



THIS COLLECTION PRESENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME the full range of material Woody Guthrie recorded for the United States government, both in song and the spoken word. This publication brings together two significant bodies of work – the songs and stories he recorded for the Library of Congress, and the material he created when hired to write songs for the Bonneville Power Administration. There have been records released in the past of the Library of Congress recordings, but this collection is the first time that the complete and unedited Library of Congress sessions have been released. The songs from those recording dates have been available in the past – notably from Elektra and from Rounder – but we offer here the full body of work, including the hours of Woody Guthrie talking and telling his story.

TO THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS AND BPA RECORDINGS, we have also added material which Woody recorded for governmental or quasi-governmental efforts – some songs and two 15-minute radio dramas for the Office of War Information during the Second World War and another drama offered to public health agencies to fight the spread of venereal disease.

WOODY GUTHRIE

AMERICAN RADICAL PATRIOT

by Bill Nowlin

Front cover photo: MARJORIE MAZIA AND WOODY GUTHRIE IN EAST ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI. JULY 29, 1945.

Inside front and inside back cover photo: WOODY, "OREGON SOMEWHERE" ON THE COAST IN OREGON.
THIS IS THE ONLY KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF WOODY GUTHRIE DURING THE TIME HE SPENT TOURING WITH THE BPA.



Woody Guthrie
* L E G A C Y *

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A M E R I C A N
R A D I C A L
P A T R I O T

Woody Guthrie loved his country. He didn't agree with all of the policies of the government, or the ways in which some people took advantage of others. He saw faults in society, problems that negatively affected real people, and he wanted to fix them. He saw shortcomings and human failures and weaknesses – and strengths – and he knew things would never be perfect but he appreciated and understood and embraced the imperfections and he seemed to have a fundamental faith that people would see to it that things got fixed, if only more people realized that there really could be better ways. He was an optimist, and a bit of a dreamer, as anyone looking for real change must inevitably be.

And he wanted to fix these things through the persuasive power of his writing, primarily through songwriting. As he once wrote:

A folk song is what's wrong and how to fix it or it could be
 who's hungry and where their mouth is or
 who's out of work and where the job is or
 who's broke and where the money is or
 who's carrying a gun and where the peace is.¹

He was a tightly-wound bundle of restless energy who seemed rarely at home but was always at home, and who made the whole country his home. He had family of his own, and he also had the people of America as his family. There was the abstract and idealized concept – The People – to which others sometimes hewed. Woody swam in the sea of the people – people who were individuals, real people of flesh and blood.

Some found him hard to take, and he had harsh words for those who wielded their power over others to take advantage – call it exploitation. There were those who damned and condemned him but one senses that he never wrote other people off, that he believed no one but the most heartless was beyond reach. And he felt compelled to call out, with words and song, giving voice to those who needed it most, the people and families who were suffering in the hard times of Depression era America. He saw hardship and he felt called to give voice to the desperate and the dispossessed.

You elected me to this office
 Of a poet and a singer
 And I think I know
 What you want me to do here
 Things are said in history
 And they are said again
 And these of today
 Have got to be said
 Said again
 Because today is our first time
 To say
 What we are today –
 And I will say
 And sing of these things
 These things
 That you fight for today ?

“Woody Guthrie, American” – so ends Ed Cray’s superb biography of Woody Guthrie, *Ramblin’ Man*, and it’s a good place to start when appraising the recordings he made for the United States Government.

Here was a man named after a United States President, but later castigated by some as unpatriotic. What did Woodrow Wilson Guthrie believe? Did he have a political philosophy? Some have suggested that “This Land Is Your Land” should become America’s true National Anthem in place of the more war-associated “Star Spangled Banner.” Others have called him a Communist. As this collection shows, he recorded a substantial number of songs for the U. S. government. Was that a contradiction of some sort? Was it a paradox, that a “radical” would record songs for a government he opposed?³

Did he truly oppose the government, though, or did he just oppose those of its policies he found wrong-headed? There is no reason to believe that he opposed the government. Indeed, there are numerous ways in which he thought government could help the populace. Born in 1912, he came of age during the New Deal, when many saw governmental action as the way to help guide the country out of economic straits, to help bring more benefits to a needy people. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) had brought rural electrification to the Tennessee River Valley. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had provided employment for 2 ½ million Americans during the decade beginning in 1933. Social Security had been enacted and implemented. The Farm Security Administration worked toward rural rehabilitation. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) had stimulated creativity in the arts. There were other New Deal programs as well. There was opposition to these programs, naturally, but the New Deal prevailed and many Americans saw government not as evil but as something socially beneficial and worthy of support.

In the first half of the 1940s, Guthrie is found working in one way or another with certain government or quasi-governmental bodies – the Bonneville Power Administration, the Library of Congress, and during World War II he served in the Merchant Marine for more than a year in 1943 and 1944, and then was inducted into the United States Army on May 7, 1945, honorably discharged in mid-January 1946. He knew that government could be repressive, but also knew the government had the power to do good. After all, in building the Grand Coulee Dam he wrote that:

Uncle Sam took up the challenge in the year of 'Thirty-three,
For the farmer and the factory and for all of you and me,
He said, "Roll along, Columbia, you can ramble to the sea,
But river, while you ramble, you can do some work for me."

–“Grand Coulee Dam”

Here we see that Woody has given a human and avuncular face to government, with the moniker “Uncle Sam.” While he could rail against a given governmental action, and feel free to criticize policies of the national government, he had faith that a united and organized citizenry could prevail upon government to act for the public good.

One perhaps needs to distinguish between governments. State or local governments sometimes appeared to act at the behest of local power holders, but the federal government may have offered more hope as a counter to entrenched local authorities, who were sometimes too compliant with big business in their area and too complicit in its depredations. The federal government could become a counterweight.

There were vested interests which were threatened by the New Deal, and by the growth of militant labor, and those interests didn't hesitate to paint opponents as radical or beyond the pale, as they saw it.

Nonetheless, Woody's spirit seemed to prevail. Robert Shelton, music critic of the *New York Times*, saw in him “a stunningly positive pride in nation and people” (citing his song “This Land Is Your Land” in particular), and Millard Lampell (formerly of The Almanac Singers) contrasted Woody to the later “beat generation” of the 1950s: “His hope, promise, and endurance led him to opposite conclusions from the beatniks. He had a vitality that the exhausted generation of today can learn from. Woody didn't compromise. He refused to become a commodity to be bought or sold. His true dignity and beauty came from that.”⁴

Of course optimism itself is not a political philosophy, and Woody Guthrie never pretended to be a political philosopher. He was a singer and a songwriter and like most artists, particularly one active in such a time of social upheaval as the Depression and Second World War, his opinions were bound to be fluid and evolving. Circumstances were changing with rapidity, and dramatically. That his views may have changed, too, would hardly be surprising.

People approach the Woody Guthrie legend with their own biases. This is only to be expected. But any attempt to sort his expressions of thought into “black and white, either/or” dichotomies is not just simplistic. It's also unfair. He lived a dynamic life, dynamic not in the sense of energy generated (though there was plenty of that) but dynamic in terms of ongoing change. Sure, his views changed over time. It would be a rather limited individual who didn't let facts contribute to developing ways of regarding the world.

What were Woody's views about government? Again, it depends on which level or agency of government you're talking about. And the circumstances. He couldn't have been more in favor of government programs such as the Bonneville Power Administration. He put himself in harm's way during World War II and survived two incidents where the ships on which he served were torpedoed and struck by a mine. Yet there were other times he decried actions of the government, for instance the Los Angeles police setting up a blockade to prevent migrants from the Dust Bowl entering if they didn't have sufficient funds.

The Okies and Arkies hadn't left their homes and farms because they wanted to. Disaster had struck and they were seeking a way to survive – and to become contributing members of society once more. Government wasn't always helping at first. The migrants were victims. “They're just looking up at the heavens, like ‘Isn't there anyone to help us? We're American citizens. We're respectable. We're not criminals. We're being treated like criminals if we try to go to California to get jobs.” That's Nora Guthrie, Woody's daughter, setting the stage before framing it in early 21st century terms: “Imagine if they did something like that now and said, ‘You can't come to Connecticut to work. We're over-flooded with workers so you can't cross the Connecticut border line unless you have \$50 in your pocket.’”⁵

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RECORDINGS

The recordings Woody Guthrie made for the Library of Congress were his earliest recordings, with the exception of four air-checks for Los Angeles radio station KFVD, which were released in the summer of 2012 on the Smithsonian Folkways album *Woody at 100*.

Hearing Woody talk about the years of his life up to 1940 is a treasure – and it is remarkable that Woody was only 27 years old at the time. Though three years younger than Woody, Alan Lomax (1915-2002) knew what he was doing in recording Woody Guthrie at length. It was effectively the fourth in a series, and in his recordings of Lead Belly (1935, up and into 1942), Jelly Roll Morton (1938), Aunt Molly Jackson (1935 and 1939), and Woody Guthrie (1940), Lomax pioneered a form of musical autobiography. Sadly, it is one which has not been emulated as widely as one might have anticipated, or hoped. The first recordings of Huddie Ledbetter (“Lead Belly”) for the Library of Congress were in Louisiana at the Angola State Penitentiary in July 1933, for John Lomax, accompanied by his son Alan. He recorded commercially early in 1935 for ARC, but the recordings embracing his own autobiography began in mid-February 1935 in Wilton, Connecticut. Biographers Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell explain, “Huddie was encouraged not only to perform the songs, but to include the stories he had started telling about them.”⁶ Alan Lomax recalled, “He began to try and put his songs in their context. It was one of the most amazing things I’ve ever seen done....He created those *cante-fables* [the half-spoken, partially sung introductions] in a month. For me that was the most remarkable thing he ever did.”⁷

John Steinbeck’s book *The Grapes of Wrath* was the best-selling book of 1939. Both Steinbeck and Guthrie were, each in their own way, writing about the plight of the migrant workers on the West Coast, many of which were “dust bowl refugees” from Oklahoma, Arkansas, and northern and western Texas. The Great Depression had not let up, and the country as a whole was well aware of and struggling with the problems of the dispossessed and unemployed. There were literally millions of Americans who had been uprooted and had taken to the road, looking for a way to eke out a living and survive. It’s not surprising that creative minds grappled with this major national concern.

Woody Guthrie had been singing on the radio in Los Angeles, and helping supplement his income by selling mimeographed songbooks. In July 1939, James Forester of the *Hollywood Tribune* compared one of Woody’s songbooks to Steinbeck’s novel, calling them “relatives” and then adding, “Woody is really one of them [the Joads] and at the same time he’s a poet and a singer. He’s the troubadour of those who are condemned to the other side of the fence.”⁸

In 1939, while Woody was still in California, he had in fact been offered a small role in the production of John Ford’s filming of *The Grapes of Wrath*, but (unfortunately, for posterity’s sake) Woody left the state at the time of the shooting. Ford’s motion picture was released to great public acclaim in January 1940, just a couple of months before Woody’s first recordings for the Library in March.

How did the Library of Congress recordings come to happen?

It all happened rather quickly. The *Grapes of Wrath* book and film had spurred ongoing public interest, and a New York City benefit concert was scheduled for March 3 at the Forrest Theatre, to support the John Steinbeck Committee for Agricultural Workers.⁹ Lead Belly and Aunt Molly Jackson were on the same bill, and Alan Lomax of the Archive of American Folk Song (who had already recorded both singers for the Library of Congress) came from Washington. Woody had just arrived in New York for the first time two weeks earlier, barely surviving being stranded while hitchhiking, inadequately dressed, during a major blizzard which combined 13 inches of snow in parts of New York, combined with winds of up to 75 miles per hour; some 71 deaths were attributed to the storm in Associated Press dispatches dated February 16.

Since September 1934, the Forrest Theatre had been home to the stage show *Tobacco Road*, which was in its sixth season at the venue and featured Will Geer in the character of Jeeter Lester. Woody got work as a backstage hand and errand boy, and lived at Geer’s apartment.¹⁰

The Steinbeck Committee event at the Forrest was apparently the second time Lomax encountered Woody Guthrie, the first being at another benefit – for the Spanish Refugees Relief Fund to help the victims of the Franco regime – held on 56th Street and Broadway at the Mecca Temple a week earlier, on February 25. Lomax wrote of that time:

The first time that Woody and I got together was following a long Broadway concert that had been produced to raise money for the Spanish loyalists. Will Geer was the MC – he had known and worked with Woody on the [west] coast. The rest of us were folkniks, but the audience was new to ballads and thought we were special...until Woody came along, his guitar slung behind his right shoulder by a buckskin thong, like a rifle ready at hand. He stood up to the microphone, scratched his head and began. As he sang his famous Okie ballads, the theater seems filled with the presence of all Woody’s Southwestern

kin. Lead Belly followed Woody, but only after a long wait filled with encores and roars of delighted laughter. It was Woody's first night in New York.¹¹

Bizarrely, Guthrie was slotted in between "the workers' chorus singing Russian folk songs and classically trained baritone Mordecai Bauman."¹²

Author Joe Klein portrays the scene when Woody followed Aunt Molly on stage at the Forrest Theatre (Geer was the MC again) and began to sing: "Out in the wings, Alan Lomax snapped to attention and felt a surge of adrenaline as he realized – quickly, viscerally, no question about it – that the little man on stage was someone he'd often thought about but feared he'd been born too late to meet: the great American frontier ballad writer."¹³ Klein may have conflated the Mecca Temple benefit with the Forrest Theatre event; an advance story in the February 28 *New York Times* announced Woody as one of the performers on the show.¹⁴

Lomax was riveted by what he saw in Woody and, on the spot, at least according to legend, invited him to come to Washington to tell his story and record his songs for the Archive of American Folk Song. Less than three weeks later, Alan welcomed Woody to his home in Arlington, Virginia, where Lomax lived with his wife Elizabeth and with houseguest Nicholas Ray, later a filmmaker who counted *Rebel Without A Cause* among his credits. Woody stayed there for several weeks. On March 21, the Library of Congress sessions commenced.

Alan Lomax was as impressed with Woody Guthrie as he had been with Lead Belly. In a 1987 interview with Michael O'Rourke he recalled a day he was preparing for one of his "American School of the Air" radio shows in 1940. Woody was visiting, staying with the Lomaxes in Arlington, Virginia. As Alan left the house one day, he asked Woody to put down some notes "on a piece of paper" so that Alan could write up a bit of an introduction for him on the show. "When I came back he had 15 pages of single-spaced typing which began the basis for his book, *Bound for Glory*. It was very beautiful prose, the equal of any prose in the English language. It was superb, a combination of Joyce and Mark Twain and...Oklahoma. It was the prose of the Southwest, something that I had tried to write myself, and I have dreamed about but there it was, on the paper...superb!"¹⁵ The show won an award as the best education broadcast of the year.

The radio show was broadcast at 9:15 AM on WABC on Tuesday, April 2; Woody was to sing a program of "Poor Farmer Songs," according to listings in the newspaper. But in the same 1987 interview Alan says that Woody's 15 pages were written more or less on the eve of his first recordings, a couple of weeks earlier. Regardless of the actual chronology, all of this happened in a matter of a very few weeks. "A bit later...I recorded his life story and songs for the Library of Congress and that of course is also a very important experience for people who up to that point have been thinking of themselves maybe in terms of knowing some songs but hadn't maybe felt the whole continuity of the whole thing. So, if one gives people time to really talk in out, sing it out, it's a part of a growth process..."

WOODY GUTHRIE FIRST RECORDED FOR THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS IN WASHINGTON ON MARCH 21 AND 22, 1940 at the Department of the Interior's Radio Broadcasting Division facility. On March 27, he recorded a third session for the Library of Congress, this time interviewed by Elizabeth Lomax. Joe Klein has written that it was because Alan's voice had given out that his wife Elizabeth conducted the session.

Just a month later, on April 26, he made his first commercial recordings, in New York for RCA Victor. The songs he recorded in New York were meant to be on a theme and two albums called *Dust Bowl Ballads* (volumes 1 and 2) were ultimately released. On May 3, Woody had returned to record two more tracks for RCA Victor so the record company had enough material for the two albums. A final session for the Library of Congress was held on January 4, 1941 for Alan Lomax and John Langenegger in the Phonoduplication Service studio and recorded on one 16" disc.

Guthrie's work for the Bonneville Power Administration was a little over a year after his first Library of Congress sessions, in May 1941. By that time, Woody had also appeared on national radio broadcasts for the CBS radio network.

The Library of Congress recordings were done by engineer Jerome Weisner, later the President of M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), on a Presto disc recorder.¹⁶ Lomax said, "The engineer was behind double glass. He pressed the red light for GO and we began to talk like a couple of old cronies. However, I wanted the interview used for radio (a hope never realized in those faroff barbarous times) so I slightly pretended that this was the first encounter. Woody pretended along with me and when I ran out of questions my then wife Elizabeth Littleton spelled me. It was all done without a bobble. The guitar went back over the right shoulder blade, the half-Stetson roosted on top of the bushy hair, we walked down the endless corridors of the Department of the Interior and got into the car a little drunk."¹⁷

Alan was apparently quite pleased with the first day's work. Edward Waters, the Acting Chief of the Division of Music wrote to the Librarian of Congress on the 21st itself, "Alan Lomax has in Washington with him today and tomorrow a folk singer for whose excellence he vouches. This singer, Woodie Guthrie by name, is willing to sing many recordings for the

1940!

A "GRAPES of WRATH" EVENING



FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE
JOHN STEINBECK COMMITTEE
FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

presented by

the THEATRE ARTS COMMITTEE
and WILL GEER of the "TOBACCO ROAD" COMPANY

Featuring American Ballad Singers & Folk Dancers

WILL GEER • ALAN LOMAX • AUNT MOLLY JACKSON
LEADBELLY • WOODIE GUTHRIE • PENNSYLVANIA MINERS
MARGO MAYO • GOLDEN GATE QUARTET and many others

SUNDAY MARCH 3RD 8³⁰ P.M.

FORREST THEATRE 230^{WEST} 49TH ST.

TICKETS: 55¢ 83¢ \$1.10 \$1.65

at FORREST THEATRE or TAC 117 West 48th Street

GRAPES OF WRATH EVENING, MARCH 3rd, 1940

Forrest Theatre

John Steinbeck Committee

Tobacco Road

Program

Aunt Molly Jackson

1. I Am Aunt Molly Jackson
2. Beauty Bride
3. Jack Monroe
4. Let's Join the CIO

Woody Guthrie

1. Blues
2. Do-Re-Mi
3. Why Are You Stani^g in the Rain

Golden Gate Quartette

1. Weeping Mary
2. Bledding Lamb
3. It's Almost Done
4. Go Down, Old Hannah
5. Grey Goose
6. Travelling Shoes

Leadbelly with above

Tobacco Road, Act 11

Intermission, 5 minutes

Aunt Molly, Will Geer, Prop Man

1. Slap Song

Alan Lomax & Bess

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Burl Ives

1. Red Bird
2. Cod Liver Ile
3. Joe Hill

Leadbelly

1. Good Morning Blues
2. Gallis Pole
3. Boll Weevil
4. Gwinna Dig a Hole
5. Duck Shoot

Margot Mayo & Co.

Dances

Intermission

Minto Cato & Co.

Po' John Henry

Penn. Boys
Woody & Aunt Molly

1. Stockade Blues
2. Miner's Child
3. Little Green Valley
4. My Little Lady

Finale

Ain't Gwine Study War No More

Archive of American Folk Song while in the city. I recommend that 50 (fifty) blank acetate discs be purchased at once, the cost to be about \$35.00 and charged to Increase.” The Librarian of Congress at the time was Archibald MacLeish (1939-44), a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner who likely would have been quite pleased had he heard the recordings. His 1938 book *Land of the Free* was an original poem profusely illustrated with 88 photographs of impoverished Americans taken by the more noted of the Farm Security Administration such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. And MacLeish was a target of McCarthyism in 1952 when McCarthy himself said with his habitual hyperbole and oft-times outright fantasy that MacLeish had “the longest record of affiliation with Communist fronts of any man that I have ever named in Washington.”¹⁸

How might one characterize the content of what Woody Guthrie recorded for the Library?

