final verse describes the persecution the proponent of the individualism espoused by Christ would receive in Guthrie's contemporary society. Much like Guthrie himself, Christ offered a message contradicting the wishes of the elite, but promoting the benefit of the masses. Guthrie's pessimism toward both the impotent power of the collective and the overwhelming might of the upper class would be re-realized in the modern day execution of the religious figure. The Orthodox Christian message of redemption through belief in Christ's death is nowhere to be found in the songwriter's theology. Replacing salvation through faith is a view of individualism as the correct mode of action in one's life and a rather negative, or at best neutral, view of the collective, even the community of the Rabbi's followers.

The individualism present in the lyrics of each of these pieces demonstrates Guthrie's concern with self-actualization, occasionally to the exclusion of faith in communal viability. His Communist leanings and affiliations suggest a positive attitude toward the power of the collective. Upon further examination of the lyrics of several of these song selections, however, traits revealing his pro-individualist stance are made evident. This praise of individualism demonstrates a break with the Communist Party on important, core philosophies. It becomes clearer, therefore, that Guthrie did not associate with the Marxists out of ideology, but out of the vision the Leftists had for helping the poor, a vision with viable solutions.

## CHAPTER 5

### INDIVIDUALISM IN THE MUSIC OF GUTHRIE<sup>101</sup>

Guthrie's impact on the popular music world was felt the most strongly years after his career had been derailed by the onset of Huntington's disease. Through the actions of his self-appointed pupil Bob Dylan, friend and co-musician Pete Seeger and other members of the Folk Revival the Guthrie legend thrived even as Guthrie's body and mind wasted. In many ways, their adoption of Guthrie as their idol was more an expression of their often-varied perceptions about who this man was. To some, such as Ramblin' Jack Elliot, a young, Jewish native of New York, he was the embodiment of the American West. Elliot admired this ideal to such an extent that he worked to imitate the speech and mannerisms of his hero exactly. So exactly did he mimic that Guthrie, then in the beginning stages of the disease that would kill him, began to see in vivid detail his own mental and physical unraveling.<sup>102</sup> To others, such as Seeger, he was embodiment of the kinds of people the Left both needed and sought to help, rural, with an uneducated wisdom, humble beginnings and simple desires. Guthrie's musical style was almost an afterthought to some in the Folk Revival. He was by no means a virtuoso, but he was a capable musician. His simplicity was, in part, what attracted so many to his music. It was neither difficult to enjoy nor to imitate. The messages of the lyrics of these songs were most important, but that is not to say the music was merely a non-participant in the message. Several songs created by Guthrie, "This Land is Your Land," "They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave," "Jesse James," and "I Ain't Got no Home in this World Anymore," were heavily influenced by Guthrie's philosophy of individualism, seemingly contradicting his socialist and communist associations.

The music apart from the lyrics denoted an individualistic aim on the part of Guthrie. The ease of performance, both in the vocal line and instrumental accompaniment allowed these pieces easy reproduction on the part of the performer. This ease of performance put tremendous power in the hands of the common person. Minimal education in music was necessary. Armed with only a guitar, an individual could touch the minds of many listeners through Guthrie's songs. The technical skills of Guthrie himself demonstrate this. In recordings of his music, the guitar, voice and occasional harmonica, follow

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**101.** For the first stanza set to the melodies and to view the chords see Appendix B, pg. 66.

**102.** Klein, 365.

the simplest of patterns. Hammered strings with the left-hand and a melodic bass line constitute the extent of intermediate-level technique. These techniques only occur at points in the pieces, such as interludes and introductions, where the voice is not present. Perhaps in a studio with the ability to record multiple tracks and takes the guitar playing of Guthrie would have taken on more complexity, but the live recordings demanded accuracy more than virtuosity. At any rate there is no evidence that Guthrie strove for technical complexity. His main source of income while on the radio had been selling song sheets of his music. This not only put music in the hands of individuals, but the simplicity of the music would encourage more people to empower themselves through performance either on a grand or simple scale. More challenging pieces would have necessarily meant fewer performances.

