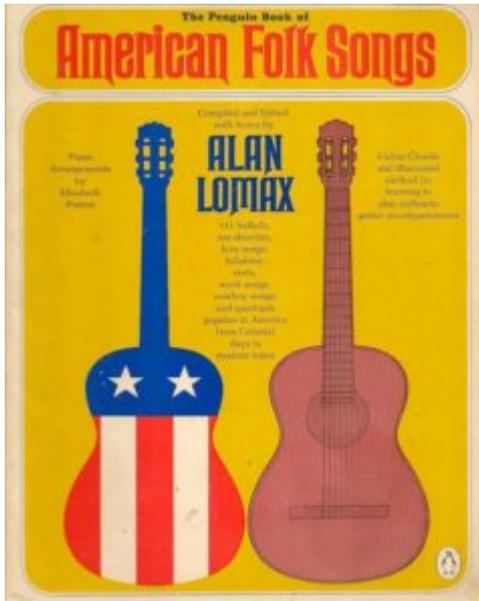


Folk Song: This Land is Your Land (guitar chords & sheet music) by Woody Guthrie (1939)

Folk Song: [This Land is Your Land](#) (guitar chords & [sheet music](#)) by Woody Guthrie.

Today, this classic folk song is usually sung as a popular pro-America anthem by Americans of every background. But it was written to have a radical edge that hollered for the country to make its bounty available to rich and poor alike.

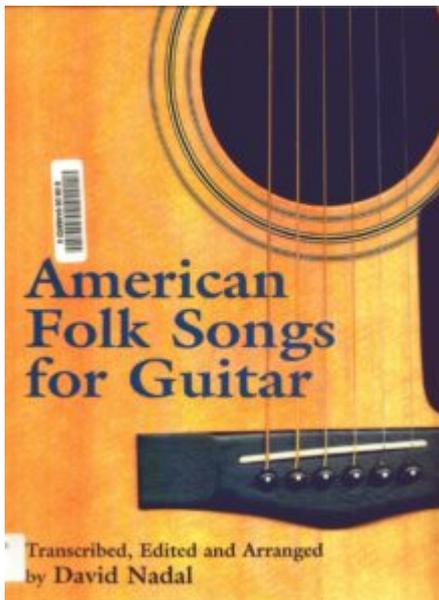
Folk singer Woody Guthrie was sick of THAT song. The year was 1939, and everywhere he wandered, "[God Bless America](#)" was playing on the radio. It was driving Guthrie nutty. Guthrie felt that Irving Berlin's song was too sappy, too blindly patriotic, and too cut off from the hard-knock life many Americans were facing as the Great Depression dragged into its 10th year.



Guthrie knew firsthand how tough life could be for poor folks. Since his teens, he had hopped trains and hitchhiked back and forth across the country. He shared the road with former farmers, laid-off factory workers, and migrants chasing hopes of work. Along the way, he chronicled their adventures, dreams, and sorrows in song.

In February 1940, Guthrie decided to fight music with music. In reaction to “God Bless America,” he worked up a simple song that tried to capture his love of the American landscape. At the same time, he wanted to point out that a lot of Americans weren’t feeling blessed at all.

Lyrics



“This Land is Your Land” ***by Woody Guthrie***

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

In the squares of the city, in the shadow of the steeple,
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?

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.

Woody Guthrie

Woodrow Wilson Guthrie was born in the small town of Okemah, Oklahoma, on July 14, 1912. Named for the soon-to-be-elected Democratic candidate for president, Guthrie remembered an early boyhood full of music, singing, and plenty of pocket money. His dad was a successful real estate wheeler-dealer. The Guthries were the first people in town to own a car.

Tragedy and trouble began to mount after 1919. Guthrie's sister died in a fire and his dad's business collapsed. His mom had a nervous breakdown and was committed to the state mental hospital. He and his brother were left to fend for themselves.

The teenager began to travel the country, strumming his guitar and singing for coins. As he wandered, he became increasingly critical of the injustice he associated with American capitalism. He was drawn toward the plight of American workers and embraced socialist beliefs. During World War II, though, he served in the Merchant Marine and U.S. Army. He entertained sailors and troops with songs blasting fascism, the brutal, nationalistic system of government operated by Germany's Adolf Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini.

Guthrie viewed folk music as a potent means of protest. About his writing and singing he said:

“I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I am out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and in your work. And the songs that I sing are made up for the most part by all sorts of folks just about like you.”

Guthrie died of Huntington’s disease in 1967, but not before inspiring a new generation of singer/songwriters including Ramblin’ Jack Elliot, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen.

Lost Verses

Guthrie originally titled the song “God Blessed America For Me”—words that also served as the last line of each verse. He meant it as a slap at Berlin’s hit number, making it clear that he didn’t think God was the solution to America’s problems.

By the time he debuted the song on his weekly radio show in 1944, Guthrie had revised the title to “This Land is Your Land.” He reworked the last line of each verse to a friendlier, “This land was made for you and me.” He also nixed the two most controversial verses, verses that accused the American system of business of greed and disregard for the needy.

**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.**

**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?

With those two verses gone, any American could sing “This Land is Your Land” without fretting if they were questioning America’s greatness. Its simple melody and picture-painting lyrics made it fun and easy for kids to learn. It remains one of the all-time, all-American favorites. (Ironically, “God Bless America” and “This Land is Your Land” are often performed together in school programs and on albums of patriotic songs.)

More recently, a growing number of singers have dusted off Guthrie’s preferred lyrics. In 2009, rocker Bruce Springsteen and folk legend Pete Seeger sang it from start to finish as part of President Barack Obama’s inaugural celebration.

[Read the original article here.](#)