He begins by recording a number of traditional pieces – just short of a dozen, though one he says he learned from a boy in his hometown of Okemah, a raucous but compact Oklahoma boomtown (“Main Street was about eight blocks long.”)¹⁹ Then he sings a few of his own Dust Bowl songs, occasionally reaching back for an older song. A mixture of songs from commercial recordings – the Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, and perhaps Lowe Stokes and His North Georgians – is intertwined with a full dozen more of his own, and then he ends with six or seven songs he learned from others.²⁰

Given that these were Woody Guthrie’s first recordings, and that they were cut for a government entity, one might expect that some of his more controversial – the more radical – songs were skipped over, or did those come a little later in his life? Perhaps at the time of the Library of Congress recordings, Woody was not quite as provocative a radical as he would become, or was more of a populist and less the more fully-developed radical? Neither was the case.

The mix of songs cut for the Library represent Alan Lomax’s interest in Woody as a songwriter, and not just in his ability to sing folk songs. Lomax wanted to know where Woody came from and what he had to say, and why he wrote what he wrote. Right from the inception of the sessions, he introduced Woody as someone who had seen more in his 27 years than most men see by age 70, someone who’d lived a hard life, and who had performed on picket lines. He got Woody talking, much as he had in collaborating with two earlier figures in American music in developing oral musical biographies: New Orleans piano player and jazzman Jelly Roll Morton and Kentucky songwriter and union organizer Aunt Molly Jackson. Lomax had recorded Morton at the Library’s Coolidge Auditorium between May and December 1938, and taken down Aunt Molly’s story and songs on disc in 1935 and 1939.

There was unlikely any political filter applied. It isn’t as though Alan Lomax would have shied away from recording any of Woody’s more radical songs. To the contrary. Given his own radical inclinations, Lomax unquestionably would have wanted to tease out the harder-hitting songs, or flat out ask Woody to sing them. Once or twice, we can see him bringing Woody back from a traditional to songs which Woody had written about conditions he’d experienced or observed.

How much they may have discussed in advance what they’d be talking about and what songs Woody might sing is unclear, though Joe Klein says there was some planning involved. Woody was staying at Lomax’s home, and Lomax acknowledged, “One night during his Washington visit, Woody and I had a singing contest to decide which of us knew the most songs about the most subjects. Someone suggested the topics – dogs, faithless women, and the weather, and we matched each other until one of us won the round by a process of elimination. I had a headful of ballads at the time and I gave him a hard run for his money. I forgot who won but after this Woody and I worked together like silk.”²¹

It may have been difficult to script Woody, even if Lomax had wanted to – which he almost certainly had not. One gets the sense that while Lomax may have become familiar enough with some of Guthrie’s body of work, there was no true rehearsal. The sessions sound natural and spontaneous; at one point, Lomax asked Woody if he had another “hard times” song and Woody replied that he couldn’t think of any more. Alan adeptly switched tack and asked him for a love song, and Woody came up with “Bring Back To Me My Blue-Eyed Boy.” Then the conversation led to some outlaw songs, ranging from Billy the Kid to Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, a few songs earlier Lomax had foreshadowed Woody’s “Do Re Mi” with a bit of humor. He’d heard the song and knew what was coming when he asked Woody what it was like when Woody and the other Okies arrived in California: “Did they welcome you with bands and banners and everything? How was it?” It was one of the songs Woody had performed at the Forrest. And rather than revert to asking for a traditional folk song, Lomax probed and prompted for songs of protest: “Woody, you keep talkin’ about the bankers all the time. Did you ever make up any songs about these bankers? Uh, to try and give the sentiments to some of these outlaws and some of your sharecropper friends in Oklahoma and some of your Dust Bowl friends from California, the way...what they think about the bankers?”

Hearing Woody sing a traditional song such as “Old Joe Clark” just wasn’t as interesting as hearing him expound on songs he himself had written, and how he’d come to write a song like “Talkin’ Dust Bowl Blues.” Lomax got Woody going by talking about his background growing up in Oklahoma and Texas, and he dutifully sang a few folksongs – but the talk soon

turned to the songs reflecting some of the hard times (“Greenback Dollar” and “Boll Weevil”). It didn’t take too long to get into the original songs Woody had composed, songs that weren’t meant to warm the hearts of the bankers or politicians of the day.

The 1930s had indeed seen hard times. The whole country had suffered through a decade of the Depression. For someone such as Guthrie who had lived the hard times, and who had already seen himself giving voice to people who might not otherwise have been heard, one didn’t have to dig deep to get at his topical songs. They were part and parcel of his persona, and authentically so. And that’s what Alan Lomax wanted to capture, the creative works which distinguished Woody Guthrie from other singers of folk songs.

How did Woody’s RCA recordings differ from the Library of Congress sessions?

Woody recorded for RCA Victor at virtually the same time as for the Library of Congress, and RCA didn’t shy away from what we might call “protest songs,” either. The company had originally contemplated recording folk songs by Woody Guthrie, but *Grapes of Wrath* had been a tremendous success – Steinbeck’s book sold over 400,000 copies and was the best-selling book of 1939. It won the National Book Award and John Ford’s film of the same title (with Henry Fonda playing Tom Joad) was a huge hit as well. Later in May, the book won the Pulitzer Prize. It didn’t take much for an enthused Alan Lomax to persuade the record company executives to want a record album which could tap the same market.

RCA asked Woody to record 12 songs, enough for two albums each of which would contain three double-sided 78 rpm records. RCA was looking for his “dust bowl ballads.” Woody told Pete Seeger, “The Victor people want me to write a song about *The Grapes of Wrath*.”

On April 26, Guthrie recorded many of the same songs he’d just cut for Alan Lomax at the Library of Congress. Significantly, he added two powerful songs. RCA had indeed asked him to write a song tied to Steinbeck’s book, and Woody came up with his two-part epic “Tom Joad” which he cut on April 26, along with “Vigilante Man” which he’d written in 1939 and was also inspired by Steinbeck’s novel. The RCA recordings were done for Robert P. “Bob” Wetherald of the company’s Recording and Record Sales department, who had approached Alan Lomax with the idea of recording Woody.²² On April 29, three days after the first session, Wetherald wrote to Alan Lomax, “Woody came down Friday morning, and we recorded twelve sides.” He listed them and explained he planned to put out two albums of six sides each, but that he was requesting that Woody come back that week and record an additional song. Woody did cut two more songs in a follow-up session on Friday May 3 to make sure he met his quota.

In all, Woody cut 14 sides for Victor, 12 of which were released in the July 1940 album. Woody was quoted in the *Hartford Courant* as saying he doubted RCA had ever released a more radical record. The *Los Angeles Times* review called Guthrie “the dustiest of the Dust Bowlers” and said the albums “casts something of a shadow over ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’ But Woody, one of the Okies that John Steinbeck wrote about, sings his bitter songs without bitterness. His humor and the poetry of his lyrics make this particular album the prize of this and many other months.”²³ Howard Taubman wrote a feature review in the August 4 *New York Times*; he said, in part, “These albums are not Summer sedatives. They make you think; they may even make you uncomfortable, though not as uncomfortable as the Okie on his miserable journeys. But they are an excellent thing to have on records. The albums show that the phonograph is broadening its perspectives and that life as some of our unfortunate people know it can be mirrored on the glistening discs.” This was a quick vindication of Alan Lomax’s sense of mission, and words Woody must have been pleased to read. Taubman later listed *Dust Bowl Ballads* as one of the most notable albums of 1940.²⁴

The albums cost \$2.75 apiece. The other two tracks were added to the LP version which the company published in 1964. All 14 were on a Rounder release in August 1988. RCA rewarded Woody with an advance of \$25.00 for the recordings, against a royalty of 8% of the retail list price for records sold.²⁵

It would be difficult to write songs about the Dust Bowl which didn’t embrace social criticism. Nor was Victor looking for pabulum. They were hoping to capitalize on Steinbeck’s successes, and bland folk songs that shied away from the intrinsic issues of the Depression would be less likely to be received well. Somewhat paradoxically, because the Library of Congress sessions were meant to cover Woody’s full life and repertoire, the range of songs recorded was overall more representative but less pointed. The commercial enterprise – RCA – focused on the more political songs while Lomax, the committed radical, produced a more rounded body of work.

Some welcome acceptance was coming Woody’s way. *A Treasury of American Song* (by Olin Downes and Elie Siegmeister) was published by Alfred A. Knopf in November, and among its 142 songs were two by Woody: “Tom Joad” and “I’m Goin’ Down This Road Feelin’ Bad.”²⁶

THE BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION RECORDINGS

Woody Guthrie's recordings for the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) was another series of recordings that came about as the result of Alan Lomax's recommendation. The Bonneville Power Administration was part of the Department of the Interior, and the acting chief of its Information Division in Portland, Oregon was Stephen B. Kahn, a dedicated advocate of public power who wanted to better publicize the work that the BPA had been doing in the Pacific Northwest, tapping the rivers to produce public power.

The first Federally-funded dam begun on the Columbia had been the Grand Coulee Dam, initiated by the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation in 1933, though funding through the National Industrial Recovery Act for the Bonneville Dam was appropriated just a couple of weeks later, while full funding for Grand Coulee took until 1935.²⁷ Bonneville was completed first, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt officially dedicated the Bonneville Dam on September 28, 1937. In a speech he gave on radio, the President described turning the knobs to initiate its operation.

The Bonneville Power Administration was created in 1937 specifically to market the power from Bonneville Dam; power from Grand Coulee Dam was added later to the BPA's mandate.²⁸ The BPA's older sister was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), chartered in 1933 to help provide rural electrification, irrigation, and economic development in the Tennessee River valley. Flood control provided part of the legal rationale on which the provision of public power was based.

The Resettlement Administration had commissioned filmmaker Pare Lorentz to produce two documentaries – 1936's *The Plow That Broke the Plains* and a 1938 documentary called *The River*.²⁹ Though through modern eyes, *The River* is (in author Ed Cray's characterization) "didactic, even ponderous" it was perhaps not out of touch with the times. Director Gunther Von Fritsch had just filmed *The Miracle of Hydro*, promoting the BPA, which was a little more lively and used a few bits of folksong. Kahn, however, decided to seek someone who could serve as a narrator combining speech and song.³⁰ It would be something different.

Alan Lomax's recommendation of Woody Guthrie was persuasive. Lomax offered the context. "We were engaged in the big fight for public power. It was part...perhaps the most important achievement of the New Deal was to get cheap public power into rural areas all over the country. All of us in Washington were in that, and for it. My friend Tex Goldschmidt was the administrator of the whole shebang of public power, under Roosevelt. We were all knowledgeable about this and I did get a call from Bonneville – they were very nice people – and they said they were facing an election...where it was going to be voted on by the people of the state or region...whether Bonneville would furnish the power, or it would be furnished by a private corporation. And they didn't have any money for publicity for a big campaign..."³¹

Alan continued, "Woody at that time could make a song as he sat there...And knew how to tell a story, but also how to make [it] burn with the fire that emerges when the text is struck by the tune. That's what a song is! And Woody had that gift...The idea that Woody would actually get a job writing ballads was just an inconceivable stroke... I felt like shouting over the telephone! It was a laughing conversation all the way, I can remember how full of laughter of delight and triumph I felt that Woody would get a chance to do this."

After having Von Fritsch visit Guthrie at his home in Los Angeles, before they moved to Columbia, California, Kahn had a letter written to Woody which discussed a year's appointment as a "narrator actor" – but then Kahn, admittedly, got cold feet. "I didn't want to film anything that would incriminate me," he told Ed Cray.³²

Woody remembered first hearing from Kahn. "We got a registered letter that told us to come up to the Columbia River to the Bonneville and the Grand Coulee Dam, to the office of the Bonneville Power Administration. Well, I talked to people, I got my job, it was to read some books about the Coulee and Bonneville dams, to walk around up and down the rivers, and to see what I could find to make up songs about."³³

Since Woody was known as a "lefty," Kahn worried about whether Woody would pass muster as a hire. When Woody and family unexpectedly turned up at Kahn's office in Portland, ready to go to work despite the agreement never having been formalized, Kahn opted instead to make an "emergency temporary appointment" of one month's duration, rather than have to submit Guthrie's application to civil service vetting.³⁴ Woody shaved and spruced up a bit at Kahn's suggestion, was told to steer clear of the political, and went in to present himself to Kahn's superior, Dr. Paul J. Raver, the head administrator. He was given the green light. Woody was officially hired as an Information Consultant. He and his family first put up in a motel, #42 Portland Auto Court, then rented an apartment at 6111 S.E. 92nd Avenue.

As a matter of routine, Guthrie had to sign a "loyalty oath" before he could accept the appointment, and Kahn talked to Woody about keeping the songs free from politics. For one month's work, from May 13 to June 11, 1941, he was paid \$266.67, the pro-rated share of the \$3,200 annual fee Woody thought he'd been offered. "Hiring Woody for \$266 a month was the best investment the Department of the Interior ever made," Kahn told interviewer Michael Majdic.³⁵

Woody was fired up by what he saw in Oregon and Washington. Here was government taking action that would



WOODY AND FAMILY IN LOS ANGELES JUST PRIOR TO HEADING NORTH TO OREGON, 1941.

CELILO FALLS, COLUMBIA RIVER, 1940.



provide jobs and create something lasting that could improve people's lives. The electricity to be generated was public power, not owned by private enterprise. What wasn't there for him to like about the work of the BPA? He was shown around the region by a young BPA employee named Elmer Buehler, who drove Woody around in a black 1940 Hudson. They headed to the Hood River Valley, first visiting Parkdale, Dee, and Odell, and then to Lost Lake. Buehler next took Woody to Celilo Falls, where they watched the Native Americans of the area fishing with nets from wooden platforms they'd constructed.³⁶ After spending the night at a hotel in Spokane, they drove to Grand Coulee Dam the next morning. In all, they spent close to a week touring the area. This granted Guthrie the opportunity to meet and mingle with those working on the construction work and some of those who would benefit from extending the availability of electric power.

Well, Oregon state is mighty fine
 If you're hooked on to the power line
 But there ain't no country extra fine.
 If you're just a mile from the end of the line.
 –“End of My Line”

Woody sat in the back seat of the Hudson, sometimes playing on his guitar. They went to Grand Island, visited peach orchards and hop yards and supporters of public power in the region. They visited the already-completed Bonneville Dam and also Celilo Falls and the land that could really benefit from the irrigation that could come from the half-constructed Grand Coulee Dam. They stopped in Arlington and Spokane, visited Connell and Kenewick and Wenatchee, to Lost Lake and Baker. They stopped in at the Hood River Electric Coop office and when Woody got out of the car at Lost Lake, on the flanks of Mount Hood, Buehler reports Woody marveling that it was just like being in a framed picture. He said, ‘This has to be paradise.’ He’s talking to himself...He kept saying that.”³⁷ And he met people along the way.

“The spirit of the people inspired him,” Kahn said.³⁸ Buehler said it was a time of optimism in the region, and farmers were upbeat about the benefits of using what the river had to offer for a better life.³⁹ The BPA did bring electrification to hundreds of thousands of people in the Pacific Northwest, with the added benefits of flood control and irrigation for agriculture. The taming of the Columbia even helped provide the inexpensive hydroelectric power necessary to the process of manufacturing metallic aluminum, which helped build the area’s large aircraft factories so essential to defense. With the country coming out of the Depression and the hard times, the future seemed to be brightening. Studs Terkel said there was an “optimistic spirit...a light at the end of the tunnel.”⁴⁰

When they returned to Portland, Woody wrote at the BPA offices for the rest of the time. At the end of the day, he’d sometimes play his guitar and sing some his new songs to the staff.

It was an inspired time for Woody, Alan Lomax recalled. “Woody was driven around and I don’t remember very much what he said about it, but I do remember that for him it was just a heavenly experience, a godsend. Everything about the situation was just right for him. He came from the dry Southwest, like I did, and I can remember the first time I saw the Columbia River Valley...I felt like I’d got to heaven: green, clear water, soft air, and that was the way the Columbia River hit Woody. I understand he made a song every day! They perched him on the heights of the dam, he’d look down, and commune with the salmon – oh God! Those songs were superb.”⁴¹

“I made up twenty-six,” Woody recalled. “They played them over the loud speakers at meetings to sell bonds to carry the high lines from the dams to the little towns. The private power dams hated to see these two babies born to stand up out there across those rockwall canyons, and they pulled every trick possible to hold up the deal, saying that the material would be wasted and could be used to build a big war machine to beat Hitler with. Our argument was that we could run a thousand towns and factories, farms, with these two power dams, and turn out aluminum bombers to beat Hitler a lot quicker with. And our side won out on top.”⁴²

Bill Murlin of the BPA added, “I don’t know that he was so interested in glorifying dams, in the words that he was writing, but he certainly was interested in what the dams were going to do for the people who were here and the people who were moving here.” When he was interviewed by *The New York Times*, Murlin said that if Woody were writing today, he’d be more likely to write about conserving energy and saving the salmon on the river.⁴³

The songs he wrote – 26 of them in the one month’s work, almost a song per day – are filled with paeans to the Northwest, the hard work in building the Grand Coulee Dam, and the payoff from taming the rivers. He didn’t entirely avoid the political, but that would have been expecting the near-impossible. The songs cost the BPA just about \$10 apiece – those 26 songs for \$266.67.

This time, Guthrie actually worked for the government. He had a GS rating, at the time FCS-13. When he recorded for the Library of Congress, he was not an employee of the Library or any other branch of the government. He was an informant.

He was not paid for his service (though Alan Lomax did give him a drink at least once or twice during the recordings.) For the BPA, he was an employee. As a soldier in the United States Army, he also drew pay from the government.

The Library of Congress is the archival and research arm of Congress, of the legislative branch of government. Woody had recorded for the legislative branch. And now he had recorded for the Department of the Interior, a Cabinet-level part of the executive branch. The results surely would have been interesting, but he was never asked to record for the judicial branch.

How might one characterize the content of what Woody Guthrie recorded for the BPA?

“The U. S. Government, headed by Franklin Roosevelt, was out to help the people get cheap electricity, and Woody helped them.” – Pete Seeger, *Roll On Columbia*

For one thing, the songs he recorded were all original ones and were all specifically composed for the BPA. Though he was on salary, he was in effect commissioned to write a series of songs celebrating public power and the work being done by the Bonneville Power Administration.

These were not true folk songs, as were a number of the songs Guthrie recorded for the Library of Congress, though most of the songs he cut for the Library were originals, too.

Some of his most beautiful songs were written in this one month, and the edge which some of them had was muted but still present. See, for instance, “Pastures of Plenty.”

LOOKING EAST OVER THE GRAND COULEE DAM, CIRCA 1941.



California and Arizona, I make all your crops
 Then it's north up to Oregon to gather your hop
 Dig the beets from your ground, cut the grapes from your vine
 To set on your table your light sparkling wine

Green pastures of plenty from dry desert ground
 From that Grand Coulee Dam where the water runs down
 Every state in this Union us migrants have been
 We'll work in this fight and we'll fight till we win

Well, it's always we rambled, that river and I
 All along your green valley, I'll work till I die
 My land I'll defend with my life if it be
 'Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free

"Woody's topical and 'motivational' songs, as one might call them, were actually very patriotic," says Alan Lomax's daughter Anna L. Wood. "His most celebrated songs were filled with a Whitmanesque glory in his country and seem to me to poetically articulate the feelings of most American progressives and radicals."⁴⁴

It may be of additional interest that 70 years ago, Woody Guthrie was promoting renewable energy resources:

Now there's full three million horses charged with Coulee's 'lectric power
 Day and night they'll run the factory and they never will get tired
 Well, a coal mine gets dug out and an oil well it runs dry
 But Uncle Sam will find his power where the river meets the sky
 —"Roll, Columbia, Roll"

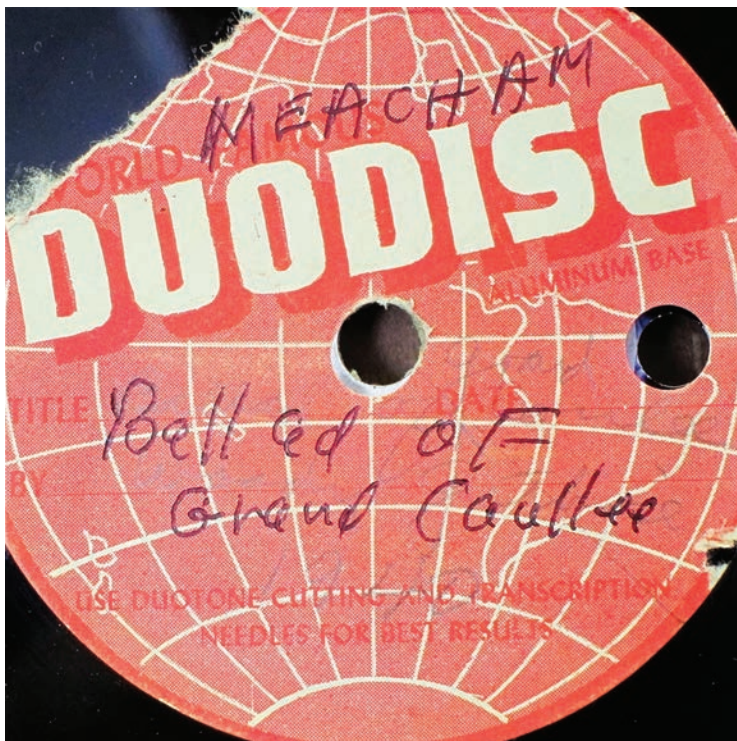
The songs were written to help serve as part of the soundtrack for the film Kahn envisioned. The songs were recorded in a basement studio (which has been characterized as a "closet") in the BPA headquarters in Portland. They were not released as recordings to the public. They were put to some use, however, Woody explained: "The records were played at all

sorts and sizes of meetings where people bought bonds to bring the power lines over the fields and hills to their own little places. Electricity to milk the cows, kiss the maid, shoe the old mare, light up the saloon, the chili joint window, the schools, and churches along the way, to run the factories turning out manganese, chrome, bauxite, aluminum, and steel."⁴⁵ In retrospect, it is not clear exactly what Woody was talking about. There is no mention in any of the books about Woody of the BPA discs being brought to meetings where bonds were being sold. The timeframe isn't clear, either.