The small ranges of the pieces made performing them accessible to many musicians. In each of the six songs discussed the vocal range covered less than an octave. The importance of using an octave as the range of the piece lies in that this was the smallest possible melodic range musically satisfying in this type of songwriting. A smaller range would have damaged the strength of the tonic and created a song more simple than satisfying. By limiting the range to an octave Guthrie was able to create music accessible to most singers, however limited their vocal technique, while retaining a melody faithful to the musical structures the Western ear is most comfortable with. Guthrie constructed each of these pieces using structures similar to the structure of the plagal church modes. The fifth scale degree was both the highest and lowest notes of each of these pieces giving a strong sense of tonic in the center and thus easy to sing, yet satisfying aurally.

These pieces were therefore quite vocally accessible, if not in the key Guthrie originally conceived, then transposable to other ranges more suitable to the performer. Guthrie himself is said to have mastered only two keys, G and D.<sup>103</sup> This allowed individuals of all vocal fachs to sing Guthrie's songs, lending great power to a large number of singers. More singers meant more opportunities for augmenting or changing Guthrie's original lyrics, many of those same "original" texts were themselves changed and adapted from performances Guthrie had overheard such as "Jesse James," which, as Guthrie described it, was created because Guthrie could not find the actual song sheet. As a result he created an entirely new song about the outlaw. Although recordings and sheet music had made a writer's

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103. Cray, 52.

original intention more fixed, musical creations were much more fluid in Guthrie's time than now. The schedule of radio broadcasts of Guthrie performing his own songs were oftentimes erratic between regions and the dissemination of long playing records did not take place on a large scale among the main audience of Guthrie's songs, the poor. Therefore, access to Guthrie's songs via electronic media was probably not the main method of transmission, but live, public performances handed down from performer to performer. Textual substitution would no doubt have taken place as a result of Guthrie's construction of these songs. Far from criticizing this practice, the songwriter would have applauded any changes made by the listener in re-transmitting the song for others. He himself often changed lyrics in the middle of performances either out of a desire to cater the message or simply because of forgetfulness. Occasionally he would change meters mid-song in an effort to stall and think of some words to put in.

Guthrie wrote these pieces as propaganda more than as entertainment. A listener adopting a song to make it her own, while keeping or enhancing the original message, would have been exactly what Guthrie wanted. The ease of singing made each performer's presentation of a piece a unique contribution to the workers' cause. Thus, a great deal of power rested in the voice of the new singers. Guthrie trusted this power in their hands because he believed in the potential for positive action lay in the individual. Many successful folk singing acts relied on technical skills at the banjo or other stringed instrument to gain the public's attention. Others impressed with their vocal ranges, timbres or harmonies, but Guthrie kept his songs simple. His primary interests were not in musical originality, excellence or virtuosity. His interests were twofold, disseminate his beliefs to as large an audience as possible and empower the individual through the content of the songs.

A simple instrumental accompaniment increased the accessibility of these pieces. Similar to the effect the small vocal ranges had on the diffusion of these pieces, the simple harmonic structure, written in an idiom ideally suited to the six-string guitar – an almost ubiquitous instrument among the rural working class – facilitated the popularity of these tunes. The guitar was relatively cheap compared to other instruments, such as the keyboard. This allowed for easily accessible self-accompaniment. Certainly other instruments just as cheap were relatively available, but only the guitar afforded the performer the harmonic depth combined with portability at an economic price. The price of a piano was many times the price of a guitar and lacked the portability so important for Guthrie's mystique of

wandering minstrelsy. Without the guitar, much of Guthrie's influence would have evaporated. For Guthrie, the ownership of a guitar was such a given that his purchase or initial gift of the guitar used in his travels is not even mentioned in his autobiography *Bound for Glory*.