The Grand Coulee Dam itself was completed in October 1941.

The film *The Columbia* wasn't released until 1949; it contained three of Guthrie's songs. By the time of its release, it could accurately be described as "a typical, if belated, example of New Deal discourse."⁴⁶

Most of the recordings were not made available to the public until the Rounder Records release in 1987. Bill Murlin was an Audiovisual Specialist for the BPA department



CONTEMPORARY BPA DISC PRESERVED BY MERLE MEACHAM



ELMER BUEHLER

SPILLWAY DAM AT BONNEVILLE, AROUND THE TIME WOODY GUTHRIE VISITED.



NOTE: This package was prepared in 2012, the 100th anniversary of Woody Guthrie's birth. The Bonneville Power Administration celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2012 and made arrangements with Rounder Records and Woody Guthrie's publisher to play selections from the BPA recordings on this set as music for people placed on hold on their telephone system and at meetings during the course of the year.

charged with preparing a 50th anniversary look at the BPA. Part of his efforts resulted in the *Columbia River Collection* being released on Rounder, and a songbook of the same title being published by the Bonneville Power Administration in 1988.⁴⁷ Murlin had to go much further than simply researching the archives of the BPA. The recordings weren't there. In fact, he's still been unable to locate the originals. Fortunately, former information specialist Ralph Bennett had brought copies home with him and donated them to the BPA when Murlin began assembling material with the anniversary in mind. Merle Meacham and Gordon MacNab each had recorded material they donated as well. Those copies are now in the care of the National Archives. There were no copies of each song, however. The *Columbia River Collection* included all that could be found, all 17 tracks which Woody recorded of the songs he had written for the BPA. No additional recordings have surfaced in the 25 years since the Rounder album was released.

But what of Woody talking about the records being used to drum up support for bond drives? We asked Bill Murlin in February 2012 and he said that Elmer Buehler told of driving Woody to one or more Grange meetings where Woody sang some of his songs. We know that Woody sang at one or two events while in the region, including something of an impromptu concert in a hotel lobby in Arlington, Oregon.⁴⁸

It's possible that Buehler himself took the records to some meetings even after Guthrie had left the Northwest. Murlin says he knows that Buehler had taken copies of the 1938 film *Hydro* to some Grange meetings, and says, "It's quite possible he would have taken Guthrie recordings to Grange and other meetings after Guthrie left town." This could have continued even after the 1948 release of *The Columbia*. Murlin adds, "I also know, based on letters in our Guthrie file, that Kahn loaned copies of Guthrie recordings to various people including NBC radio for some nationally aired programs."

Woody may have remembered more than actually happened, but there seems to be real substance to his recollection. The records were put to use, sometimes at meetings – with Woody present or not, and in some cases a number of years later. Three were used in the film, itself released seven years after their recording (it's worth keeping in mind that a world war occurred in the interim), and the songs themselves live on even today.

Elmer Buehler may have been a simple chauffeur, but he played a role in saving part of America's heritage. He'd begun work with the BPA in February 1939 running a mimeograph machine. He learned how to run a film projector and brought copies of films such as *The River* to rural communities in the Columbia River area, in order to try and build up support for the BPA and for public power and the BPA. Sometimes he worked in places which didn't yet have electricity and he would need to dig a pit for a generator, put boards over the pit, and cover the boards with blankets to deaden the sound of the generator. "They wanted me to get out and tell the story of Bonneville," he said in the 2005 interview. "We had a strong movement but not strong enough."

Some years later, when Douglas McKay was Secretary of the Interior for the first three years of the Eisenhower administration, an order came down to destroy all the films in the possession of the BPA, including *Hydro* and *The Columbia*. This was during the period when McCarthyism held sway and Buehler himself recalls being told that he was "one of the 26 Bonneville Power employees who was alleged to be a Communist by none other than Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin."⁴⁹ He was working at the time at the Ross Substation and was in charge of the incinerator there and copies of the films came in from all over. "It just broke my heart," he remembers, of taking the films out of their metal containers and burning them. But he saved three films: *Hydro*, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, and *The Columbia*. He took a copy of each home. "I took them home. Never told anybody. And put them in the basement in a woodpile that I always had in reserve...It was a place that was protected from the elements. No water. No excessive heat. They were in the metal containers." The purge was apparently fairly complete; not even the National Archives had a copy. In later years, under a later administration, when asked if he might know whether any copies existed, Buehler brought the films out. "I didn't steal anything," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, it's government property and I've been the caretaker. While I couldn't write a book, I could save a book anyhow."⁵⁰

Arlo Guthrie, one of Woody's sons, felt that the work Woody did during this one month in the Pacific Northwest was "probably the best time of his life." Arlo amplified: "He really saw himself, for the first time in his life, being on the inside of a monumental, world-changing, nature-challenging...huge-beyond-belief thing. It was bigger than him...He saw this as a big deal."

And it tied into Woody's strong positive sentiments about America. These songs were filled with hope, brimming with optimism. "Here finally was almost a patriotic thing," Arlo adds. "He had a chance to express the feelings he had for the country, in the forms of these songs. Not just in its political sense or its social sense or its engineering sense, but in almost all of these things at one moment. It was probably the best time of his life....That raw creativity at work."⁵¹

WHAT WAS IT THAT WOODY GUTHRIE TRULY BELIEVED?

Very few people are rigid ideologues. Very few people hold and adhere to one unchanging set of principles. Take any individual's writings, utterings, or pronouncements and submit them to dispassionate dissection by a logician and few will hold up as internally consistent over time. People evolve and their thoughts evolve. People are human, and probably more often than not embrace paradoxical thoughts. And Woody was never static. Nor was he monochromatic, or a song with just one chord.

Woody Guthrie was as complex as the rest of us, maybe more so than many. He certainly had a restless spirit which seemed to keep him from settling down, sometimes letting others worry about his family obligations while he pursued his muse of the moment. *New York Times* music critic Robert Shelton once wrote, "Guthrie has always caused controversy. His radicalism, his unconventionality, his refusal to conform, his eccentricities, his drinking, the chaos of his personal life that made Robert Burns' seems like that of a solid citizen in comparison. All these fed the legend that distorted the truth, and that often took the focus off his contributions."⁵² Any attempt to discern his political philosophy has to yield to the fact that he was a living, breathing being. As with all of us, he was filled with internal contradictions and inconsistencies – because he was human, and paradox is part of the human condition. People change over time – over the years, and sometimes even from week to week. Perhaps no one is purely linear in the progression of their thought; people sometimes even hold contradictory positions at the same time.

Woody Guthrie: communist or "commonist"?

This is the sort of question that perhaps mattered more back in the days of McCarthyism, but it's a question a number of people have tried to address. Will Kaufman's book *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (University of Illinois Press, 2011) argues that over time our appreciation for how radical Woody really was has dimmed, and some of his messages diluted.

On the other hand, in another book published in 2011, John S. Partington makes a convincing argument that Woody harbored some fundamentally conservative views.⁵³ Or at least gave voice to the aspirations of the people for whom he sang. The migrants making their way to California weren't looking to establish collective farms there on the Soviet model.

If you want to buy a home or farm
That can't do nobody harm
Or take your vacation by the mountains or sea
–"Do-Re-Mi"

In "Talkin' Dust Bowl Blues," Woody recalled more idyllic times just a few years earlier:

Back in 1927
I had a little farm and I called it heaven
Prices up, and the rain come down
and I hauled my crops all into town
I got the money
Bought clothes and groceries
Fed the kids
Took it easy

Then things fell apart, during the Depression. Given how his own relatively prosperous father had lost the family home in the early 1920s, and saw the family dispersed (not unlike the experiences of tens of thousands of other Oklahomans), it's not surprising that among the masses of migrants, there would be a longing for a settled life and some of the values that went with it. Woody's background wasn't with the urban working class; his fundamental impulses were the basically conservative ones of wanting to see the same opportunities offered to all people – to buy a home, go to school, and create a better life for oneself and one's family.

There is no indication he was ever a member of the Communist Party but there's no question that he was a "com-symp" (in the word often used by the John Birchers of the 1960s), someone sympathetic to communism – if not ideologically, at least because those who called themselves socialists and communists seemed to stand with working people. Woody wrote a daily column for the *People's Daily World*, a Communist Party publication in California. It wasn't just an occasional column. He submitted 174 columns from May 12, 1939 through January 3, 1940. Selections from the columns are offered in the Grosset and

Standard Form No. 6
(Approved by the President, May 22, 1925)

OATH OF OFFICE

Prescribed by Section 1757, Revised Statutes of the United States

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
(Department or Establishment)

BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION
(Bureau or Office)

I, WOODROW W. GUTHRIE, do
(Name in full, printed or typed)

solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. SO HELP ME GOD.

INTERIOR DEPT.
RECEIVED
MAY 26 1941
SECRETARY'S
MAIL CENTER
TO APPTS. UNIT

Woodrow W. Guthrie
(Signature of Appointee)

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 13th day of May, A.D. 1941

at Portland, Oregon
(City or place) (State)



Elva Brown
NOTARY PUBLIC FOR OREGON
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES DEC. 27, 1943

NOTE.—If the oath is taken before a Notary Public the date of expiration of his commission should be shown.

Position to which appointed Information Consultant Temporary-Emergency (Not to exceed thirty days)

Date of entrance on duty May 13, 1941 (1:00 p.m.)

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 10-1089

Noted on record card
By R.B. Appt. Div.

Dunlap book *Woody Sez* (1975). Woody later wrote for the *Daily Worker* in New York City. He knew people who were Communists, and attended events promoted by the Party, and sometimes – perhaps to get a rise out of people – declared he was a communist. But party member and friend of Woody, actor Will Geer’s summation was probably right on target: “Woody never was a party member, because he was always considered too eccentric by the party apparatus...” He was, however, Geer said, a “convinced socialist.”⁵⁴ At times, he no doubt considered himself a Communist, but “eccentric” is a good word; there was no way he could ever submit to the discipline of such a rigid party.

Woody called himself a “commonist.”

One of his columns for the *People’s Daily World* expressed his reaction to seeing *Grapes of Wrath* on the big screen:

Seen the pitcher last night, *Grapes of Wrath*, best cussed pitcher I ever seen. The *Grapes of Wrath*, you know is about us a pullin’ out of Oklahoma and Arkansas, and down south, and a driftin’ around over State of California, busted, disgusted, down and out, and a lookin’ for work.

Shows you how come us to be that a way. Shows you the dam bankers men that broke us and the dust that choked us, and comes right out in plain old English and says what to do about it.

It says you got to get together and have some meetins, and stick together, and raise old billy hell till you get youre job, and get your farm back, and your house and your chickens and your groceries and your clothes, and your money back.⁵⁵

Had he truly been orthodox, he would have called for the workers to take ownership of the means of production. Instead, he’s really arguing a distinctly conservative position: hold meetings and, through sticking together, organize to get back your homes and your possessions.

He concluded on another note: “Go to see *Grapes of Wrath*, pardner, go to see it and don’t miss. You was the star in that picture. Go and see your own self and hear your own words and your own song.” Those sentiments expressed his belief in what we may call the common man. An older folk song Woody adapted, “Goin’ Down the Road Feelin’ Bad,” was in the film.

In some ways, Guthrie was culturally conservative as well. He wasn’t unlike most other men, having grown up in a patriarchal society that regarded women as keepers of the home and center of the family. That said, he evolved over time and in August 1947 wrote the lyric “I Say to You Woman and Man” in which he urged a woman to come out from the confines of home and become a wild dancer.

I say to my woman dance
out of our home.

Dance out and see fighting.
Dance out and see people.
Dance out and run factories.
Dance out to see street meets.
Dance out in the deep stream.
Dance out to your vote box.
Dance down to your office.
Dance over to your counter.
Dance up your big stairs.

If your husband gets jealous
dance out to new lovers.
If your man keeps your
heart tied dance out
and untie it.

Dance out to sing equal.
Dance up and be pretty.

Dance around and be free.

And if I just had this
one thing to say to
a husband it would
be these words

Go dance
That's all
Just jump up and let
go and dance.

Dance in your own way.
Sing your own song.⁵⁶

Until he was called on it, he used the word “nigger” when referring to a well-known fiddle tune of the day – but once a radio listener wrote in and explained how hurtful that word was, from that time in 1937 on, he never used it again and sometimes got himself in trouble for fighting racism in word and deed.⁵⁷ Not many years later, Woody lived for a time in Lead Belly’s small apartment in New York. Henrietta Yurchenco, who knew them both well, has written, “Woody admired few people in the whole wide world as much as Huddie Ledbetter.” Woody wrote her a letter in late 1940, when he went on and on about how they’d been working together and how “lucky” he was to “study under Huddie which is to me one of New York’s greatest pleasures.”⁵⁸

Without belaboring this line of thought, one also notes the verse in “Roll On Columbia” which indicates some acceptance of the historical lynching of Native Americans:

Remember the trial when the battle was won
The wild Indian warriors to the tall timber run
We hung every Indian with smoke in his gun
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

That may reflect more of a thoughtless moment than anything else; it would hardly be conclusive evidence that Woody was prejudiced and nearly everything else about his life would indicate he was not, or would have wanted to challenge bias in others and whatever he may have had within himself. He was around Native Americans growing up in Oklahoma, and when Woody wrote about his father Charlie, it sounded like they both enjoyed aspects of Indian life: “He was always out talking, dancing, drinking and trading with the Indians...Taught me to count in Chickasaw or Choctaw, Cherokee, Sioux, Osage or Seminole dialect. He was a Clerk of the County Court and our hose was full of the smells of big leather law books and poems of pomp and high dignity that he memorized and performed for us with the same wild pioneer outdoor chant as he sang his Negro and Indian square dances and Blueses.”⁵⁹ Okemah was a Creek name meaning “Town on a Hill” – about 50% percent Anglo, and 25% each Native American and African American. Charlie Guthrie lost it all even before the Depression and lost his wife Nora, too, to what was first thought to be mental illness but was actually the disease known as Huntington’s chorea. Both parents had been musical. Nora had a piano and Charlie had played banjo and guitar in cowboy bands before their marriage. They sang together in the house, Woody writing “The color of the songs was the Red Man, Black Man, and the white folks.”⁶⁰

People’s backgrounds inform their belief patterns. It’s not as though Woody would have been out there denying the rights of Native Americans, but there was arguably a shortcoming of consciousness when he wrote those words. It should be safe to assume that he would have responded the same way he did to the radio listener’s letter, and excised and replaced this verse from his song, had it been brought to his attention. If sometimes perceived as abrupt and abrasive in his personal life, he was politically sensitive in these matters.

As stated above, feelings and opinions and political positions evolve and change over time. There are few flip-flops as immediate and dramatic, or as glaring, as the CPUSA’s change in attitude toward American military intervention in Europe in 1941. After the 1939 Molotov/Von Ribbentrop Pact (commonly considered the “Nazi-Soviet Pact”), the Party was solidly against intervention. And Woody was outspoken, writing that war was a “game played by maniacs who kill each other... You can’t believe in life, and wear the uniform of death...Locate the man who profits by war and strip him of his profits – war will end.”⁶¹

The Almanac Singers' song "C is for Conscription" from their March 1941 anti-war album *Songs for John Doe* went:

Well it's C for Conscription,
C for Capitol Hill.
C for Conscription,
C for Capitol Hill.
Hey, hey, hey
And it's C for the Congress
That passed that goddamn bill.

Yodelayee Yeow! hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo.

I'd rather be at home,
Even sleeping in a holler log,
I'd rather be here home,
Even sleeping in a holler log.
Than go to the army
And be treated like a dirty dog!

Yodelayee Yeow! hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo

That wasn't Woody's song. He was just an occasional Almanac and Woody himself did not perform on the album. He didn't just argue against the military draft – conscription – but took a more principled stand against militarism, exemplified in this quotation from one of his columns for the *People's World*:

"I took a bath this morning in six war speeches, and a sprinkle of peace. Looks like ever body is declaring war against the forces of force. That's what you get for building up a big war machine. It scares your neighbors into jumping on you, and then of course they them selves have to use force, so you are against their force, and they're aginst yours. Look like the ring has been drawed and the marbles are all in. The millionaires has throwed their silk hats and our last set of drawers in the ring. The fuse is lit and the cannon is set, and somebody is in for a frailin. I would like to see every single soldier on every single side, just take off your helmet, unbuckle your kit, lay down your rifle, and set down at the side of some shady lane, and say, nope, I aint a gonna kill nobody. Plenty of rich folks wants to fight. Give them the guns."⁶²

Woody's alignment with the Communist Party's pro-Soviet stance even impelled a strong leftist like Frank Burke to distance himself from Woody. There are numerous anti-war proclamations and sentiments throughout his writings, but it's not as though he didn't grasp the evil that Hitler embodied. Even a few months before Hitler's forces invaded Russia, Woody wrote a song like "Adolph and Nevilline" which condemned British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain for his appeasement policy toward Hitler.

When Hitler's forces suddenly and unexpectedly broke the pact and invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Party promptly called for America to enter the fray – now the Soviet Union had come under attack. The party line turned on a dime. Defense of the Soviet Union signaled intervention, not isolation. *Songs for John Doe* was quickly pulled from distribution after the German assault. The Almanacs began to write songs such as "Round and Round Hitler's Grave" and the moving and still-popular "Sinking of the Reuben James," both of which were on an early 1942 Almanacs album. The group promptly and solidly got behind the war effort.

Woody himself wrote a song while living at 74 Charles Street in New York entitled "Let Me Join Your Army." It starts with the singer waking up and reading in the paper that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and that war had been declared. The second verse read:

I didn't boil no coffee, I didn't boil no tea,
I didn't boil no coffee, I didn't boil no tea;
I made a bee line for the recruiting office,
Surely Uncle Sam's got room for me.

This song would have been written a year after Pearl Harbor because Woody lived at 74 Charles from December 1942 until May 1943.

Like most of us, Woody's politics were formed by those around him. Immersed in the milieu and the quickly-changing events of the time, many on the Left were guilty of turning a blind eye to what we now know were the excesses of Stalinism.⁶³ In this, Woody was like many well-intentioned folks who had had such hopes for socialism, and in their urgency to defend the vision against the vicious attacks of reaction had been unable to see past their own wishful thinking to the reality of a promise perverted. And he once did tell a screening office for Naval Intelligence, who asked if he had been a member of the Communist Party, that he was not a member, "Nor was he ashamed to be described as a communist."⁶⁴

He would never have been comfortable as an ideologue. There is no indication of him ever being associated with violence.⁶⁵ He was willing to work in electoral politics, and in 1944 he joined Cisco Houston and Will Geer and others in campaigning for the re-election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as President on a "Bandwagon" tour. He believed in organizing people and the power of the ballot, at one point writing "Most folks don't realize that your vote is about the best thing you got in the world because it is the best thing you can use to change the world and make it better."⁶⁶

In 1948, the newly-organized Progressive Party ran Henry A. Wallace for President of the United States (Wallace had been Vice President under F.D.R. from 1941-45, but he had replaced on the 1944 ticket by Harry S. Truman. Truman became President after Roosevelt's death.) The 1948 Democrat Party nominee, Truman, was considered too anti-labor by many on the left, and in July 1948 Wallace accepted the nomination of the Progressive Party, basically a party created to promote his candidacy. Woody remarked, "President Truman has proved to me that he don't like my trade unions, don't like organized labor, don't like the Communist Party, don't like the human race."⁶⁷ Woody and People's Songs also supported Wallace because of his positions on the Cold War and on matters of civil rights. Ed Cray notes that Alan Lomax "staffed a 'musical desk' responsible for assuring this would truly be a singing campaign—and signed up E. Y. Harburg, Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Guthrie, and others to write campaign songs."⁶⁸

Cray elaborates, commenting on how Woody felt the effort to enlist the arts fell short. "Guthrie and Cisco Houston sand together at rallies for Wallace from June 1948 until election day, but Guthrie was increasingly unhappy. In keeping with the Communist influence on the direction of the campaign, the songs turned out by Lomax's squad were heavy-handed and grated on Guthrie. He was 'wildly opposed to agit-prop,' Bess Lomax Hawes recalled. 'He felt artistically it was very inferior.' According to Guthrie, songs had to be about people to be interesting, to be art. 'A song was a different kind of thing than a speech....A song had to have some staying power.'⁶⁹

His fundamental understanding of Communism may have been rooted in something closer to a quasi-Christian socialism, as a paragraph highlighted by Ed Cray as "an intensely personal synthesis of primitive Christianity and nondoctrinaire communism" would suggest:

Every single human being is looking for a better way...when there shall be no want among you, because you'll own everything in Common. When the Rich will give their goods unto the poor. I believe in this Way. I just can't believe in any other Way. This is the Christian Way and it is already on a big part of the earth and it will come. To own everything in Common. That's what the bible says. Common means all of us. This is pure old Commonism.⁷⁰

Naïve, maybe, but this seemed to have been his true motivational underpinning. He even wrote a song titled "Christ for President" asking folks, in part, to:

Cast your vote for the Carpenter
That you call the Nazarene.

The only way you can ever beat
There crooked politician men
Is to run the money changers out of the temple
And to put the Carpenter in.

O it's Jesus Christ our president,
God above our king —
With a job and a pension for young and old,
We will make hallelujah ring!



ROADSIDE CAMP, SPIRO, OKLAHOMA

What he really seemed to want was to bring people together out of their troubles and isolation. Seeing everyone's lives upset by the Dust Bowl, becoming part of a vast number of migrants, abandoned, alone, roaming the country looking for work and to find a place to settle down, it was natural for him to think of combining forces – in unions, for instance. Shortly after publication of his autobiography *Bound for Glory*, Woody wrote an article which was published in 1943 in *The New York Times*. The article was titled "America Singing" and he rhapsodized on the potential of song, in particular to help pull people together for the cause of national unity during the Second World War. "People everywhere across the country are all working on the same big job," he began. "You hear them talk in the wheat fields of North Dakota, and it's just about the same words as you'll hear down in the celery patches or along the docks in lower California, and they say, 'We got to all get together, and stick together, and work and fight together.' People's songs say this same thing....People need work music. People need music to march by and to fight with." He concluded, "All any kind of music is good for anyway is to make you and me know each other a little better."⁷¹

His instincts put him on the side of the dispossessed and never-hads, on the side of those subjected to the abuse of power. He told Studs Terkel, "Any event which takes away the lives of human beings, I try to write a song about what caused it to happen and how we can all try to keep such a thing from happening again." Terkel expanded Woody's concern beyond the literal taking of life, adding, "Or which takes away from their sense of personal worth. That's what made Woody the most mad."⁷² In his article "The Bowery and Me," Woody painted a picture of urban desolation. "And these five men fighting over that bottle of cheap water vino, they look purple and a pasty muddy color with these neon lights hitting down on their faces. Who are they? Where are they at home? What whispered word in which padded office took these men's money and herded them down here to lose all sense of hope, plan and reason?"⁷³

One of his most enduring declarations of mission (apparently made during a live performance) was:

"I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good to nobody. No good for nothing. Because you are too old or



DUST BOWL REFUGEES AT BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

too young or too fat or too slim or too ugly or too this or too that. Songs that run you down or poke fun at you on account of your bad luck or hard travelling. I am out to fight those songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood. 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. I could hire out to the other side, the big money side, and get several dollars every week just to quit singing my own kind of songs and to sing the kind that knock you down still farther and the ones that poke fun at you even more and the ones that make you think that you've not got any sense at all. But I decided a long time ago that I'd starve to death before I'd sing any such songs as that. The radio waves and your movies and your jukeboxes and your songbooks are already loaded down and running over with such no good songs as that anyhow."

This may be as good a summary as any as to what Woody Guthrie was about politically. Really, what he wanted to do most of all was lift people up. Through his actions, and not just his words, he truly seemed more comfortable with the downtrodden than trying to make a stable home for himself and his family. He was restless, maybe a little possessed, and liked to be on the move. Though far from doctrinaire, he did have a deep internal credo, perhaps best expressed in the final words he had Tom Joad tell his dying mother:

Wherever little children are hungry and cry,
 Wherever people ain't free.
 Wherever men are fightin' for their rights,
 That's where I'm a-gonna be, Ma.
 That's where I'm a-gonna be.

Did that make him a Communist? Not at all. Don't followers of Jesus proclaim that they are on the side of the poor? Yes, it meant that sometimes he wound up on picket lines with leftists of one stripe or another. His sympathies saw him support Tom Mooney in California and the Spanish Loyalist refugees in New York. He also wound up on picket lines with non-aligned folks who saw injustice, or a greater promise of opportunity through collective action. In the 1930s, with the country deep in economic depression and before the full range of Soviet atrocities became well-known, the bogeyman of communism wasn't what it became in the postwar era when America's ally of convenience – Joseph Stalin – was found to have obtained the secrets to the atom bomb, and had come to represent a real threat to American ascendance. Understandably, a war-weary populace feared yet another worldwide conflagration, this time with weapons of devastating power. It was a situation ripe for demagoguery and there followed the paranoia of McCarthyism and blacklisting, a second “Red Scare.”

Woody would sometime utter a joshing response to the question of where he stood on the political spectrum. He told Ed Robbin, “Left wing, right wing, chicken wing – it's the same thing to me. I sing my songs wherever I can sing 'em.”⁷⁴

His wife Marjorie Mazia Guthrie told Ed Robbin, who had been an avowed member of the Communist Party, “I'm frequently asked whether Woody was a Communist. Woody learned to believe in a world of sharing. He constantly talked of organizing and unions, but he would never have been able to fit into the Communist party and follow a political line. When he was asked, I remember he used to quip, ‘Some people say I'm a Communist. That ain't necessarily so, but it is true that I've always been in the red.’”⁷⁵ He even put it into writing, in the *People's World*: “I aint a communist necessarily, but I have been in the red all my life.”⁷⁶

There is probably a lot of truth to the idea that Woody Guthrie was almost constitutionally incapable of becoming a lasting member of any structured organization. With Marxism in mind, one is reminded of the famous Groucho Marx proclamation: “I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member.” Ron Cohen was succinct: “He believed in causes more than organizations.”⁷⁷ Ed Robbin wrote, “He didn't bother to read what Karl Marx had written, or Lenin. Woody believed that what is important is the struggle of the working people to win back the earth, which is rightfully theirs. He believed that people should love one another and organize into one big union. That's the way he saw politics and world affairs.”⁷⁸

Going beyond the technical question such as even a momentary party membership, Cisco Houston may have pinned it down: Woody's politics “were about as honest as anything about him. They may have been confused and erratic, and they might have blown with the wind a little bit – like everyone else's – but he made no bones about it.”⁷⁹

As Woody wrote in a letter to Alan Lomax, “They called me a Communist and a wild man and everything you could think of but I don't care what they call me. I ain't a member of any earthly organization...[Regarding singing songs to help out the “folks that need help”] I've always knowed this was what I wanted to talk and sing about and I'm used to running into folks that complain but I don't ever intend to sell out or quit or sing any different because when I do that drug store lemonade stuff I just open my mouth and nothing comes out.”⁸⁰

Even the Old Left, Ron Cohen writes, had not always accepted Woody for who he was. Cohen quotes Irwin Silber: “The puritanical, nearsighted left...didn't know quite what to make of this strange bemused poet who drank and bummed and chased after women and spoke in syllables dreadful strange. They loved his songs and they sang ‘Union Maid’ or ‘So Long’ or ‘Roll on Columbia’ or ‘Pastures of Plenty’...on picket lines and at parties, summer camps and demonstrations. But they never really accepted the man himself – and many thought that as a singer, he was a pretty good songwriter....”⁸¹

BPA 85
9-30-40

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION
PORTLAND, OREGON

CITIZENSHIP AFFIDAVIT

I, being an applicant or an employee on work of the Bonneville Power Administration, paid or to be paid from funds appropriated to the Department of the Interior, Bonneville Power Administration, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that:

- 1. I am a citizen of the United States.
- 2. ~~I am not a citizen of but owe allegiance to the United States.~~

Only one of the above assertions should be used, the other should be crossed out.

3. I was born at Okemah, Okla
(City) (State or Country)
on July 14 1912
(Month) (Day) (Year)

Woodrow W Outline
(Signature of Applicant or Employee)

Subscribed and sworn (or affirmed) to before me this 13th day
of May 1941 at Portland, Oregon

Signed Elva Brown Notary Public for the State
of Oregon My commission expires Dec. 27, 1943

OFFICIAL SEAL:

WOODY'S "GOVERNMENT RECORDINGS" AND THE REST OF HIS WORK

Do his "government recordings" significantly differ from the rest of Woody's creative work? How do they fit within the body of work he recorded over the years?

We've already looked at the question of whether Woody Guthrie became "more radical" after the March 1940-May 1941 stretch which comprised his recordings for these two government bodies. It doesn't appear that he really did. He continued to sing songs calling for change, but the songs changed as new issues came to the fore. He definitely didn't dwell on his "greatest hits" from the Dust Bowl ballads. Jeff Morgan has studied Woody's surviving set lists over the decade of the 1940s and unless he was playing for a particular function such as a union gathering, his material varied widely. He writes, "After 1940, songs about the Dust Bowl or the migrant experience all but disappeared from the live repertoire. On a list of songs for several 1941 performances in Madison, Wisconsin, Guthrie organized the songs he intended to perform into a number of categories. 'Dust Bowl' made up one of 26 categories, with a total of four songs. The primary focus of Guthrie's performances of the period was war songs (24) and union songs (13). However, as throughout much of his career, apolitical songs appeared in similar or greater numbers than topical song: religion songs (nine), 'moral song' (four), love songs (23) and 'vulgar songs' (seven). Several other lists for single-night performances in the early 1940s reveal no Dust Bowl songs at all."⁸²

Issues do change over time, and after Pearl Harbor, the Second World War preoccupied the country. With the war on in earnest, Woody Guthrie, patriot, would have loved nothing more than to be called upon to offer his primary talent – to write and sing songs in support of the struggle. He would have been glad to accept other commissions. Songs such as "Sinking of the Reuben James" clearly show the power of writing he could have brought to the war effort. However, given the history of the Almanac Singers and their shifting stance regarding American intervention and involvement before the June 1941 Nazi invasion of Russia, one can understand some skittishness on the part of any wartime officials who may even have considered approaching Mr. Guthrie.

Woody sought out opportunities to record songs that would help the effort. In a June 17, 1942 letter to Alan Lomax, he wrote, "I'm trying to arrange an audition over at Columbia and Victor Recording Cos., in hopes of making an album or two for them mostly about the work to win the war."⁸³

He did record several numbers for the Office of War Information (OWI). These are listed in Guy Logsdon's "bibliography" which appears in *Hard Travelin'*, and in a "finding aid" offered by the American Folklife Center.⁸⁴ These items were recorded in 1942 and early 1943. One was "Farmer-Labor Train" on which he sang a verse, recorded on July 18, 1942 and broadcast on August 29 as part of a 15-minute broadcast from 10:15 to 10:30 in the evening. It was apparently a co-production of the CIO and NBC's Red Network. Both Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray were attached to the OWI.⁸⁵ The other was a more general one using "work heroes" such as Paul Bunyan and John Henry to convey a message about increasing productivity in wartime.

The OWI was established by executive order on June 13, 1942, as successor to the Office of Facts and Figures of the Library of Congress which had been a branch of the Library set up by Archibald MacLeish at President Roosevelt's request the previous October. John Szwed says that MacLeish resigned as Librarian of Congress to help serve in the Office of War Information under its director, Elmer Davis of CBS. Lomax followed suit in October 1942, joining the OWI as an information specialist in its Bureau of Special Services. Szwed succinctly states, "The OWI was created to build morale and national spirit to prepare the country for what the war would ask of them."⁸⁶ One other song on which Woody appeared was "Foggy Mountain Top" which he recorded for the Overseas Branch of the OWI, part of a program featuring the Almanac Singers. In all, Szwed says, Lomax produced over 100 hours of radio shows featuring Burl Ives, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, "and others in the Lomax circle."⁸⁷

The U. S. Office of War Information (OWI) Collection is housed at the Library of Congress and contains more than 8,000 programs in English, as well as broadcasts in many other languages. The Library website says that the OWI Collection "features domestic and foreign news, entertainment, information, and propaganda broadcasts from 1942 through 1945."⁸⁸ The OWI created the Voice of America in 1942, which endures as a broadcast service of the United States Government, even though OWI itself was disbanded in 1945. Much of the work was pure propaganda, and OWI worked to varying degrees of closeness with companies such as NBC and the Hollywood film studios. During wartime some of the lines between private and public were blurred a bit, with some of the material being influenced by OWI. Though OWI never had censorship powers, most of the studios permitted OWI to review scripts for film production.⁸⁹ Resultant programs such as the radio dramas in which Woody performed were almost quasi-governmental in nature. They were, without question, intended to further the war effort – but sometimes also to achieve other objectives. The CIO involvement in the two *Labor for Victory* dramas pressed

the point of view of the labor organization. The sort of sentiments contained in the show would likely not have received the stamp of approval of the National Association of Manufacturers.

The Almanac Singers had fully changed positions regarding the war in Europe. In a letter Woody sent to the Almanacs, when the group was in Detroit and he was still in New York, he enclosed lyrics to his song “Goin’ Away to Sea” which they had requested. It wasn’t a letter designed for public consumption, but Woody signed it: “Hail the Army, Hail the Marines, Salute the soldiers! Open up the western Front!”⁹⁰

The group also contributed several numbers to other radio broadcasts in the war effort. In this set, we’ve included six tracks which Woody sang. In recordings for the OWI on May 14, 1942, he recorded “Reuben James” and “Takin’ It Easy” and “Reckless Talk,” all for a show entitled *Here’s News from Home* (OWI E14-39). And for two different episodes of the *Jazz in America* program, he recorded “Whoopy Ti-yi-yo, Get Along, Mr. Hitler” (on January 14, 1943) and, on April 4, he recorded versions of “Sally, Don’t You Grieve” and “Dig A Hole,” all with anti-fascist lyrics. Others in the Almanacs sang songs as well, with Woody sometimes contributing guitar or joining in the singing, songs such as Pete Seeger singing “Dear Mr. President” – which acknowledged the group’s prior position against involvement:

Now, Mr. President
 We haven’t always agreed in the past, I know
 But that ain’t at all important now
 What is important is what we got to do
 We got to lick Mr. Hitler, and until we do
 Other things can wait.
 In other words, first we’ve got a skunk to skin.

Though it might not seem politically correct in today’s overcrowded world, Woody even expressed a willingness to do more on a personal level in the struggle to fight fascism; in the lyrics to “Takin’ It Easy,” he sang:

I got two more things that I want to do
 Beat Japan and Hitler, too
 Gonna get married just as quick as I can
 And speed up production for Uncle Sam.

Including the Almanac Singers by name in the broadcasts resulted in some embarrassment for the OWI. The Almanacs had been hired to do these programs for shortwave radio broadcast and perhaps other distribution, but a newspaper raised questions about the group which had recorded the song “Plow Under Every Fourth American Boy” on their *Songs for John Doe* album. Not surprisingly, the newspaper misunderstood the anti-interventionist point of the song, making it out as though the singers were advocating the deaths of young American soldiers, but this was an era when the *Chicago Tribune* didn’t hesitate to label the Almanac Singers as “Commies, who previously had had nothing but the ugliest things to say about this country.”⁹¹ Leonard Carlton, in charge of the international radio section of the OWI, replied, “We pulled a blunder. Those boys are no longer doing any broadcasts for us.”⁹² The *Tribune* offered a further remark regarding the pro-union proclamations of the Almanacs, saying it was (as it would have been) “a little embarrassing when the American Federation of Musicians protested three of the singers were nonunion men.” The *Tribune* either didn’t know, or care to mention, that the Almanacs had abandoned their prior position against American involvement in the war in Europe, and had been performing songs such as “Round and Round Hitler’s Grave” since at least May 1942.⁹³

The OWI had become a bit of a political football. There was a war on and a nation that was purportedly united, but this was never fully the case. MacLeish and the head of the Overseas Branch of the OWI, Robert E. Sherwood, were both “dedicated anti-fascists” and idealists who believed that the way to marshal support for the war was to proactively promote the nominal goals of American democracy. He believed that process is important, that “democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing.”⁹⁴ He wanted OWI to be more than just an information agency, and to publicize the ideals of democratic thought. MacLeish and Sherwood were not atypical of many at OWI. Holly Cowan Shulman, in her study of *Voice of America*, wrote that the leaders of the Overseas Branch were ‘New Deal liberals’ who “brought their political convictions to American foreign policy but did so outside the State Department. The OSS (Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of today’s Central Intelligence Agency) “competed with the OWI for leadership in the field of propaganda.”⁹⁵ Because they were outside the mainstream of the bureaucracy and because more conservative pressures were coming into play, “by late 1943 their influence on foreign policy had clearly waned, and these outsiders-as-insiders found themselves politically stranded.”⁹⁶

In his book on the OWI, Allan M. Winkler wrote that Congress “became increasingly hostile, not only to OWI but to the Roosevelt administration in general [becoming] more and more intolerant of other administration programs...The Office of War Information became involved in the conservative effort to dismantle the liberal framework Roosevelt had created. Congress had been suspicious of OWI ever since its organization, and the random sniping that began then grew in intensity as the war continued.”⁹⁷ For his part, MacLeish declared he had “little interest in trying to work for an agency which was nothing more than an issuing mechanism” passing on proclamations from military leaders.⁹⁸ He resigned in January 1943, the same month the *Chicago Tribune* issued its condemnation. He went on to serve a year as the Assistant Secretary of State for Public and Cultural Affairs.

As noted, Woody Guthrie had offered to record songs in support of the war effort, but was turned down both by RCA and Columbia.⁹⁹ His idea was a record album or two titled *War Songs Are Work Songs*. The songs on radio, he complained were empty ones. He told Robert Wetherald of RCA that he realized there was a shortage of materials to make records, but argued “if recording is cut down, I think it ought to be the cocktail numbers and not the songs about jackhammers and diesel engines and saws and axes and sledges that build our railroads. There aint no better way to get more work out of anybody than to tell them how proud you are of the work they already done....”¹⁰⁰

The rejection was frustrating. So many others were doing so much in literal battle against fascism, and the fact that Woody found himself unable to contribute through his craft may have influenced him to join Cisco and Jimmy Longhi in shipping out to sea. When he signed up for the Merchant Marine (and the National Maritime Union), those two bodies just may have been the first organizations he ever joined.

He was open and interested to record when the opportunity presented. Fortunately, Moe Asch let him do so. When Moe gave Woody and Cisco Houston the opportunity to record for him in April 1944, while the two were between voyages for the Merchant Marine, Woody recorded 165 items each given their own matrix numbers. Rather few of them were of a topical nature and most simply meant to entertain, including songs for children such as “Skip To My Lou” and “Turkey in the Straw” and “Polly Wolly Doodle.” Another session in 1945 produced 19 more items, again with few of them topical.

Woody recorded a good number of children’s songs, with those released on the first *Songs to Grow On* album put down in 1947. Early that same year, Moe commissioned him to do an album of songs on Sacco and Vanzetti, which gave Woody the chance to write more songs with a critical edge.