Guthrie played the guitar in a simple manner most people with some kind of musical aptitude could duplicate. Though Guthrie occasionally added variety, his fundamental style highlighted the bass while he played the higher treble notes on the offbeat. In addition to bringing a sense of musical variety, this allowed the performer to play a measure or measures with the same hand position, changing only occasionally. The fundamental technique of this style does not vary in the recordings Guthrie left. If someone achieved a satisfactory performance level in "I Ain't Got no Home in This World Anymore" they would also be able to perform the style of the three other songs discussed. The guitar therefore became an instrument of independence. Alone, one could travel through the country proselytizing a Leftist agenda as Guthrie did, or one could stay in the familiar surroundings of his or her hometown converting friends, family and coworkers. The guitar afforded portability coupled with flexibility for the individual. Again in contrast to the more logical emphasis of group harmonics in Guthrie's leftist, proletarian politics, Guthrie turns to the instrument more easily associated with the loner and vagabond. A band could certainly play the music Guthrie made popular solo, as e.g. the Almanac Singers, but the emphasis for Guthrie, in his life as a songwriter and performer, was on individualism rather than on collectivism, the monody of the guitar and voice rather than the fuller sound of a musical group.

Another example of simplicity for the sake of individualism is found in Guthrie's guitar performance itself, specifically the instrumental introductions to each of the pieces discussed. The introductions to these songs, as in many others, relied on varied material taken from the body of the piece. The varied material became varied more out of a desire to remain technically modest than to change the melodic structure. Instead of a strict adherence to the melody of the verses the musical choices he made were based on which offered fewer changes of hand position. This enhanced the diversity of the piece without being exact. Fans and musical amateurs found that this style was not only easier to imitate, but that it gave their pieces more individuality and musicality than a more difficult, strict reproduction of the voice's notes.

These pieces were written as solo songs, not communal exercises in musicality, but personal expressions of inner feeling. As a freelance writer for a Communist newspaper and supporter of union workers Guthrie would have seemed more apt to orchestrate pieces more translatable to communal singing. Communist pieces written by composers writing under the authority of the Soviet Union, e.g. Dmitri Shostakovich in the final chorus of his Second Symphony,<sup>104</sup> often implemented rousing ensemble numbers performed by actors playing members of the working class united in building the Russian state, or a symbol of that state, and fighting against the traps set by enemies of the worker's paradise. In choosing a solo idiom for his expressions of societal angst, Guthrie did not celebrate the collection of workers en masse, but as individuals. The profit of the many could only be viewed in terms of the benefit of each individual. In "I Ain't Got no Home" the tune, adapted from the hymn by the same name, could easily be harmonized with other voices, but the improvised feel Guthrie infused into the performance made it more ideally suited to the single voice and probably single instrument. Also, the use of the first person singular, "I," while certainly not excluding multiple singers, lent this song to solo performance more so than not. Guthrie chose this piece as a signature of protest against the perceived refusal of the church to help the struggle of the unions, but also because of the importance Guthrie places on the personal experiences of the individual. This and other songs were meant to embolden the spirits of Guthrie's union followers, but as individuals not as a collective unit.

The familiarity or simplicity of melody Guthrie used in his songs allowed many people to quickly learn these pieces. "I Ain't Got No Home" is an example of a hymn tune Guthrie set to alternative text. Guthrie used the familiar tune to illuminate hypocrisy he saw in the church, but it also exhibits the individualism he infused in this and similar hymn tune pieces. A familiar tune allowed rapid learning of these pieces. It also gave him access into the unconscious, musical minds of many through the media of, what was for him, the suspicious institution of the church. Having heard Guthrie's rendition of the hymn tune, once inside the church the listener on rehearing the tune would remember Guthrie's sardonic text. Guthrie used arguably the most important tool of the most unifying, and divisive, characteristic of the

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**104.** Dmitri Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 2: "October,"* (Melville, New York: Belwin Mills, 1970). David Fanning and Laurel Fay, "Shostakovich, Dmitry," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52560pg2> (accessed July 7, 2008). Rima Kosaceva, "Traditional Music in the Context of the Social-Political Development in the USSR," *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol 22 (1990): 17-19.

human race – religion – for his own aims of spreading his partisan, individualistic views. A parishioner simply thinking about the tenets of personal freedom and independence as a result of the tune instead of promised glory in the afterlife won Guthrie a minor battle. Stealing away the minds of the laity and focusing them on the possibilities each possessed on this world, and the injustices perpetrated upon them by hegemonic forces such as the church was accomplished in part through the simple use of a hymn tune combined with lyrics expressing a sarcastic twist.