Woody was appreciative of the encouragement Asch gave him and the spirit that Moe’s enterprises embodied. “I don’t know where there is a more progressive atmosphere amongst artists, performers, and engineers, packers, shippers, owners, and pressers and stampers.”¹⁰¹

For all the emphasis on Woody’s politics, here and elsewhere, it’s worth keeping in mind that of the thousands of songs he wrote, or those he’d learned elsewhere and liked to sing, most weren’t so explicitly political. Let us not forget the children’s songs, and the love songs, the portrait songs he wrote about numerous public figures, and just the appreciations of moments in life. The Guthrie Archives houses just over 3,000 sets of lyrics – 3,001 to date.

The children’s songs in particular are nothing but life affirming, brimming with simple pleasures but also reflecting the same sentiments as in his “political” songs – bringing everyone together and recognizing everyone equally.

My mommy told me an’ the teacher told me, too,
There’s all kinds of work that I can do:
Dry my dishes, sweep my floor,
But if we all work together it won’t take very long.

CHORUS:

We all work together with a wiggle and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle and a grin.
We all work together with a wiggle and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle and a grin.

My sister told me,
Brother told me, too,
Lots an’ lotsa work
That I can do.

I can bring her candy.
Bring him gum.
But if we all work together
Hadn’t oughtta take long. So

CHORUS

My daddy said,
And my grandpaw, too,
There’s work, worka, work
For me to do.
I can paint my fence.
Mow my lawn.
But if we all work together,
Well, it shouldn’t take long.

–“All Work Together”



RECRUITING POSTER, U. S. MARITIME SERVICE (THE MERCHANT MARINE)

WOODY AND THE MERCHANT MARINE

In signing up with the United States Merchant Marine, Woody may not have fully appreciated it but he was placing himself in the fight with the service that suffered the highest rate of fatalities. In 1942 alone, well before Woody and Cisco Houston and Jim Longhi signed up together in June 1943, the Merchant Marine had seen 571 of its ships lost or damaged and suffered 4,363 Mariner deaths. The website www.usmm.org reports that 8,421 Mariners were killed, and additional 1,100 died of their wounds according to testimony before Congress. The table presented here compares the Merchant Marine casualty rate to that of other services.

Service	Number serving	War Dead	Percent	Ratio	
Merchant Marine	243,000*	9,521**	3.90%	1 in 26	<p>*Number varies by source and ranges from 215,000 to 285,000. War Shipping Administration Press Release 2514, January 1, 1946, lists 243,000. Even if the 285,000 figure were correct, the percentage of fatal casualties would be 3.34%.</p> <p>**Total killed at sea, POW killed, plus died from wounds ashore. The USMM site notes, "We may never know the exact count, because the U.S. government never kept accurate records as it did for other services."</p> <p>Source: Captain Arthur R. Moore, <i>A Careless Word – A Needless Sinking: A History of the Staggering Losses Suffered by the U.S. Merchant Marine, both in Ships and Personnel, during World War II</i>, American Merchant Marine Museum, Kings Point, NY: 1998.</p>
Marines	669,108	19,733	2.94%	1 in 34	
Army	11,268,000	234,874	2.08%	1 in 48	
Navy	4,183,466	36,958	0.88%	1 in 114	
Coast Guard	242,093	574	0.24%	1 in 421	

This was dangerous service, one's ship being subject at any time to attack by German submarines or other dangers. The Liberty ship *SS William B. Travis*, on which Guthrie first served, as a mess man, was struck by a torpedo as it was heading from Sicily to Tunisia; the ship had fortunately unloaded its cargo of fuel and explosives in Sicily. One soldier aboard was killed. On Woody's third voyage, another Liberty ship transporting 3,000 soldiers, the *SS Sea Porpoise*, struck an underwater acoustic mine on July 5, 1944 as it left Omaha Beach off Normandy. This time there were wounded but fortunately no fatalities. The badly damaged vessel had its engine room blown apart but a tugboat brought it safely across the English Channel to Southampton.

The Merchant Marine was not a branch of government, which is one reason the number of people serving in it is not as precise as for the Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard. Working in the Merchant Marine, however, was sufficient to exempt one from military service so long as one stayed in. However, shipping out aboard one of the vessels in the Merchant Marine was indeed putting one's self in harm's way.

One finds a succinct explanation of just what the Merchant Marine is on the usmm.org website:

The Merchant Marine is the fleet of ships which carries imports and exports during peacetime and becomes a naval auxiliary during wartime to deliver troops and war materiel. According to the Merchant Marine Act of 1936: "It is necessary for the national defense... that the United States shall have a merchant marine of the best equipped and most suitable types of vessels sufficient to carry the greater portion of its commerce and serve as a naval or military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency..." During World War II the fleet was in effect nationalized, that is, the U.S. Government controlled the cargo and the destinations, contracted with private companies to operate the ships, put guns and Navy personnel (Armed Guard) on board. The Government trained the men to operate the ships and assist in manning the guns through the U.S. Maritime Service.

If Woody's goal had been to avoid military service, he well may not have needed to enlist in the Merchant Marine – though he was indeed ultimately drafted into the Army. As Jim Longhi writes in the Prologue to his book *Woody, Cisco, and Me*, "Neither Woody nor Cisco had to go to war. Woody had four children and could have been exempted from service or gotten a soft job in the army. Cisco was legally blind; he couldn't see three feet ahead of him. But they volunteered for the Merchant Marine."¹⁰² Cisco himself had already lost a brother in the war some months earlier, torpedoed at sea. Longhi's book tells in detail the story of their time in the Merchant Marine and names both Cisco and Woody as heroes.

WOODY GUTHRIE IN THE U. S. ARMY

Woody Guthrie's service to the United States Government was not complete. Even with his four kids, and his having served in the Merchant Marine, he was nonetheless inducted into the United States Army in May 1945. As it happens, he was inducted at Fort Dix, New Jersey on May 7 and the leadership of the Third Reich surrendered the next day, now celebrated as V-E Day. (Hitler had taken his own life on April 30.) The war in the Pacific Theatre was still in progress, though it was clear that was coming to an end as well. Shortly after induction, Woody was placed in the Army Air Force and sent – to Sheppard Field, in Wichita Falls, Texas for basic training. Adept as he was with a typewriter, it was probably fitting that he was assigned to become a teletype operator. That resulted in his transfer to Scott Field, near Belleville, Illinois, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis.

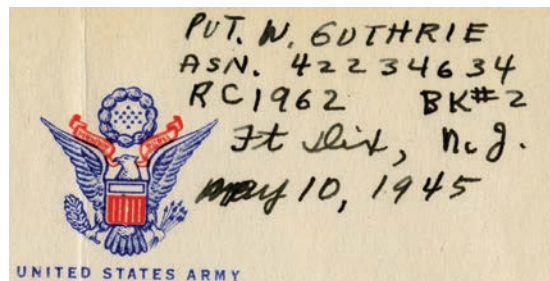
Private Guthrie arrived at Scott Field on July 8, and he was ready to do his duty. He was assigned to Squadron L with the 3505th Army Air Force Base Unit, Barrack 326. Marjorie Guthrie recounted an anecdote of how he had tried to employ his prodigious energies on behalf of the Army. "Besides drilling, wearing a uniform, and getting up at bugle call, he did cleanup duty. Woody went to work with a vengeance. To his mind, cleanliness in an army camp and beating the Nazis were the same thing. Apparently the others didn't think so. Two guys walked over to him. 'What are you doing?' they asked. 'Making Scott Field clean, what you think?' They made it very clear to him to slow down. For them it was going to be a three-day job, not one day. Woody was horrified. He wrote to me saying, 'What kind of a war effort is this to do a job in three days when it could be done in one day!' He was that way about everything that had to do with the war."¹⁰³ Woody's was hardly the reaction of someone not prepared to do his utmost for his government in the service of a just cause.

Less than a month later, the first atomic bomb was dropped at Hiroshima, and August 14 became V-J Day when the Japanese government unconditionally surrendered.

Though he went AWOL to visit Marjorie Mazia and New York in early September, he returned unpunished, as the armed forces began to focus more on demobilization and transition to peacetime. He graduated teletype school at the end of September but there was no work to be done. The Army used him as a sign painter but, without the war effort to energize him and focus his energies, he knew he was pretty much just killing time and no longer working in wartime emergency. He did write songs and wrote Marjorie in an October 2 letter, "I am mailing you all of my ballads I've wrote here at Scott Field. Got plenty of clippings for more."¹⁰⁴ On a two-week furlough in November, he married



WOODY GUTHRIE IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1945



Howdy Everybody!

Fort Dix N. J.
May 9th 1945
W.W.G. # 42234634

Well you asked me to tell you everything that I done every day. This is a hard job because things happen to you so fast in the Army that you dont know at the end of the day just what all you did do. I am now at the club house and it is 10 pm.

When we first left G.C. Palace + Penn Station we played and sang and talked and we rode some busses and pretty soon we saw the lights of Fort Dix. We went through a barn of some kind and they gave us our bags and gear and then we marched to our barracks house which is a nice wooden 2 story house with 50 or 60 small beds in it. I saw hundreds of these barrack houses and havent seen the end of them yet. We got to sleep dead to the world at 1230 and got up next morning at 530 and marched to chow. I marched better than all the other men in our Company.

after chow I marched down through a big building and got stripped of my civilian clothes and had some army ones slung at me. They gave me my dog tag with my number on it. They stripped me, measured me, criticized and examined me, and it was a funny sight to see all of the men getting into their new long handle wool underwear and uniforms piece by piece. They gave me a big green canvas bag to put all of my new clothes in. The bag is bigger than me. I put my civilian clothes in the War Relief Box to get rid of them. That afternoon I set at a table in a little booth and took 2 hours of I. Q. test. We marched some more to a mess hall and had some more chow and then I hit the sack.

I woke up to the gentle voice of the officer over the loud speaker at 530 next morning. We marched in the rain to chow. We marched some more to take our allotment and insurance interviews and to get our medical shots + blood test. (Last nite I got a tooth drilled and filled) - and after my blood shots and tests I have ached worse than I ever did. My arms hurt and I whirl in the brain but they say you got to stay in action to keep it from getting you down. So I marched some more. You ought to see our Company march. They look worse than a herd of lost sheep. The officers have a real headache trying to keep us busy.

Marjorie on the 13th, then returned to Scott Field. On December 21, he was released from active duty and on January 13, 1946 was honorably discharged from the Army.

Two months later, he was singing at a CIO rally for striking workers at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh. He wrote, "We sang 'Solidarity Forever' and the papers said the rally started off with a Communist song. Oh. Well. Any song that fights for the case of the workhand is a Communist song to the rich folks."¹⁰⁵ And not long after that, on May 21, 1946, he wrote the words which lead off these notes.

About a year and a half before Woody Guthrie died, in April 1966, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall presented a citation in absentia to citizen Guthrie for the songs he had written 25 years earlier as a temporary employee of the Department. He also announced the decision to name a power substation for him.¹⁰⁶

The substation was situated in Odell, Oregon, near the city of Hood River and bore his name until the year 2000. Guthrie's name was removed when ownership was transferred from the BPA to the Hood River Electric Co-op, and is now named after the first general manager of the co-op, Willard Johnson. In a commentary for the *Portland Tribune*, Michael Munk wrote of Guthrie's opponents:

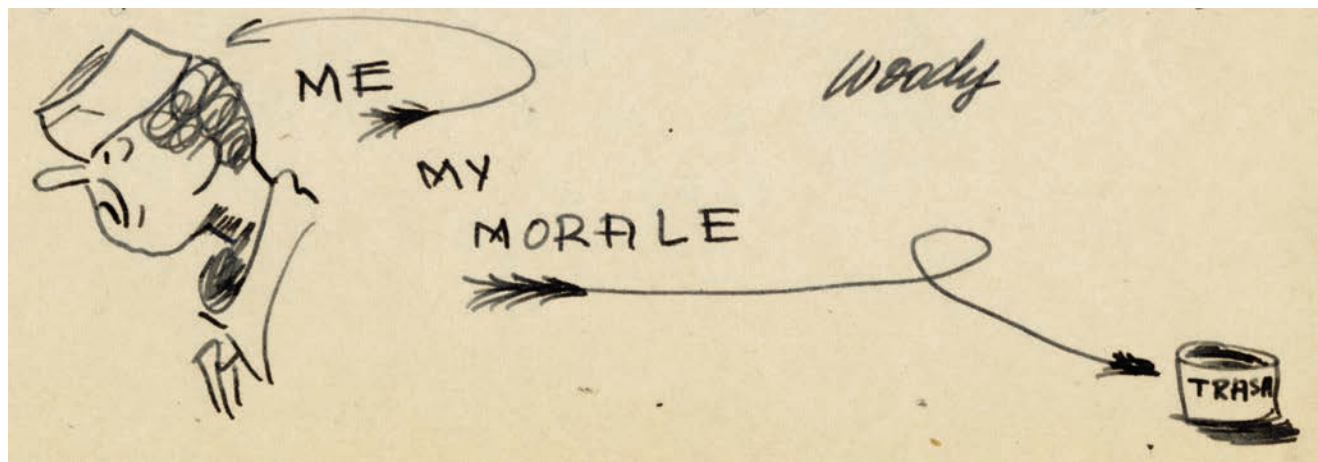
Woody's name did not sit well with some in Hood River, a community already notorious for removing Japanese-American names from its Honor Roll of World War II veterans. Local businessmen claimed it was disgraceful to flaunt the name of a "communist" in their neck of the woods. They were forced to live with it until they got their chance in 2000, when the Hood River Electric Co-Op took over the facility from BPA. Then the co-op board hastily erased the offending name and thereby declared the insular culture of their community.

In renaming it for Willard Johnson, the co-op's first general manager, the board ironically overlooked a crucial fact: At the time of the original controversy, Johnson himself stood up in favor of naming it for Woody, going so far as to tell the opponents that the "world would be better off with more Woody Guthries in it."

The second effort to honor Woody came in 2001, again thanks to Bill Murlin. He persuaded the BPA to name the drive at its headquarters at 905 N.E. 11th Ave. "Woody Guthrie Circle," and rescued the original Woody Guthrie sign from benighted Hood River. Several impressive stones engraved with verses from his songs were erected...and his image was woven into a large tapestry just inside the building entrance.¹⁰⁷ The verses came from "Roll On Columbia" and "Pastures of Plenty."

Several years after the naming of the driveway, and almost 40 years after Udall's designation, the original substation sign was refurbished and placed across the river from Portland in front of the BPA's Transmission Business Headquarters at Vancouver, Washington on July 13, 2005. It is 13 feet long and two feet high, and the frame was made by BPA shop craftsmen out of electrical substation materials.

SELF-PORTRAIT BY WOODY GUTHRIE, DRAWN ON LETTER FROM GUTHRIE TO MARJORIE MAZIA, FORT DIX, NJ. MAY 20, 1945.



HOW HAD WOODY WANTED TO BE SEEN?

This is a question we can't really answer, and to address it is really beyond the purview of these notes. We've seen that he didn't really want to be pigeon-holed as the bard of the Okies.¹⁰⁸ He once placed himself in association with a number of other great writers: "You know when I think about me and the others, Me and the others I mean like Walt Whitman, Will Rogers, Pushkin, Sandburg and the others and the others...."¹⁰⁹ Not bad company, and perhaps not so far off. Jeff Morgan said, "Guthrie sought to be regarded as a democratic artist a la Whitman and his art was anchored in a deeply felt populist activism."¹¹⁰ Woody mentioned Whitman and the others more than once, sometimes saying he shouldn't be compared to them but also, less modestly, pointed out that none of them wrote in the language of true working people. "Whitman makes glorious the works, labors, dreams, and feelings of my people, but he does not do this in the sorts of words my people think, talk, and dance and sing. Sandburg tosses in grammar words that I never do hear my kind of folks talk. And Pushkin does the same. The praise, describe, they pay their thanks and their tributes to my people, but not in words my kind of people think. So I've got to keep on plugging away."¹¹¹

He seemed to believe in the power of song to humanize people: "I can show you a dozen clippings I've got here where the cops, even the hired thugs, the vigilantes, joined in and hummed and laughed at the songs. They did not laugh at the pamphlets, they did not hum the editorials, they did not dance the factual charts and graphs, nor whistle the proofs, affidavits, the warrants, the court papers, the printed word in any form. It was the deep running personal sentiments that caused the paid gangster to lay down his oily gun."¹¹² One can imagine seeing a policeman, or even a vigilante, respond to song. Whether Woody ever saw one lay down his gun is unknown; it's likely we would know about it, had he seen it occur outside the realm of artistic license. Many of his songs were inspired by newspaper articles he had read; it's also possible he had read something along these lines. Woody did maintain a sense of humor about some of his encounters with the police. In the songbook he and Lefty Lou (Maxine Crissman) published ca. 1938 while the pair were performing on radio in Southern California, Woody wrote, "My contract with KFVD don't give me enough money to get the bighead, but it gives me enough that I don't care what other people think about me. I'm just a pore boy tryin' to get along. The dust run me out of Texas, and the Officers run me in at Lincoln Heights. But they was nice to me. They had bars fixed up over the windows so nobody could get in and steal my guitar."¹¹³

Unfortunately, the postwar era was nowhere near as receptive to Woody's message, or that of others like him. First, the country wanted to relax a bit. There wasn't as much militancy in the labor movement, largely because of some of the protections and progress during the New Deal years (the Wagner Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938), and most unions and employers had come to accommodations during the war on behalf of the national defense.

But it didn't take long for the chilling spirit of Cold War to take hold in America, squelching progressive causes of any sort. As noted above, even what should have been a familiar and welcoming place such as the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress deflected Woody when he approached it about recording more of his songs. In a long July 1946 letter to Moe Asch, he showed he already understood the forces likely to be marshaled against progressives and the power a blacklist could hold.¹¹⁴

He'd initially been encouraged by the Library's new Chief of the Archive of American Folk Song Duncan Emrich. In an April 12, 1946 letter to Woody, Emrich said that he and his wife and their daughter Cathy would all be welcome to "spend some time in the Recording Laboratory singing and doing a good job of it." He noted that they couldn't pay his travel expenses but would provide him with duplicates of the records. So that he could prepare a budget for the recording, he asked how many records Woody thought he would use – "10, 20, 50?" The session never happened.

When he'd first recorded in 1940, Woody had found the Archive a congenial place, and had an appreciation for the limited resources Alan Lomax had at his disposal. In a September 17, 1940 letter to "Brother Lomax," he asked, "How's the skid row section of the poor folks division of the Library of Congress?"¹¹⁵

It wasn't the first time that the possibility of additional recordings had been broached. Before the April 1946 letter, in 1942, Alan Lomax had suggested another session to Harold Spivacke, the "chief" of the Music Division. Woody could even record the songs in New York, where he had a recording machine available to him. Lomax explained, "He would record material from his own repertory which we do not already have, and a group of new ballads which he has composed within the last year." He recommended sending 20 blank acetates to Woody. The costs, including shipping, would be \$22.00.

Spivacke wrote back that he'd naturally be interested in more Guthrie recordings but wanted to know two things: one, would there be any special restrictions (there hadn't been before, so why he thought there might be this time is unclear), and, two, whether the Library would be performing a unique service. He asked, "Would this be material that would not normally be recorded by the commercial companies?" A reasonable enough question: why should the Library record material that non-public enterprises might record? Lomax presented good arguments back, saying in part, "the continued documentation of this most unusual of American ballad makes has a very great importance."¹¹⁶ The \$22 was never authorized and the proposed self-recording never happened. Lomax left the employ of the Library later that year.

SOME ASPIRATIONS

It's unfortunate that more recordings for the Library hadn't been done before the climate changed. Woody really wanted to reach out, to communicate through song, to help in any way he could. He tried to write songs for the war effort as early as 1942, but couldn't find the right connections or niche. After he was drafted, he wanted to work in a section of the Army where his songwriting talents could help – but it was only his sign-painting talents that were put to use.

Communication takes a willing partner, of course. Looking at the targeted writing Woody did for the Bonneville Power Administration and think for a moment how many more great songs we would have had – for pennies – had another governmental body green-lighted his work. Imagine what a record album like the *Columbia River Collection* could have done to help sell Liberty Bonds, or for the Merchant Marine, or for the United States Army – even in peacetime after the war had ended.

Woody's correspondence makes clear that he thirsted to do more, to channel his restless energies toward positive goals.