Guthrie's other songs, while not hymn tunes per se, do have similar elements to hymns and other folk songs. The same harmonic progression of I – IV – I – V – I is used in the each of the verses of the pieces studied.<sup>105</sup> The tunes and harmonies of “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave” and “Jesse James and His Boys” are both modeled on the same tune with refrain, with inconsequential melodic variations resulting from changes of text.<sup>106</sup> The tune and harmony of “This Land is Your Land” follows a slightly different harmonic rhythm with the anacrusis measure starting the piece with a shortened tonic chord and holding the subdominant chord two full measures before resolving to a tonic for two beats.<sup>107</sup> “I Ain’t Got no Home” follows the same harmonic rhythm as “Jesse James”/”Jesus Christ” and it also employs very similar melodic motion. In fact excluding the pickup notes and the continuing melodic motion on the dominant chord, the melodies are strikingly similar.



Figure 1. Measures 1-4 of “Jesse James and His Boys” and “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave.”



Figure 2. Measures 1-4 of “I Ain’t Got no Home.”

**105.** See Appendix B.

**106.** See Appendix B “Jesse James and His Boys,” p. 68 and “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave,” p. 69 for melody, chords and first verses.

**107.** See Appendix B, p. 66.

This was one of Guthrie's simplification methods. Learning vastly different melodic repertoire was not necessary for the individual to begin affecting her world.

The chords offered little variety or complexity. I – IV and V were the only chords used in any of these pieces and they followed very predictable patterns: I – IV – I – V – I, and IV – I – V – I (the second set of chords only found in the refrains of “They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave” and “Jesse James and His Boys”). With only the three primary chords used in predictable patterns both vocal and instrumental memory would have been achievable for most musicians. The musical idiom associated with the Left before the Folk Revival, jazz, was much more complicated, and more elitist, in its harmonic complexity. Guthrie disdained the use of jazz chords in folk music and rarely went beyond the “minimal tonic, subdominant and dominant.”<sup>108</sup> These characteristics made learning, adapting and performing these pieces easier for the general populace of non-professional musicians, empowering them as individuals. Simplicity of harmonic language could also better imprint the lyrics on the minds of the performers and listeners. Much as a virus, the simplest of all living things, spreads from host to host, so these lyrics arriving on the backs of the simplest possible chord structures satisfying to twentieth century ears, and stressing the importance of the individual, came upon the minds of the audience members. Depending on the music's reception, this process could repeat itself continuously through new hosts. The chords of Guthrie's music empowered the common human being. She would not only be exposed to the gospel according to Guthrie, but, if Guthrie's purpose was carried out, through the “catchiness” of the music brought about by the simplicity of the chords, she would herself become a proselyte. Guthrie wanted adherents motivated not by a desire to win over converts, but by a sense of inner independence and ambition to bring others into this philosophy. Simple chords contributed to this goal.

The interest of the music, therefore, did not rely on more musically abstract concepts such as harmonic progression or rhythmic complexity. The listener's interest was captivated by the melody, the vehicle of the text. The presence of individualism in the construction of these melodies cannot be found in heroic motives or bombastic cadenzas. These expressions of personal power would have been far too exclusive for Guthrie's taste. The simple, melodic lines and repeated motives empowered singers of all vocal abilities to participate in the progressive movement espoused by Guthrie. The melody's

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108. Cray, 97.

predominance also kept the listener's focus on the person performing rather than on instrumental virtuosity or compositional innovation. This is seen by comparing Guthrie's choice of melody for "This Land is Your Land" with Irving Berlin's "God Bless America."<sup>109</sup>

Guthrie's piece is more accessible in its smaller range (minor seventh), more comfortable tessitura, repeated melodic figures, use of smoother rhythms, and linear motion of the melody. Berlin's piece by contrast is a minor third larger in range (major ninth), remains in the higher range for extended measures, makes use of several unrelated figures and utilizes dotted rhythms and disjunct melodic motion. Guthrie's melody moves throughout the vocal range, never remaining on the upper notes of the piece for very long. This makes the piece less taxing on vocal chords. Berlin's piece by contrast climbs and climaxes towards the end of the piece when the voice would be the most exhausted. "God Bless America" climbs ponderously with a repeated figure scale degree by scale degree until finally climaxing on a long held high note after an even longer penultimate note.