Moe Asch kept him busy with a few projects, a couple of them on themes that interested Moe. In 1945, Moe asked Woody about writing a song about Sacco and Vanzetti and gave Woody some material to read about the Massachusetts anarchists who had been executed by the state government. Woody wrote back in early 1946 that there was great material there – enough for an album – but he suggested the album be about labor martyrs such as Joe Hill and the Haymarket massacre.¹⁷ The martyrdom album never eventuated, but Asch commissioned Woody to write an album of songs about Sacco and Vanzetti and even provided him funds to travel to Massachusetts. The songs were recorded in January 1947, with the 20th anniversary of their execution approaching in August. But of course, the two martyrs were long since dead and the case was not an active matter, not the same sort of thing Woody could truly become engaged with and feel he was helping others.

The Sacco and Vanzetti recordings weren't released at the time (not until 1960, in fact.) In February and March 1947, Woody recorded a considerable number of children's songs.¹⁸ Several had come out earlier, on Disc Records (a Moe Asch label), to some acclaim. But this wasn't an area which fully engaged Woody either. Asch, of course, later founded Folkways Records.

By 1948, his longtime supporter Alan Lomax had begun to spend more time in Europe and took up residence in London beginning in 1950. The FBI was asking questions about Lomax's affiliations, and he more or less went into self-imposed European exile from 1950-1958, taking advantage of his relocation to record an extensive body of work in the British Isles, Spain, and Italy.

THE V. D. RECORDINGS

There was another way that Woody wanted to help – in support of public health initiatives. He may well have seen the headline on page 20 of the *New York Daily News* on June 10, 1949: “Juke Box Songs to Fight Syphilis.” That’s the kind of title that would catch his eye – the use of song for the public good. Syphilis was a major scourge at the time, with over 3,000,000 Americans estimated to have the highly communicable disease, with a million people unaware they had contracted it. And yet as of 1943 it had been discovered that early treatment with penicillin could be effective against both syphilis and gonorrhea.

At Columbia University on June 9, Surgeon General Leonard A. Scheele announced the launch of a national drive coordinated by the United States Public Health Service, one which would involve 300 communities. The campaign would enlist the support of newspapers and magazines, radio, and motion pictures and television, reported *The New York Times*. Russ Symington’s article in the *Daily News* said that “Juke box hillbilly songs about syphilis played in 28 states as well as soap operas about the trials and tribulations of wives whose mates haven’t been too moral” would be part of the radio campaign. “The juke box songs are catchy and well sung,” he added. “The radio and some television programs, already prepared, are the work of topflight script writers. Comic books, likewise, have been prepared.”

Many people would have understandably been inhibited by shame and not take advantage of the new medications. Columbia anthropologist Erik Barnouw asked Alan Lomax to devise a series of musical radio programs featuring popular vernacular musicians who would be able to advocate effectively for treatment in their communities and hopefully make folks feel more comfortable about getting treated. And Woody Guthrie was one of those to whom Lomax turned.

Just as he had tried to contribute songs while in the Army, Woody was evidently driven to write songs he hoped would be adopted and help in the effort. It’s not that he hadn’t touched on the subject before. His song “VD Gunner Blues” dated to 1945, and just a couple of months earlier he’d written “Palmetto Veedee Blues.” But Woody had a burst of topical songwriting activity in the days after the Surgeon General’s announcement. Consider these songs and dates:

“VD Avenue” was written on June 14, 1949 – just four days after the Surgeon General’s announcement hit the newspapers
 “Veedee Blues” – June 15
 “Blessed & Curst” – June 19
 “A Case of Veedee” – June 20
 “Veedee Seaman’s Letter” – June 23
 “V.D. City” – June 27
 “V.D. Day” – date of authorship unknown
 “A Child of V.D.” – July 6
 “V. D. Gunner Blues” – written at some point in 1945

The self-recording which Alan Lomax had urged the Library of Congress to authorize for Woody in January 1942 never occurred, but we do have home recordings of his V.D. songs, thanks to a home recording Woody made around this time. Woody recorded the nine songs about venereal disease, and six others which were not on this theme, on his 47th birthday, July 14, 1949.¹¹⁹ The precise purpose for which the tape was made is unclear, but it was clearly a demo tape of some sort – whether for a publisher, for someone who might be able to help him with other connections, or to be submitted on his behalf to the U.S. Public Health Service is unknown.

Arlo Guthrie later recorded “A Child of V.D.” for WNET-TV of New York City. It was included in an October 1972 broadcast as a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) special entitled *VD Blues*. The hour-long production was hosted by Dick Cavett, and won an Emmy Award in the Special Classification of Outstanding Program Achievements announced on May 22, 1973. A book of the same title, *VD Blues*, was published by Avon Books in 1972, containing the full script of the show and another broadcast hosted by Geraldo Rivera titled *VD Hotline*.¹²⁰

Woody himself was featured in a broadcast at the time, a radio drama which appears to have been produced in response to the Surgeon General’s announcement. It was a 15-minute show recorded for radio. The narrator introduces it with reference to a generic government health agency:

“Your health department presents *The Lonesome Traveler* starring Woody Guthrie as Rusty, the Traveler.”

After the skit itself, with its story line and several songs, the narrator concludes by saying:

“You have heard *The Lonesome Traveler* starring Woody Guthrie as Rusty the Traveler and written and directed by Alan Lomax. This program was produced for the Health Department of the nation by the Communication Material Center at Columbia University.”

A 1951 brochure from the Communication Materials Center at Columbia explained the mission of the center:

- The Communication Materials Center of Columbia University Press is a non-profit organization which
- prepares and distributes public education materials in all mass media
 - enlists topflight writers, artists, performers and producers in this vital work
 - consults with leading authorities for maximum authenticity and effectiveness.

The materials in this catalogue are distributed as a non-profit service to federal, state and local health agencies.

The brochure explained that the service was made possible by a special revolving fund for health education materials, established with the assistance of the U.S. Public Health Service and the State of New Jersey.

Some of the material produced included: "a comic book on *juvenile narcotics addiction*...a radio transcription series on *alcoholism*...a cartoon film on *detection of chronic diseases*...a film strip on *inter-group relations*...a jukebox ballad on *syphilis*...a quiz on *home safety*...a feature film on *prevention of congenital syphilis*..."¹²¹

There are 28 programs which were made available on 16" transcription discs. The Woody Guthrie disc is listed by the Center for Disease Control as Catalog number VD 127, dated 1950:

"The Lonesome Traveler" Starring: Woody Guthrie. Woody portrayed "Rusty" – a wandering musician who helped tell others of the dangers of Syphilis (sic) and how they can get help. The play was produced by Alan Lomax and was aimed at educating rural audiences about getting medical treatment. Woody re-works some of his classic songs to illustrate the horrors of VD.

Other performers in the series, some of whom are better-known today than others, included: Roy Acuff, Eddie Albert, The Dixieaires, Red Foley, Alice Frost, Tom Glazer, George Hicks, Joyce Indig, Raymond Massey, Henry Morgan, Drew Pearson, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Johnny Powers, Roger Pryor, Robert St. John, Phil Silvers, Tex and Jinx, Merle Travis, and Hank Williams. Alan Lomax was invited to participate in the development of the series by Prof. Erik Barnouw of Columbia, who Lomax biographer John Szwed describes as "Alan's old boss from OWI."¹²² Barnouw had worked for the Armed Forces Radio Service during the war and had worked with Norman Corwin and Alan Lomax as early as 1939 for CBS. Alan wrote the scripts for the radio dramas featuring Roy Acuff, Woody Guthrie, and Merle Travis.¹²³

The V.D. songs later captured the interest of another singer, Bob Dylan, who recorded four of the songs ("V.D. Blues," "V.D. Waltz," "V.D. City," and "V.D. Gunner's Blues") on what has become known as the Minnesota Hotel Tapes. The songs were actually recorded in December 1961 at the apartment of Bonnie Beecher. In Dylan's book *Chronicles: Vol. 1*, he writes about his interest in Woody. Dylanologist Clinton Heylin says, "As for the Hotel tape – it's a joke. The tape was done at Bonnie Beecher's apartment, which everyone – BD included – treated like a hotel. Hence 'The Hotel Tape'."¹²⁴



RECORDING DISC PRESENTING THE RADIO DRAMA "THE LONESOME TRAVELER"

OTHER AMBITIONS

Woody's concern with health issues was not new. Both he and his wife Mary had appeared with Will Geer and Herta Ware in the 1940 Pare Lorentz documentary film *The Fight for Life*, about the infant mortality among the impoverished. Earlier in 1949, in January, he'd written a letter to Attorney General Tom Clark saying he'd heard radio station WNYC talking about cancer, which Woody declared was a disease that was "partly caused by fear and kept alive by other kinds of fears." The cure was national health care. It was a rambling letter, but he talked about the fear of "losing everything you've been building up all your life...fears about talking down sick with no money to pay for medicine nor nurse nor doctor nor hospital." The rise in crime was attributable to younger people not finding work that built them up. "Kids in their prime knocked out like broken lamps on account of not being able to find a chance to work, to be useful, to get paid, to have the joys of working, spending, shopping, & buying along the display windows."¹²⁵

The fear that many had of being seen as too close to Communism prevented Woody from being more prolific. It may even have prevented this very package from embracing an uncountable number of albums! On September 12, 1950 – more than a decade after his first sessions at the Library of Congress, Woody wrote Duncan Emrich and again offered to come in and record more songs.

That December, he hatched another idea he wrote to Folkways about: a "walkytalky album for GI's of all stripes." It would be ten or twelve numbers "about being inducted, boot-camp, shipped over, foxholed, dugout, dusted off, shipped here & shipped yonder, shipped back home (missions done with)..." It wasn't to be merely a backward look at the G.I. experience. He was inclined to give it a bitter edge, reflecting a return to a more anti-military stance. It would effectively be an appeal for better conditions for those who had served, for G.I. rights. He talked about folks being "shunted, shuttled, scuttled, fuddled, and herded & huddled off to dwell on edges of psychotic Quonset huts as things called family units; and to pay twice as much rent for a Quonset hut not 1/2 big enough to jerkup a kid in; then, robbed and fooled in every known fashion till the next war busts loose."

The letter was a little muddled, but an appeal Woody was making for the opportunity to create some "talking news blueses" – to be able to work on something meaningful. In the next couple of paragraphs, he said he'd also be glad to record an album of "ranchdance" numbers, an old-timey dance album.¹²⁶

Writing songs on a theme was a particular talent Woody had, particularly if they might be of some benefit to others. At one point, he wrote from New York to Alan Lomax, "The main thing is to set your head of some subject you want to harp on and haul off and start and you can write 25 or 30 or 500 songs on the same subject if your subject is a helping people. I took as my subject songs that would make people want to help people, and I am on my 202th – two oh tooth. I've wrote up songs and tore them up. I bet I tore up more than a orchestra feller could shake a stick at...I feel bit guilty for not taking more time out to jot down more."¹²⁷

Woody also wrote Emrich in 1950, "I'd love to record a few hundred more of my tales, travels, jokes, songs, ballads, and such to finish up the other 99/100th of my legend on your wax." By 1950, however, there were different forces at play. Emrich dodged the real issue, writing Woody about three weeks later that the Library lacked the necessary funds. The truth was, as Will Kaufman puts it, the Library "was increasingly wary of working with him [Guthrie]." Kaufman adds, tellingly, "Emrich had already begun collaborating with the FBI, accusing People's Songs of being 'unpatriotic' and voicing his outrage 'at the efforts of Communists and Communist sympathizers to infiltrate and gain control of Folksinging."¹²⁸

Then he got sick, or perhaps more precisely, became more obviously so. By 1952, Woody himself began to feel the effects of the disease which did him in over many years, Huntington's disease. A number of Guthrie scholars have concluded that government investigators who might otherwise have been following him more actively realized that he was limited in his abilities, and influence, and more or less left him alone.

He still wanted to write songs to deal with issues of the day. At the end of March 1952, he wrote to Stetson Kennedy in Florida that he'd been inspired by Kennedy's publication *We Charge Genocide* to work on an album's worth of "balladsongs" against race hate. He hoped that Moe Asch might release it, and mentioned Asch to Kennedy: "Moe told me how scared and how afraid nearly all of the big record houses are about recording or printing down anything having to do with protests or politicks..." Folkways was "one of the few (one or two) houses in this entire recording industry that has got the guts to stand up and believe in something."¹²⁹

Nothing came of Woody's idea. Times truly had changed. When he'd begun, of course, Woody was younger and healthier and more full of faith that things could be different. As Bruce Springsteen said of the world during Guthrie's glory days, "It was a world where speaking truth to power wasn't futile, whatever its outcome."¹³⁰ But so much had happened in such a short period of time, and the world was not much like it had been.

When he died in 1967, this man of words was released from the ultimate and horrible irony caused by Huntington's. He had been unable to speak for an extended period of time.

Yet, in time, the name Woody Guthrie became a legend. Of course, like most poets, the words he wrote have been open to interpretation and others have sometimes wanted to use them for their own purposes. The words of a number of songs – or the spirit they seem to convey – have an appeal.

"This Land Is Your Land" has been used more than once as a political theme song, even on a national level, first by George McGovern, Democratic candidate for the presidency in 1972.¹³¹ Republican Ronald Reagan used some of the lyrics of Woody's "This Land Is Your Land" song in a speech as part of his re-election campaign in 1984, and George H. W. Bush used it as a 1988 campaign song. By 2010, right-wing talk show host Glenn Beck realized there was more to some of these songs than was first evident. In his March 11 broadcast that year, he said, "So many of us don't understand. We haven't come...we're a little late to the party on the Woody Guthrie songs and all of that. It was just all presented as patriotic to us in school. I mean, how many of us sang, 'This Land Is Your Land' in school and it was like, 'Well, yeah, that's just super-patriotic and that's just a great song.'" Beck goes on to excoriate Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" as "anti-American" and said it was time to "wake up, out of our dream state, out of the propaganda."

Of course, what Beck means is that the song is against *his* vision of America – though the more cynical among us may feel that Beck's vision of America is primarily that of an "entertainer" informed by how to garner attention to himself, in the hopes that ratings will expand revenues.

Some things come full circle. From Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama? At the time of the inauguration of Barack Obama after the 2008 elections, "This Land Is Your Land" was performed by Pete Seeger with Bruce Springsteen and Tao Rodriguez Seeger and included three often-omitted verses – the more radical ones. As sung at the "We Are One" opening event of the inaugural ceremonies in front of the incoming President's family and a crowd of "hundreds of thousands" (*USA Today* and other media outlets) at the Lincoln Memorial on January 18, 2009:

As I went 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.

CHORUS:

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

I 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.

CHORUS

In the squares of the cities, by the shadow of the steeple
By the relief office, I saw my people
As they stood there hungry, I said, "What this?" [Pete has improvised. The singers all sing "I stood there whistling"]
This land was made for you and me.

There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me
A great big sign read... said "private property"
And on the other side – it didn't say nothing
That side was made for you and me.

CHORUS

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

CHORUS³²

The last three verses here aren't familiar ones to most, because they are rarely sung. They are omitted from most renditions, presumably because including them turns the song into one with an edge. It's a "safer" song without them.

Woody originally wrote the song in response to how tired he'd become of Kate Smith singing Irving Berlin's famous song "God Bless America" to the point it became ubiquitous, and nearly inescapably so, but in a way that seemed to encourage blind nationalism. Woody wanted to reclaim America on behalf of the American people, and his initial lyrics injected a bitter irony into the fact that not everyone equally experiences the bounty of the country – he saw a propertied class and others who had been excluded. Many feel that it was patriotic to make a stronger country by acknowledging shortcomings and working to address them.

In this spirit, George McGovern, in his 1972 presidential nomination acceptance speech, had said, "And this is the time to stand for those things that are close to the American spirit. We are not content with things as they are. We reject the view of those who say, 'America — love it or leave it.' We reply, 'Let us change it so we may love it the more.'"

It's not that Woody was against Irving Berlin for writing his song. He just wanted to present another, dissenting point of view. Nora Guthrie doesn't believe her father ever meant to put down the other man: "Irving Berlin came from really, really horrible conditions as a child from Eastern Europe. *Everything* was better than that, and certainly he was hoping that coming to America – when his family came over – they would have some opportunities that they didn't have." Berlin had been born on May 11, 1888 as Israel Isidore Baline, one of eight children of Moses and Lena Lipkin Baline. The Baline family had been living in what is now Tolochin, Belarus, when waves of anti-Jewish pogroms swept the region. They fled, and arrived in New York City in 1893 where Berlin himself became a "dirt-poor Lower East Side street urchin who left home and school at age 13 and plunged into the Bowery demimonde, sleeping in flophouses and tenement vestibules..."³³



NORA GUTHRIE AT THE BONNEVILLE DAM, OREGON. SEPTEMBER 26, 2004.

Woody's actual title for the song mimicked Berlin's: "God Blessed America." Nora understood there is a difference between the life experience of immigrants and the feelings toward country and government in the second or third generations after immigration. She continued, "I think it's an evolutionary kind of thing, that Irving Berlin was Part One and that "This Land Is Your Land" comes along and it's Part Two. Yeah, we're better off here than in Russia at the turn of the century! Absolutely. Woody never disagreed with that. Anybody who's ever lived in another country knows what it's like to live in a place where you don't know the language so well or you don't know the government so well. You don't know what's right, what's wrong, what's expected, what's the custom. So here are the Berlins, coming and having one set of experiences and one set of opportunities. These songs are not to be compared. They're cousins. They're kissing cousins, these two songs. They never should be used against each other."¹³⁴

Woody had another set of experiences and opportunities. He was indeed born in the U.S.A., and so his relationship to the country and to its government was naturally a different one. Personal circumstance and experience matter. Time and place matter. The tenor of the times matters.

Young Americans today aren't faced with military conscription – the draft – as they were as recently as the 1960s and early 1970s. However, all men older than 18 years of age are required to register with the government's Selective Service System and are subject to being taken into military service upon demand. This system remains in effect in the 21st century even though Congress ended the draft in favor of an all-volunteer army built on recruitment in 1973. For the most part today, young people are not forced into direct dealings with the government that have life-and-death consequences. They have different experiences than earlier generations. Again, the tenor of the times matters.

"The thing about Woody was that he was always participating," Nora has observed. "His music was his way of participating as a citizen. I think that's what he felt his job was. Literally a job, like a 9-to-5 job. Some people blog. His was to write songs – about something he read in the newspaper, or if there was march or a picket or a boycott, 'I'll write a song for you. I'll write a song for this cause or this march or this boat trip.' He was very much participating as a citizen all along... I think everyone's forgotten what citizenship is – that it's just participating in any way you can. If you're writing music about it, or writing blogs about it, or voting."¹³⁵

Clifton Fadiman once wrote in *The New Yorker* that Woody and his songs "are a national possession, like Yellowstone and Yosemite, and part of the best stuff this country has to show the world."¹³⁶

What is the true meaning of patriotism? Most definitions have it as love of country and devotion to country. No one would suggest, in the contemporary United States, that only the Republican Party or the Democrat Party embodies patriotism. Political parties are aggregates which, at least in theory, try to make policy and nudge the country in one direction or another. Tarring the opposition with a brush of dripping criticism is a time-honored tradition, but it begins to become extreme – and its practitioners appear a little frantic, or even desperate, when they resort to calling their opponents "un-American."

Some on the left want to adopt Woody Guthrie as an icon who resolutely stood up to government; they ignore the fact that the times he felt most productive as a citizen, as a participant, was when he was in one way or another working with, or for, the government. Some on the right want to portray Woody Guthrie as scurrilous, as a Communist, as un-American. There's ample evidence that he was pro-democracy and pro-America, even if he had strong views about obstacles that the empowered put in the way of others striving for the American Dream. In a private letter to Alan Lomax in September 1940, he said, "If I thought for two minutes that anything I do or say would hurt America and the people in it I would keep my face shut and catch the first freight out of the country... All I know how to do Alan is to just keep a plowing right on down the avenue watching what I can see and listening to what I can hear and trying to learn about everybody I meet everyday and try to make one part of the community feel like they know the other part and one end of it help the other end..."¹³⁷

This is our country here as far as you can see no matter which way you walk or
 No matter what spot of it you stand on
 And when you have crossed her as many times as I have you will see as many ugly things about her as pretty
 things
 You will hear whole gangs of travelers and settlers arguing about her.
 What she is, how she come to be, what you are supposed to do here and you will hear some argue at you
 That she is so beautiful you are supposed to spend your life just feeling her pretty parts,
 Sucking in her sweetest breezes and tasting her fairest odors, looking at her brightest colored scenes,
 And I would say that gang has the wrong notion.
 And there are some bunches that tell you she is all ugly and all dirty, that there is nothing good about her, noth-
 ing free, nothing clean, that she is all slums, shacks, rot, filth, stink, and bad odors, loud words of bitter
 flavors,
 Well, this herd is big and I heard them often and I heard them loud, but I come to think that they too was just as
 wrong as the first outfit,
 Because I seen the pretty and I seen the ugly and it was because I knew the pretty part that I wanted to change
 the ugly part, Because I hated the dirty part that I knew how to feel the love for the cleaner part,
 I looked in a million of her faces and eyes, and I told myself there was a look on that face that was good, if I could
 see it there, in back of all of the shades and shadows of fear and doubt and ignorance and tangles of debts
 and worries,
 And I guess it is these things that make our country look all lopsided to some of us, lopped over onto the good and
 easy side or over onto the bad and the hard side,
 I know that the people that run our desks and offices got so full of the desire to grab enough money to run away
 and hide on, that they let this thought run them, instead of the bigger plan, well, this has always been a
 hard word to say, but
 It could very truly be that our office people are doing the best they know how to do,
 But we had ought to teach ourselves better and higher than this before we run ourselves and put ourselves into
 our offices.