The repeated melodic figure in "This Land is Your Land" contrasts to Berlin's multiple figures. The figure repeated throughout Guthrie's piece consists of three quarter notes rising to sustained half notes. The figure is repeated in sequence a second lower (with a slightly varied starting note changed to remain within the chord structure), and then repeated again another second lower (again with a variation on the linear pick-up notes, which this time outline the IV chord). Measures 9-11 reiterate measures 1-3. The cadential rhyme of measures 14 and 15 with measures 4 and 5 ends the piece. This creates a mnemonically accessible song and maintains a spirit of simplicity. Nearly any person can memorize and perform this piece just as, in Guthrie's view, anyone can and should be able to reach self-actualization. Berlin's use of multiple figures made repeated hearings more necessary if one was interested in adopting the piece for performance.

Whether the sound came from an anonymous performer with a guitar or Woody Guthrie on the radio, the listener could not be distracted from the fact that the messages delivered came from a human being angry at that particular situation and determined to fix the problem. This may have elicited feelings of sympathy, empathy or, preferably, fraternity. Each of these feelings replaced abstract, cognitive appreciation for aesthetically pleasing stimuli with personal, emotional understanding of the

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**109.** See Appendix B, p. 70.

circumstances of the singer. Here again the individual took precedence over the tools of the individual. Propaganda adopted a human face. The folk music popularized outside of the left leaning progressive folk movement relied on a style quite in contrast to Guthrie's simple solo melody and easy accompaniment. It employed virtuosic banjo playing, high-pitched bluegrass, tenor led harmony or ensemble collections of unique instruments. The style that evolved from Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Band during the 1940s became virtuosic to the extreme, requiring banjo players that were capable of "producing about eleven notes a second."<sup>110</sup> These distractions allowed the listener the opportunity to miss the message (if indeed there was one to begin with) in the music. Guthrie did not permit this in his pieces. If one listened to Guthrie, or a disciple of Guthrie, then one glimpsed the core of the performer's intentment.

The keys, structure and time signatures of these pieces, similar to the complexity of the chords, were quite elementary. The pieces were in very guitar friendly keys both as transcribed by Lomax and as recorded by Guthrie. The keys of D, G and E (all major) were recommended by Lomax. This is another example of Guthrie catering to the amateur or beginner in an effort to empower as many performers as possible, giving them and their listeners access to his message of progressive individualism.

The time signatures employed duple simple meter in each of the pieces, but Guthrie added slight syncopations in his performance practice. The use of the common time signatures accomplished what the key choices had done, but the syncopations added an element of uniqueness without adding any technical difficulty. The syncopations rather than adding complexity were merely improvisational speech-like patterns. A singer would probably naturally have comprehended the style without an explanation that strict rhythmic discipline or replication was not necessary. It would have been difficult to perform Guthrie's music incorrectly, therefore, *unless* one tried to replicate the metrical patterns of Guthrie exactly or put syllabic stress on the beat of the piece. Tools for unique, individual expression were thus present in each of Guthrie's pieces without the need for virtuosity. Each performer's interpretation became all the more unique and the requisite musical ability, an innate artistry, was as readily available for the poorly musically educated as for the well educated. Guthrie took music, throughout history a commodity often

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**110.** L. Mayne Smith, "An Introduction to Bluegrass," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol 78, No 309 (1965): 248.

only available to the elite, bourgeoisie or those with enough unused time to devote to musical training, to the level of the common laborer, empowering her as an individual.

The structure of the pieces was well suited to quick memory through the use of simple motivic patterns introduced at the beginning of the pieces and repeated until the end. In "I Ain't Got no Home" the structure followed typical hymn construction: ABAC. The harmonically identical verses of "Jesus Christ" and "Jesse James" followed the same pattern as "I Ain't Got no Home," and the refrains' final two phrases repeated the last two phrases of the verses. "This Land is Your Land" follows the same ABAC structure as well. Simple structure, in addition to facilitating memorization, allowed for adaptation and improvisation. The strophic nature of each of these songs, some with refrain, also allowed easy augmentation of text. Another verse added at the end, in the middle or at the beginning did no harm to the overall structure. Guthrie's music was made in such a way as to act as a blueprint while creative performers could add material they felt contributed to the progressive, individualist message.

Various improvisational elements for the instrument, in this case six-string guitar, such as hammer ons and plucking with the chord hand were easily duplicated and, due to the nature of these embellishments, exact replication was not important. Exact replication would have in fact been moderately difficult even for the original performer, not necessarily because of the technical demands of these improvisatory embellishments, but because of the difficulty in remembering exactly what specific embellishment one had done where. Each performance would become specific to itself. The relationship between performers' interpretations of songs would become even more disparate. Each performer then had the responsibility and opportunity to craft new embellishments free from constraint, liberating the individual from performance replication.

Each piece is performed by Guthrie in the same folk or quasi-folk idiom, which also bears clear elements of individualism. Guthrie was not necessarily playing only in the social milieu from which he was born. He created a personality that fit his own desires. He once played a Carter Family song so much that he wore out the LP in one day. This shows that he took an active role in creating the persona he wanted rather than in accepting his traditional roots as they stood alone. Rather than adopting the Carter family's ensemble style completely, however, Guthrie chose to remain primarily a solo performer.

The individualism in Guthrie's music is found in its simplicity, improvisatory possibilities and use as a blueprint for augmentation by performers. The inherent simplicity of the songs begs questions about the capabilities of Guthrie as a performer/songwriter. Perhaps the true reason behind Guthrie's simple style was because he lacked the capabilities necessary for more complex musical material. While Guthrie's musical genius may be called into question, Guthrie never considered himself a composer foremost. In *Bound for Glory* Guthrie makes minimal mention about his development as a musician. He sees his music as tool; as a means to an end rather than as its own goal. Guthrie did not strive to be a songwriter fueled with avant-garde musical ideas, but a progressive partisan armed with music to break down barriers of oppression through the empowerment of enslaved or disenfranchised individuals. Judging his work in terms of compositional quality, motivic complexity, harmonic progression and key relationships is important, but does not reflect the success or failure of the goals Guthrie had in mind.

## CONCLUSION

Guthrie's embrace of individualism, in spite of his associations with groups emphasizing the power of the collective, becomes apparent in the music and lyrics of several songs representative of the genres in which he wrote. Guthrie's Leftist and Communist ties, while endearing him to many liberals on the coasts had, until lately, prohibited a more general appreciation among the conservative minded in his own birthplace. As Guthrie has been understood as more of an individualist seeking a better quality of life for the indigent, and as paranoia towards Communism has subsided he has become more appreciated in his hometown and across the Midwest and South. This appreciation has translated into The Woody Guthrie Free Folk Festival in his hometown of Okemah, Oklahoma sponsored by the Woody Guthrie Coalition.

While this appreciation is well deserved and overdue in the Midwest, the novel admiration has often come at the cost of understanding Guthrie's more radical views. The very fact that "This Land is Your Land" was written as a critical response to Berlin's patriotic "God Bless America" would be enough to raise the hackles of many. At the most recent Woody Guthrie Free Folk Festival (July 9-13, 2008), few of the artists performed music written by Guthrie, and those who did often failed to elucidate the deeper meanings behind songs such as "Pretty Boy Floyd" or "Deportee" treating them more as curious jingles than politically radical, topical songs. Whether this is from misunderstanding or misrepresenting, his message is unclear.

It is difficult to ascribe political or musically aesthetic sentiments to Guthrie if he remained alive, but there is no doubt he would be politically active and most likely radical. Sensitive as the political landscape has been in the first decade of the twenty-first century a polarizing character such as Guthrie with his gift for extrapolating complex situations into – sometimes oversimplified – explanations understandable by the majority of the population could very well tip the balance of power to one side or the other. Americans' self-consciousness may very well be more savvy than the mindset of their ancestors, but buzzwords such as "grassroots," "heartland," and "populist" are still powerful and are descriptive of the man Guthrie was. The rural characteristics of Guthrie that made him an asset to the Left of the early and middle twentieth-century would make him an asset to anyone with a political agenda to this day.