–written May 21, 1946 ¹³⁸

*Woody is just Woody. Thousands of people do not know he has any other name. He is just a voice and a guitar. He sings the
 songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people. Harsh voiced and nasal, his guitar hanging like a tire iron on a
 rusty rim, there is nothing sweet about Woody, and there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings. But there is something more
 important for those who will listen. There is the will of a people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the
 American Spirit.*

–John Steinbeck

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

Thanks to a number of people who commented on these notes, particularly Nora Guthrie and
 Tiffany Colannino of the Woody Guthrie Archive, Anna Lomax Wood, Bill Murlin, Nathan Salsburg,
 and Ron Cohen.

endnotes

- 1 Letter to Alan Lomax, September 9, 1940.
- 2 “You Elected Me...” is from the Woody Guthrie Archives, Notebooks Series-1, Item 31, Page 87.
- 3 We will note that at the time Woodrow Wilson Guthrie was named, the man he was named after had not yet been elected President but was the Democrat Party nominee for President.
- 4 Robert Shelton, “A Man to Remember: Woody Guthrie” essay in the booklet accompanying the 1964 Elektra Records release of selected Library of Congress recordings.
- 5 Interview with Nora Guthrie, June 6, 2011.
- 6 Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life & Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 160.
- 7 Wolfe and Lornell interview with Alan Lomax, April 16, 1992, quoted in Wolfe and Lornell, op. cit., pp. 160-161. Alan exclaimed, “I think the most important work that I did in my own life was to be a really sensitive audience for Leadbelly.” Rather than one concentrated session, the initial Library of Congress recordings were cut over several months from February to June 1935. On August 23, 1940, Alan Lomax recorded Ledbetter again, this time in Washington DC.
- 8 *Hollywood Tribune*, July 3, 1939.
- 9 The organization has sometimes been called the Steinbeck Committee to Aid Farm Workers. The concert was at 8:30 PM. Will Geer served as M.C. of the event. Woody had come from California at Geer’s invitation and was staying at his place. The performers listed on the program, in the order they are listed on a flyer for the evening, were: “Will Geer, Alan Lomax, Aunt Molly Jackson, Leadbelly, Woodie Guthrie, Pennsylvania Miners, Margo Mayo, Golden Gate Quartet and many others.” It was presented by the Theatre Arts Committee and Will Geer of the “Tobacco Road” Company. Ticket prices were 35 cents, 83 cents, \$1.10, and \$1.45.
- 10 Ed Robbin, *Woody Guthrie and Me* (Berkeley: Lancaster-Miller Publishers, 1979), p. 115. *Tobacco Road’s* run at the Forrest lasted from September 1934 until the last day of May 1941. Woody’s application for employment with the Department of the Interior (for the Bonneville Power Administration position) cited a monthly salary of \$48 as “Backstage hand & errand boy” for the Tobacco Road Co.
- 11 Alan Lomax, Introductory comments to the 1964 Elektra Records release of Woody Guthrie’s Library of Congress recordings. It may have been Woody’s first night on stage in New York, but he had been in the city for a few weeks.
- 12 Ed Cray, *Ramblin’ Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 166.
- 13 Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (New York: Delta Books, 1980), p. 147.
- 14 The full program ran as follows:

Aunt Molly Jackson 1. I Am Aunt Molly Jackson
 2. Beauty Bride
 3. Jack Monroe
 4. Let’s Join the CIO
 Woody Guthrie 1. Blues
 2. Do-Re-Mi
 3. Why Are You Standing in the Rain
 Golden Gate Quartette 1. Weeping Mary
 2. Bleeding Lamb
 3. It’s Almost Done
 4. Go Down, Old Hannah
 Lead Belly, with above 5. Grey Goose
 6. Traveling Shoes
 Tobacco Road, Act II

Intermission, 5 minutes

Aunt Molly, Will Geer, Prop Man 1. Slap Song
 Alan Lomax & Bess 1. (song not listed)
 2. (song not listed)
 3. (song not listed)
 Burl Ives 1. Red Bird
 2. Cod Liver Ile
 3. Joe Hill
 Lead Belly 1. Good Morning Blues
 2. Gallis Pole
 3. Boll Weevil
 4. Gwinna Dig A Hole
 5. Duck Shoot
 Margot Mayo & Co. Dances

Intermission

Minto Cayo & Col. Po’ John Henry
 Penn. Boys, Woody & Aunt Molly 1. Stockade Blues
 2. Miner’s Child
 3. Little Green Valley
 4. My Little Lady
 Finale Ain’t Gwine Study War No More

- 15 Alan Lomax interview with Michael O'Rourke, July 7, 1987.
- 16 In 1940, Weisner began work as chief engineer for the Acoustical and Record Laboratory of the Library of Congress. In 1942, Weisner began his long career at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; he became its president from 1971 to 1980. Between 1961 and 1964, Jerome Weisner served as chair of President Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee in Washington. MIT's website, presenting a biography after Weisner's death, commented, "After the United States became involved in World War II, Dr. Weisner joined the research staff at MIT's newly formed Radiation Laboratory, where he worked on the development of microwave radar...There, under a Carnegie Corporation grant, he assisted in developing recording facilities and equipment and traveled through the South and Southwest with the noted folklorist Alan Lomax, recording the folk music of the regions for the Library of Congress Archives." Todd Harvey of the American Folklife Center says that their records give the engineer the improbable name of Nev R. Rumble.
- 17 Alan Lomax, Introductory comments to the 1964 Elektra release, op. cit. Either he or a typist misspelled his wife's name; it was Lyttleton, not Littleton.
- 18 See the text of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's speech of October 27, 1952 in Chicago, printed in full in *The New York Times*, October 28, 1952. MacLeish himself said that *Land of the Free* was an effort to "illustrate" the photographs – the core of the book – with his words of poetry. The *New York Times* review noted "picture after picture of sharecroppers, homesteaders on relief, eroding grain fields, broken-down dwellings, drought refugees, migrant fruit pickers, child laborers, highly expressive pictures, printed one to a page, of the bitter American present, with an occasional brighter scene for the sake of contrast." *New York Times*, March 31, 1938. We don't know how MacLeish felt about Woody Guthrie, but *Land of the Free* is a book which could equally well have been "illustrated" by Woody. It would be difficult to imagine a more receptive Librarian of Congress for the work being done both by Alan Lomax and Woody Guthrie.
- 19 Woody Guthrie, *Bound for Glory* (Garden City NY: Dolphin Books, 1943), p. 103.
- 20 "Worried Man Blues" he credits to the Carter Family. "The California Blues" comes from Jimmie Rodgers. And Lowe Stokes and His North Georgians' 1929 Columbia recording of "Wish I Had Stayed in the Wagon Yard" may have been the source of his song of similar name. Some believe Gid Tanner may have been the song's author, though it was first recorded by the Texan Peg Moreland for Victor in 1928. Nathan Salsburg speculates that it may well have originated on the vaudeville stage. He further notes that some of the spin on the lyrics was Woody's alone.
- 21 Alan Lomax, Introductory comments to the 1964 Elektra release, op. cit.
- 22 E-mail from Nathan Salsburg, May 1, 2012.
- 23 *Hartford Courant*, July 3, 1940 and *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1940.
- 24 *New York Times*, December 29, 1940
- 25 Contract between RCA and Woody Guthrie of Pampa, Texas, dated April 24, 1940. For RCA's "Old Bob" (Robert Wetherald) Woody also recorded "a talking record for him to accompany the album. Some sort of speech to be give to radio stations that want to broadcast them." [Letter to Alan and Elizabeth Lomax, ca. late July 1940. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.]
- 26 *Washington Post*, November 10, 1940.
- 27 Wm. Joe Simonds, "The Columbia Basin Project," a draft report issued by the Denver-based Bureau of Reclamation History Program in 1998. See the full report:
http://www.usbr.gov/projects/ImageServer?imgName=Doc_1297780309537.pdf
- 28 Bill Murlin points out that the Rock Island Dam was the first on the Columbia, and also a publicly-funded one, built from 1929-33, by the Chelan County Public Utility District. E-mail from Bill Murlin, May 1, 2012.
- 29 A profile on Pare Lorentz (1905-1992) can be found in the *Washington Star* of October 9, 1938. Woody later appeared briefly in the 1940 Lorentz film *The Fight for Life*, succinctly described at www.documentary.org as "a devastating look at infant mortality among the impoverished." By the time *The River* was completed, the Resettlement Administration had been folded into the Farm Security Administration.
- 30 Gunther Von Fritsch (1906-1988) was a filmmaker born in Pula, Croatia to Austrian parents. After arriving in the United States in 1930 as a graduate of the Government Film School of Paris, he began work editing foreign films for MGM, eventually becoming a director who filmed *This is Cinerama*, Walt Disney's *Snowbear*, and both *Cigarette Girl* and *The Curse of the Cat People*. He also directed numerous television shows such as *Flash Gordon* and *The Lawman*.
- 31 Interview with Michael O'Rourke, July 7, 1987. Arthur E. "Tex" Goldschmidt was later United States Ambassador to the United Nations. At the time, he was chief of the Interior Department's power division, according to his obituary in the September 28, 2000 *New York Times*.
- 32 Kahn interview with Ed Cray on August 6, 2001. Attempts to locate Von Fritsch's heirs to see what he may have retained of the photographs he took and notes he may have made have so far been fruitless.
- 33 Woody Guthrie, *American Folksong* (a book published by Moses Asch in 1947), p. 5.
- 34 The letter to Woody was dated May 1, from Director of Personnel C. E. Lawson and it clearly said that he was "being considered" for a position and that he needed to submit some forms in triplicate, which would require approval from both the Department of the Interior and the U. S. Civil Service Commission. Being unemployed at the time, and by nature someone who liked to be on the move, Woody just simply set out for Portland with his wife Mary and their three children.
- 35 Kahn interview with Michael Majdic on June 21, 1998. We might note that the \$35.00 of acetate discs which the Library of Congress purchased for the March and April 1940 sessions were for 50 discs, of which 16 were recorded by Woody. At approximately 70 cents per disc, the cost in materials to the government in this case was apparently less than \$12.00.
- The scope of his work was broad. The "personnel action" memorandum which Kahn prepared said that Information Consultant Guthrie would undertake "necessary research and investigation to determine feasibility of making documentary film of Administration program, and preparation of radio broadcasts." Guthrie's duties and responsibilities were:
- Under general supervision of the Director of Information and other information staff members, with wide latitude to use independent judgment, to engage in research on the federal program for the development of the Columbia River; to survey the economic and social conditions of the region, its history and folk lore, to determine the feasibility of preparing a documentary film showing the relationship of the activities of the Administration to the solution of such problems; to assist in narrating and writing film strips and recordings; to analyze activities and accomplishments of activities of the Administration to determine feasibility of preparing radio broadcasts dealing with the use of electric power for agricultural and domestic purposes; to assist in the preparation and performance of such programs, including the writing, narrating and arrangement of musical accompaniment."
- 36 Ronald D. Cohen, author of the 2012 book from Routledge, *Woody Guthrie: Writing America's Songs* was gracious in reading an advance copy of this manuscript and, though his own book was already being printed at the time, offered the following thought: "The recent documentary film on PBS made the point that in addition to all of the above benefits, which Woody wrote about, the same also displaced numerous Native Americans and destroyed their salmon fishing in the river. I say nothing about this in my book, but now realize I should have mentioned some of the negatives that Woody didn't realize." E-mail from Ron Cohen, June 13, 2012.

- 37 On April 9, 2005, Bill Murlin of the BPA conducted an interview with Elmer Buehler on videotape which lasted nearly three hours, where Buehler tells his own story and of driving Woody around the region. Buehler was 93 years old at the time of the interview and had a sharp memory for names and places and dates. A tape of the interview is in the Woody Guthrie Archives.
- 38 See the *Roll On Columbia* DVD produced by Michael Madjic and Denise Matthews for the University of Oregon in the year 2000, a production of the University of Oregon's Knight Library Media Services and the School of Journalism and Communication.
- 39 Murlin 2005 interview with Elmer Buehler.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Alan Lomax interview with Michael O'Rourke, July 7, 1987.
- 42 Woody Guthrie, *American Folksong*, op. cit., p. 5. Woody was saying that opponents of the dams argued there were better uses for the material to be used in the construction of the dam, and he was stressing the long-term benefits of the electric power the dams produced.
- 43 *New York Times*, August 4, 1991. Murlin added, "That is, if we could hire a folk singer for one month again."
- 44 E-mail from Anna L. Wood, April 27, 2012.
- 45 Woody Guthrie, *California to the New York Island* (New York: The Guthrie Children's Trust Fund, 1958 and 1960), p. 31.
- 46 Richard Nate, " 'Pastures of Plenty': Woody Guthrie and the New Deal" in *The Life, Music and Thought of Woody Guthrie*, edited by John S. Partington (Farnham, Surrey, England and Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011)
- 47 BPA printed the first edition (sepia) of the book itself. In a May 1, 2012 e-mail, Bill Murlin explained: "The book was sold at cost in a limited distribution. BPA then turned over the publication materials to *Sing Out!* which published the ensuing (color) editions. The intent of my project was to have both the songbook and the recording issued in 1987, BPAs 50th anniversary. The recording made it in time. The songbook waited another six months until the foreword by Alan Lomax was received, and then added to the final version of the book. A very good decision, considering the beauty of that Lomax prose."
- 48 Jeff Brady, "Woody Guthrie's Fertile Month on the Columbia River" (NPR, *All Things Considered*, July 13, 2007). In Buehler's 2005 interview, he talked about a visit to the Dayton Grange, early in Woody's visit and before he'd written any songs. He was well-received. He was there to see what the Grange could do and before it was over the people were there to see what he could do." He played perhaps for about an hour and a half. And as he traveled with Buehler, Woody soaked up details which he used in songs later on. Not only did Woody have a very retentive memory, but Buehler recalled that even when they'd be sitting in a restaurant, Woody would write notes on a napkin and stick it in his pocket. [Bill Murlin videotape interview of Elmer Buehler, April 9, 2005]
- 49 Murlin 2005 interview of Buehler.
- 50 Ibid. Bill Murlin adds, "I think he also saved a copy of the movie BPA made called *Power Builds Ships* – it was a 1942 film specifically about the Kaiser ship yards in Portland where power from Bonneville and Grand Coulee was used in arc welding, used for the first time in shipbuilding in those yards. Later on, I determined that the purge, as you called it, was not as complete as might have been believed. BPA was able to recall copies of the movies from their own offices but made no effort to recall copies distributed to movie theatres, schools, libraries and such. Thus, copies have turned up in boxes of old films saved in old movie theatres. When the theatres went dark their collections were sold and sometimes a BPA movie would be in a box of old films. E-mail, May 1, 2012.
- 51 *Roll On Columbia* DVD, op. cit.
- 52 Robert Shelton, "A Man to Remember: Woody Guthrie" Notes to the Elektra Records release of the Library of Congress recordings.
- 53 Partington's essay is worth exploring. It's entitled "'There's A Better World a-Coming': Resolving the Tension between the Urban and Rural Visions in the Writings of Woody Guthrie" and is in the book he edited, *The Life, Music and Thought of Woody Guthrie*, op. cit.
- 54 Cray, op. cit., p. 151.
- 55 Woody Guthrie, *Woody Sez* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975), p. 133.
- 56 "I Say to You Woman and Man" – this is a portion of a lengthier set of lyrics, written in Coney Island and dated August 14, 1947.
- 57 Klein, op. cit., pp. 95-97. See also Partington, op. cit., especially page 30, note 47. Jim Longhi tells of how he effectively integrated his Merchant Marine ship; see Jim Longhi, *Woody, Cisco, & Me: Seamen Three in the Merchant Marine* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), pages 230 ff. For more commentary on Woody and race, see Mark Allan Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Wisdom of Woody Guthrie* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), pp. 236-238 and 248-249, and in Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), pp. 149, 150. The tune Woody referred to was "Run Nigger Run" – interestingly the lyrics are urging escape from a pateroller, which was a bounty hunter who made a living in the pre-Civil War era trying to catch escaped slaves: "Oh run nigger run, the pateroller [will] get you. Run nigger run, well, you better get away."
- 58 Letter from Woody to Henrietta Yurchenco, in *A Mighty Hard Road* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), pp. 103-5. It's amusing to find a letter from Hilda Cole Espy to Alan Lomax dated just weeks after the Forrest Theatre show, on April 15, 1940. In it, she tells Alan about a prickly encounter ("a strange little friction") between Woody and Lead Belly at a party she had been at. She wrote, "Lead Belly introduced the hostilities by simply remarking, 'Woody is a cowboy.' That's all he said, but somehow it didn't sound innocuous. Woody appeared to retaliate by absent-mindedly signing 'Goodbye, Irene' in the tone a soda jerker would use while polishing a table. Lead Belly soon got even when it was suggested that he loan Woody his guitar so Woody could sing. He explained in a soft confidential whisper that was just about as subtle as a riveting machine that Woody was welcome to use his guitar, only there wouldn't be any use lending it to him, since he couldn't play a 12-string guitar. Woody took a disgusted drag on his cigarette that was the next thing to spitting on the floor and began to sing 'Goodbye, Irene' again, making it sound bitterly corny..." Her story continued for another paragraph. The letter was – a bit jarringly – written on stationery from Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians, for which Espy worked as a publicist. Clearly it didn't take long for Woody and Lead Belly to break the ice and become fast friends.
- 59 Ibid., p. 18.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Guthrie, *Woody Sez*, op. cit., pp. 62, 63. And from the song "Why Do You Stand There in the Rain," he offered these lyrics: "Now the guns of Europe roar as they have so oft before / And the warlords play their same old game again / While they butcher and kill, Uncle Sammy foots the bill / With his own dear children standing in the rain." (p. 73). Martin Butler's chapter in the Partington-edited book focuses on Woody's transition, as he put it, "from anti-war to anti-fascist."
- 62 *Woody Sez*, op. cit., 71. The album *Songs for John Doe* was withdrawn after the German attack on the Soviet Union.
- 63 For instance, the forced collectivization of farming and the many purges even within Party ranks, such as the treason trials of the 1930s and the establishment of the system of gulags. Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness At Noon* was first published in 1940, but many resisted the full implication of its message. Even the most conservative estimates put the figure of deaths at more than 10 million.
- 64 Cray, op. cit., p. 282.