Balancing the contradictory elements within Guthrie is difficult. He was an individualist who supported labor unions. He was a believer in independence from government who supported the Communist party of the United States. He was a pacifist who joined the military and saw active duty. In all of this he remained a quintessential example of a man who does not fit neatly into any stereotype no matter how hard historians and the public struggle to fit him somewhere. Controversy, usually of his own making, followed him wherever he went and it seems that the balladeer's one constant was his tendency to afflict the comforted when attempting to comfort the afflicted.

Guthrie's direct influence can still be felt in contemporary America. Many artists have remade his music and even set music to lyrics composed by Guthrie. In a way the settings of his poetry seem to stem from the power of the image of Guthrie as much as the power of the text itself. Guthrie's influence has not only been felt in his music, but on his individualistic ideal he represented. He was a man who lived free from the constraints of society with only a guitar strapped to his back and the open road before him. His contributions to the folk revival of the 1960s – and thereby popular music to this day – are immeasurable in the musical style that he inspired, the song repertoire he created and disseminated, the individualistic attitude he engendered and the concern for the less fortunate.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Lyrics

### This Land Is Your Land

#### Refrain/Verse 1

This land is your land This land is my land  
From California to the New York island;  
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters  
This land was made for you and Me.

#### Verse 2

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,  
I saw above me that endless skyway:  
I saw below me that golden valley:  
This land was made for you and me.

#### Verse 3

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps  
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;  
And all around me a voice was sounding:  
This land was made for you and me.

#### Verse 4

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,  
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling,  
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:  
This land was made for you and me.

#### Verse 5

As I went walking I saw a sign there  
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."  
But on the other side it didn't say nothing,  
That side was made for you and me.

#### Verse 6

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,  
By the relief office I seen my people;  
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking  
Is this land made for you and me?

#### Verse 7

Nobody living can ever stop me,  
As I go walking that freedom highway;  
Nobody living can ever make me turn back  
This land was made for you and me.

## I Ain't Got No Home

### Verse 1

I ain't got no home, I'm just a-roamin' 'round,  
Just a wandrin' worker, I go from town to town.  
And the police make it hard wherever I may go  
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

### Verse 2

My brothers and my sisters are stranded on this road,  
A hot and dusty road that a million feet have trod;  
Rich man took my home and drove me from my door  
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

### Verse 3

Was a-farmin' on the shares, and always I was poor;  
My crops I lay into the banker's store.  
My wife took down and died upon the cabin floor,  
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

### Verse 4

I mined in your mines and I gathered in your corn  
I been working, mister, since the day I was born  
Now I worry all the time like I never did before  
'Cause I ain't got no home in this world anymore

### Verse 5

Now as I look around, it's mighty plain to see  
This world is such a great and a funny place to be;  
Oh, the gamblin' man is rich an' the workin' man is poor,  
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

## Jesse James and His Boys

### Verse 1

Jesse James and his boys rode that Dodge City Trail,  
Held up that Midnight Southern Mail,  
And there never was a man with the law in his hand  
That could keep Jesse James in a jail

### Refrain

Yes, Frank and Jesse James was men that was game,  
To stop that high rollin' train,  
And to shoot down the rat that killed Mrs. James  
There was "2-Gun Frank and Jesse James."

### Verse 2

It was Frank and Jesse James that killed a many a man,  
But they never was outlaws at heart-  
I wrote this song to tell you how it come  
That Frank and Jesse James got their start.

### Verse 3

They was living on a farm in the old Missouri Hills  
With a silver-haired mother and a home.  
Now the Railroad bullies come to chase them off their land,  
But they found that Frank and Jesse wouldn't run.

### Verse 4

Then a Railroad scab he went and got a bomb  
And he threwed it at the door  
And it killed Mrs. James a sleeping in her bed,  
So Jesse grabbed a big forty four [*sic*].

### Verse 5

Now a bastard and a coward called little Robert Ford  
He claimed he was Frank and Jesse's friend,  
Made love to Jesse's wife and took Jesse's life  
And he laid poor Jesse in his grave.

### Verse 6

The people was surprised when Jesse lost his life,  
Wondered how he ever come to fall.  
Robert Ford it's a fact, shot Jesse in the back,  
While Jesse hung a picture on the wall

### Verse 7

They dug Jesse's grave and a stone they raised  
It says, "Jesse James lies here.  
Was killed by a man, a bastard and a coward,  
Whose name aint [*sic*] worthy to appear.

## Jesus Christ or They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave

### Verse 1

Jesus Christ was a man who traveled through the land  
A hard-working man and brave  
He said to the rich, "Give your money to the poor,"  
But they laid Jesus Christ in His grave

### Refrain

Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand  
His followers true and brave  
One dirty little coward called Judas Iscariot  
Has laid Jesus Christ in His Grave

### Verse 2

He went to the preacher, He went to the sheriff  
He told them all the same  
"Sell all of your jewelry and give it to the poor,"  
And they laid Jesus Christ in His grave.

### Verse 3

When Jesus come to town, all the working folks around  
Believed what he did say  
But the bankers and the preachers, they nailed Him on the cross,  
And they laid Jesus Christ in his grave.

### Verse 4

And the people held their breath when they heard about his death  
Everybody wondered why  
It was the big landlord and the soldiers that they hired  
To nail Jesus Christ in the sky

### Verse 5

This song was written in New York City  
Of rich man, preacher, and slave  
If Jesus was to preach what He preached in Galilee,  
They would lay poor Jesus in His grave.

Appendix B: Musical Examples

This Land Is Your Land

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music with lyrics underneath. Chords are indicated above the notes.

Staff 1: Chords G, C, G. Lyrics: This land is your land, — this land is my land, — From Cal - i -

Staff 2: Chords D7, G. Lyrics: for - nia — to the New York is - land; — From the red - wood

Staff 3: Chords C, G. Lyrics: for - est — to the Gulf Stream wa - ters, —

Staff 4: Chords D7, G. Lyrics: This land was made for you and me. — me. —

Additional markings in Staff 4: [1. G (to Verses)] [(Fine)G]

I Ain't Got No Home<sup>111</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the song "I Ain't Got No Home". It consists of four staves of music in a 2/4 time signature, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The lyrics are written below the notes, and guitar chords are indicated above the staff lines. The chords are E, A, E, B7, A, and E.

I ain't got no home, I'm just a - ram-blin' 'round, I'm  
just a ram-blin' work - in' man, I go from town to town;  
Po - lice make it hard wher - ev - er I may go, And I  
ain't got no home in this world an - y - more.

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111. There is a misprint. There should be a return to the E Major chord in measure 9.

Jesse James and His Boys

D G  
Jes - se James and his boys rode that Dodge Cit - y

D A7  
trail, Held up that mid - night South - ern mail, —

D G  
— And there nev - er was a man with the law in his

D A7 D  
hand that could keep Jes - se James in a jail. — Yes,

Chorus: G D  
Frank and Jes - se James was men that was game, To

A7  
stop that high roll - in' train, — And to

D G D  
shoot down the rat that killed Mis - sus James, there was

A7 D  
two - gun Frank and Jes - se James. —

They Laid Jesus Christ in His Grave

Je - sus Christ was a man who travelled through the  
Land A hard workin Man And Brave  
He Said to the rich, "Give your money to the  
poor" But they laid Je - sus Christ in His grave.

Chords: D, G, D, A7, D, G, D, A7, D

Refrain

Je - sus was a man, a carpen - ter by hand His  
Follo - wers true and brave. One  
Dirty lit - tle coward called Judas Is - cariot Has  
Laid Jesus Christ in his Grave

Chords: G, D, A7, D, G, D, A7, D

Melody Based on Irving Berlin's "God Bless America"

God Bless A - mer - i - ca Land that I  
love stand be - side her and guide her thru the night with the light from a -  
bove. From the moun - tains to the prai - ries To the oc - ceans white with  
foam. God bless A - mer - i - ca My home sweet  
home. God Bless A - mer i ca My home sweet  
home.

The image shows a musical score for a melody based on Irving Berlin's "God Bless America". It consists of six staves of music in a single system, all in treble clef and 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below the notes. The melody is simple and patriotic, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes B4, A4, and G4. The lyrics are: "God Bless A - mer - i - ca Land that I love stand be - side her and guide her thru the night with the light from a - above. From the moun - tains to the prai - ries To the oc - ceans white with foam. God bless A - mer - i - ca My home sweet home. God Bless A - mer i ca My home sweet home." The score ends with a double bar line on the sixth staff.