- 65 Given the immense volume of Woody's work, it's not surprising, however, to be able to find the occasional fantasy of fighting back slip into a song. Mark Allan Jackson noted a couple of lines in the obscure "66 Highway Blues" which read:
- Sometimes I think I'll get me a gun,
Thirty eight or forty fo',
But a number for a name and a big 99,
Is worse than 66 Highway Blues.
- The song then goes on to suggest, instead, forming a "hungry man's union." Mark Alan Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 75. It may be a case of the rare exception proving the rule.
- 66 AFC Woody Guthrie Manuscript Collection Box 3, Folder 11. Thanks to Tiffany Colannino of the Woody Guthrie Archives for locating this item.
- 67 Woody Guthrie (ed. by Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal), *Pastures of Plenty* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 173.
- 68 Cray, *Ramblin' Man*, op. cit., p. 327.
- 69 *Ibid.*, pp. 327, 328. He credits the quotation from Bess Lomax Hawes to a December 11, 1971 interview with Bess and her husband Butch Hawes, conducted by E. Victor and Judy Wolfenstein.
- 70 Cray, p. 284, quoting handwritten thoughts Woody added at some later point to a 1935 manuscript of his.
- 71 Woody Guthrie, "America Singing," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1943.
- 72 Studs Terkel, preface to *Woody Sez*, pp. vii, ix.
- 73 "The Bowery and Me" was published in the *Daily Worker* on January 26, 1947. It is reprinted on pages 189-193 of *Pastures of Plenty*.
- 74 Ed Robbin, op. cit., p. 32.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 76 *Woody Sez*, op. cit., p. 153.
- 77 Ronald D. Cohen, op. cit. Chapter 1.
- 78 Robbin, op. cit., 41.
- 79 Cray, op. cit., p. 283.
- 80 Letter to Alan Lomax, September 19, 1940. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 81 Ronald D. Cohen, op. cit., quoting Silber's "Woodie [sic] Guthrie: He Never Sold Out," *National Guardian*, October 14, 1967, 14.
- 82 Jeff Morgan, "'Hard Travelin': Constructing Woody Guthrie's Dust Bowl Legacy," in Partington, op. cit. What Morgan characterized as "vulgar songs" is not clear, but they were likely traditional songs as opposed to original compositions and likely not "vulgar" in the sense of being scatological.
- 83 Letter to Alan Lomax, June 17, 1942. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 84 Robert Santelli and Emily Davidson, eds. *Hard Travelin' - The Life and Legacy of Woody Guthrie* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, as published by University Press of New England, 1999).
- 85 Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie: American Radical*, op. cit., p. 83.
- 86 John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Viking, 2010), 196.
- 87 *Ibidem*.
- 88 <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awrs9/owi.html>
- 89 Gregory D. Black and Clayton Koppes "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945." *The Journal of American History* 64.1 (1977): 103.
- 90 Letter from Woody Guthrie to the Almanac Singers, June 19, 1942. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 91 *Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1943.
- 92 *New York Times*, January 5, 1943.
- 93 See, for instance, the *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, May 30, 1942, reporting on a performance at the Harlem Defense Recreation Center.
- 94 Quoted in Peter Sage, *From Poetry to Prose: Archibald MacLeish and the Defense of Democracy* (Yale Misc. Mss 70, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library), unpublished.
- 95 Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 7.
- 96 *Ibid.*, 9, 10.
- 97 Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 65, 66.
- 98 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 99 Cray, op. cit., p. 261.
- 100 Woody Guthrie, letter to Robert Wetherald. Reprinted in Woody Guthrie (ed. by Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal), *Pastures of Plenty* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 85.
- 101 Woody Guthrie, *American Folksong*, op. cit., p. 7.
- 102 Jim Longhi, op. cit., p. 2.
- 103 Yurchenco, op. cit., pp. 125, 126.
- 104 Letter from Woody Guthrie to Marjorie Mazia, October 2, 1945. Woody Guthrie Archives.
- 105 Letter dated March 23, 1946. Woody Guthrie Archives.
- 106 The honor was announced before 2,000 government employees, and was reported in *The New York Times* of April 6, 2012. Arlo Guthrie sang some of his father's songs. Moe Asch was present as well.
- 107 Michael Munk, "Honoring Woody isn't as easy as it sounds," *Portland Tribune*, August 13, 2009. Updated October 30, 2009.
- 108 Jeff Morgan, op. cit.
- 109 Woody Guthrie, *Born to Win* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 25.

- 110 Morgan, op. cit.
- 111 Note dated August 5, 1947 and reprinted in Woody Guthrie (ed. by Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal), *Pastures of Plenty* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 180.
- 112 Remarks reprinted in Yurchenco, op. cit., p. 91.
- 113 *Woody and Lefty Lou's Favorite Collection – Old Time Hill Country Songs Being Sung for Ages Still Going Strong*, self-published ca. 1938.
- 114 Letter to Moe Asch dated July 15, 1946, and reprinted in Woody Guthrie (ed. by Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal), *Pastures of Plenty* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), pp. 196-205.
- 115 Woody Guthrie papers, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 116 Exchange of letters between Alan Lomax and Harold Spivacke on January 20, 22, and 26, 1942. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 117 Peter Goldsmith, *Making People's Music* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), pp. 182, 183.
- 118 Santelli and Davidson, *Hard Travelin'*, op. cit., p. 202.
- 119 The tape has been preserved by the Woody Guthrie Archive, on reel #13. He was such a prolific author that it's not surprising he had written songs about V.D. earlier (such as the 1945 item, or even the April 19, 1949 song "Palmetto Veedee Blues," which also preceded the newspaper story about using song to fight venereal disease), nor that he wrote later ones as well – such as June 1955's "Gonoreea & Hotty Balls." The recording was probably literally a home recording, and made at his home in Coney Island.
- 120 *VD Blues* (New York: Avon Books, 1972). The reference to Arlo and the lyrics he sings are on pages 71 and 72.
- 121 Thanks to Jocelyn K. Wilk of the Columbia University Archives for providing a copy of the 1951 sales catalogue.
- 122 John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Viking, 2010), 240.
- 123 Thanks to Mary Hilpertshauer of the Centers for Disease Control for making available the catalogue listing of the material produced at Columbia. Perhaps tangentially interesting to some is that Joyce Indig was Rodney Dangerfield's first wife.
- 124 E-mails from Jeff Rosen and Clinton Heylin, April 12 and 16, 2012. Heylin's book *Revolution in the Air: The Songs of Bob Dylan 1961-1973* (Chicago Review Press) offers information on the history of "V.D. Seaman's Letter."
- 125 Letter to Atty. Gen'l. Tom Clark dated January 12, 1949. Woody Guthrie Archives.
- 126 Letter of December 3, 1950. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 127 Letter to Alan Lomax, September 19, 1940. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- 128 Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*, op. cit., p. 170.
- 129 Letter to Stetson Kennedy, March 30, 1952. Woody Guthrie Archives.
- 130 Keynote speech at the South by Southwest Music + Media Conference in Austin, TX, March 15, 2012.
- 131 McGovern's acceptance speech ended thus:
 From secrecy and deception in high places; come home, America. From military spending so wasteful that it weakens our nation; come home, America. From the entrenchment of special privileges in tax favoritism; from the waste of idle lands to the joy of useful labor; from the prejudice based on race and sex; from the loneliness of the aging poor and the despair of the neglected sick – come home, America. Come home to the affirmation that we have a dream. Come home to the conviction that we can move our country forward. Come home to the belief that we can seek a newer world, and let us be joyful in that homecoming, for this "is your land, this land is my land – from California to New York island, from the redwood forest to the gulf stream waters – this land was made for you and me."
 So let us close on this note: May God grant each one of us the wisdom to cherish this good land and to meet the great challenge that beckons us home. And now is the time to meet that challenge. Good night, and Godspeed to you all.
- 132 NOTE: The performers do not sing this verse:
 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.
- Just as this essay was being completed, Robert Santelli saw published a book he authored which is devoted to chronicling the history of "This Land Is Your Land" as a song, thereby also providing him another way of re-telling, through another lens, the story of Woody Guthrie's life. Robert Santelli, *This Land Is Your Land* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2102). It's an excellent book, and he makes the point that there was at least one period of time after Woody's ability to participate in American life had ended, when music played an important role. "Guthrie's idea as to how music could be used to change American was employed more in the 1960s than at any other time since the Great Depression. The decade had witnessed the rise of the civil rights movement, which was fueled by music, principally gospel songs set with new words that inspired civil disobedience and activism. The movement's theme song, 'We Shall Overcome,' gave people home when there was no place else to find it." [pp. 226, 227] Santelli naturally also includes the subsequent, and overlapping, antiwar movement as well.
- 133 Jody Rosen, "Two American Anthems, in Two American Voices," *New York Times*, July 2, 2000.
- 134 Interview with Nora Guthrie, June 6, 2011.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 *The New Yorker*, March 20, 1943, 68.
- 137 Woody Guthrie, letter to Alan Lomax, September 19, 1940. Reprinted in Woody Guthrie (ed. by Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal), *Pastures of Plenty* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), pp. 50, 51.
- 138 "This Is Our Country Here" lyric © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. 2001.

THE COMPLETE
LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS
RECORDINGS
OF WOODY GUTHRIE

This release of the complete Library of Congress recordings of Woody Guthrie has more than two hours of material never before presented in the United States. The three-LP release on Elektra Records in 1964 contained, as the cover promised, “three hours of songs and conversation.” The 1988 Rounder set drew from the same masters. This publication – yet another two dozen years later – contains the full sessions at the Library of Congress, start to finish, thus offering a dozen “new” songs and more than 100 minutes of conversation which will be new to almost everyone. Hearing Woody Guthrie speak, at length, is a pleasure (and rewarding) in itself.

RECORDING CONSOLE AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, SIMILAR TO THAT USED AT THE 1940 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SESSIONS



Disc 1: TRACK 1 – “LOST TRAIN BLUES” [AFS 3407A]

ALAN LOMAX: The “Lost Train Blues” played on a harmonica and the guitar by Woody Guthrie of Okemah, Oklahoma. Woody knows what that lost train means because he has ridden on the Red Ball freight from one end the country to the other. In a few minutes we are going to begin our conversation with Woody Guthrie about life in the Southwest, about where he is from and where he went and what happened. Woody Guthrie is, I guess, about thirty years old from the looks of him, but he has seen more in those thirty years than most men see before they are seventy. He hasn’t sat in a warm house or a warm office, with anybody he’s been interested in lookin’ at. He has gone out in the world, looked at the faces of a hundred men and women, he has lived in hobo jungles. He has performed on picket lines, and he has sung his way through every bar and saloon between Oklahoma and California and listen to that Red Ball roll.

Disc 1: TRACK 2 – GROWING UP IN OKLAHOMA

AL: Woody, how long was it ago that you were born in Okemah?

WG: Twenty-eight years, you pretty near guessed it. I was born there on July the 14th, 1912, the year that the President Woodrow Wilson was nominated.

AL: What did your family do? What kind of people were they, and where did they come from?

WG: Well, they come in there from Texas in the early day. My dad got to Oklahoma right at statehood time and right after statehood. He was the first clerk of the county court in Okemah, Oklahoma after statehood. Wild and wooly days (laughs). He was known as one of them old hard-hittin’, fist-fightin’ Democrats, you know, that run for office down there. And they used to miscount the votes all the time, so every time that, uh, my dad went to town, it was common that the first question that I’d ask him when he come ridin’ in on a horse that evening, I’d say, “Well, how many fights did ya have today?” And then he would take me up on his knee and proceed to tell me who he was fightin’ and why and all about it.

AL: Where did you live, on a farm?

WG: Well, no, I was, uh, born there in that little town. My dad built a six-room house there, right after, well, before, while I was growing up and they got it built. It cost him about seven or eight thousand dollars and the day after he got the house built, it burned down (laughs). So then we moved off to the edge of town and that set him back financially a little bit, so we started rentin’ a house kinda down there on the outer edge of this little town. However, we had a garden spot there that most people here in this crowded part of the country would call a farm. But, uh, we wasn’t called farmers because we didn’t have but just a few acres around there. Raised hogs out there in the backyard, what we called our backyard. We had a hog farm that was bigger than most of these farms back here.

AL: What kind of a place was Okemah? How big was it? When you remember it, when you were a kid?

WG: Well, in them days, it was a little town of about 1,500. And then 2,000 and a few years later it got up to about 5,000. They struck some pretty rich oil pools all around there: Garrison City and Slick City and Cromwell and Seminole and Bowlegs and Sand Springs and Spring Hill and all up and down the whole country there, they got oil. They got some pretty nice oil fields around Okemah there.

AL: Did any of the oil come in your family?

WG: Nope, nope. We got the grease (laughter). Didn’t get no oil.

AL: Well, what kind of people lived in Okemah?

WG: To start with, oh, just sorta of a farmin’ class of people. The town didn’t amount to much except on a Saturday, you know, when all the farmin’ people would come in there to have a trades day or give away a new buggy and a box of tobaccer or buy them a new pair of button shoes, or some such stuff as that, it’s always a big Saturday. All the farmers would all

come to town and had a big time and celebrate. But the population, the people that live there right now is about one fourth Indians, and one fourth Negroes, and one fourth, I mean, half White.

AL: Do all those people mix on pretty equal terms or not? How does it go?

WG: Well, uh, no (laughter), not, not what I'd call equal terms. There's been a lot of shooting scrapes, and fights, and I had a cousin one time down there that like to get his head cut off one night. Uh, he was takin' him and one of his boy friends, was takin' two girls home and they met two colored boys and their two girls on the sidewalk. It was a common custom down in that country, you know, that the Negro people, uh, more or less come to the back door when they want to see you and take off their hat when they meet you on the street and say, "yes sir mistah" and "yes sir mistah" and "yes ma'am" and so forth and so on. But anyway, that there some, uh, crazy way they've got of lookin' at the colored situation and I can say that I, ever since I was a kid growin' up, I have always, I've always found time to stop and talk to these colored people because I found them to be full of jokes, what I mean, and wisdom. I learned a lot by talkin' to a shine boy.

AL: What did you get that idea anyhow?

WG: I learned how to play a french harp off a boy that shined shoes down there. I was passin' a barber shop one day when I was about fifteen or sixteen years old and there was a boy, a big bare-footed boy up layin' in there, and had his feet turned up towards me and, uh, he was a-playin' the, uh, harmonica, he was playin' "The Railroad Blues." That is where I learnt that "Railroad Blues."

Disc 1: TRACK 3 – "THE RAILROAD BLUES" [AFS 3407B]

Disc 1: TRACK 4 – MORE TALK OF GROWING UP IN OKEMAH

WG: That was "The Railroad Blues" that the colored boy was playing when I, uh, walked past the barbershop door. It was on a warm summer's day, and he was laying up there bare-footed and I just had my shoes off a couple of months, and just about tough enough being, you know, to where I could run through cockleburrs and broke bottles and wade through the liquor bottles up and down the back alleys in town there after whiskey got to be pretty popular.

AL: What did you say to him, Woody?

WG: And I says, "Boy, say, that's undoubtedly the loneliest piece of music that I ever run onto in my life." I said, "Where in the world did you learn it?" "Oh," he said, "I just lay here and listen to the railroad whistle and whatever it say, I say, too." Of course, he was big enough then that he had rode them a lot in his life and one time or the other then I'd come back. I had to go by this place on the way to play hooky from school every day, so, uh, I says, "Uh, I wish'd you would play me that piece again." So, about every day he would play me the same piece over and over and over. He had a whole bunch of them that he'd made up, but he just improvised them as he went along. He never did play the same piece, uh, no two days alike and he called them all "The Railroad Blues." But he never did play them alike, 'cause he was just playing, I don't know, to something that was in his head, you know, and never did have wrote down.

AL: Whatever happened to him, do you know?

WG: That boy? I don't know whatever become of him. I even forgot his name. I ain't got the least idea. But then, I was startin' to tell you about the two boys, that one of my cousins, uh, because of the way that the common, everyday feeling down in that country, you know is, that there is, for some strange reason, that there's some people born a little bit better than others, and some are supposed to work pretty hard and others are supposed to sorta coast through life, some way or the other. But then, uh, I don't know, I always did, I got used to I'd never hardly pass, uh, either an Indian or a colored boy up, either one, because I am telling you the truth, I learned to like them, especially since I been hoboin' and freight trainin' too. And the, uh, oil made a lot of the Indians rich around there, you know. That's a Creek nation, all the Creek Indians live in there. They've got five civilized tribes, what they call the five civilized tribes: the Cherokee, Creeks, Seminole, Choctaw, and the Cherokee; Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole. Anyway, the, uh, the Indians down there, when they got to gettin' this oil money, why they, of course, the white gardeens come along. You know, everyone needed a gardeeen then, so the lawyers from other states where business wasn't so good, well, they packed up

and lit out for Oklahoma and appointed themselves gardeens over some of these Indians, and uh, of course, uh, Lincoln automobiles was sellin' pretty good down there in them days. I remember one tale about a Indian that got him a gardeen and his gardeen decided that he needed a big Lincoln automobile. So, this, uh, feller, they went into the garage and they bought a brand new Lincoln and they loaded all the Indians in it, the whole family: the old squaw, and all the kids and all the hound dogs, you know. And, so, they lit out for home. The gardeen showed him how to drive it home. So, the gardeen drove 'em home and then he drove back and then he turned the Indian loose with it and said now you can go back home, said you know how to drive. So the Indian said, "Umm, hmmm, that's 'em big car, same like train, take off." So he cranked it up and took out, and about midnight he come walkin' into town and was knockin' on all the garage doors around there and woke everybody up and finally found the salesman that sold these Lincolns and he said, "Me come back, need'em new car, same like yesterday, another one." Mr. Salesman, said, uh, "What'cha been drinkin'? I sold you a automobile yesterday." "Mm, mmm, awful good. Need another one, just like the other one. Liked the other one awful good." So, uh, he said "What'cha do with it?" He said, "Well, goin' down the road pretty fast, everythin' was fine, telephone poles goin' by, me watch 'em. Push down on foot feed, telephone poles go by, look like board fence. So, I pushed down on foot feed again, everthin' fine, trees go by, everythin' fine, so fast I can't see what the heck they're goin'. And all at once, looked down the road and see bridge comin' and I turned now to let it go by. Need a new Lincoln, same like the other one."

AL: What was this fight that you were tellin' me about your cousin had?

WG: Ah, that son of a gun, he, uh, all the time. He got cut with a razor.

AL: These Negroes cut him?

WG: Yeah, well, they all started to fight. The white boys, you know, uh, had been born and raised to think that the colored people ought to get off the sidewalk, you know, for 'em. Nobody knows what did break out up there, but then, uh, I have an idea and I could guess in my own imagination, that, uh, it was so dark up there where they was in that part of town, that neither one of 'em recognized anybody else in the crowd. All they knew was that they got tryin' to push them off the sidewalk and wound up fightin'. And, uh, teachin' of that kind, you know, to someone born and raised here all the time, it causes a lot of unnecessary rakes and scrapes like that which could be avoided if they were taught just a little bit bigger religion.

AL: Well, what did you young fellas do there in Okemah to have a good time? How did you amuse yourselves when you played hooky from school? What did you do?

WG: Well, we'd, uh, fish, go fishin', go swimmin'— stay out in the hills and hollers all day, and we'd make nigger shooters, and pride each other with them — slingshots they called 'em, bean flips. We would go down flat on the sides of hills and pick up some good round rocks about the size of a walnut and then we'd proceed to have a fight. And several of us almost got our heads knocked off with 'em. We'd fight with bow and arrows. Go down there and make bow and arrows. Fought each other with everything but Winchester rifles. I don't see yet how we got to be as old as we did.

Disc 1: TRACK 5 – THE GANG OF KIDS WOODY HUNG AROUND WITH [AFS 3408A]

AL: Well, uh, after you got out of knee pants, after you got out of the age when you were having rock fights, what was the next thing this gang of boys did? How many of you were there anyway? How did you get along?

WG: About thirteen in the whole bunch that I played with. We called them our gang. However, we had, every time one of them would do something against the laws of the gang, why, we would vote him out. So usually, out of the thirteen, there wasn't but about ten or nine or ten in the gang. But then, we elected our own sheriff and deputy sheriff and all that, and ah, we elected our own president and the rest of us, you know, we'd be the outlaws. The sheriff had to have somebody to throw in jail. We had a nice little jail built out of a piano box and a whole bunch of bed crates, uh, bed slats, you know, and we nailed them across the piano box and that was our jail. Anyway, uh, we built a whole house up there, had us a two-story house, a rickety little old house, with about like a hen house, but then, uh, we had a top story on it. And, uh, we stayed in there and played hooky from school. There was always two or three of us playin' hooky from school. We would go down to the gang house and we had our own money. We would make our money and uh, the president, he had to sign it. It was just

sheets of tablet paper like we were supposed to work our arithmetic problems on, but when the president put his name on them, why then, we would use it for money.

AL: What were the laws of this gang, anyhow? Do you remember what they were? Did you have a constitution written out or how was that?

WG: Well, no, just a...we tried several different ways. We tried to use the Ten Commandments. We got ahold of a copy of them and nailed up on the wall. Anybody didn't do what they said, why, we'd, each one of us had a big paddle hanging up on the wall with our name in it, carved in it, and about three or four big holes bored in it. And we would all straddle our legs out, you know, and whoever broke the law, he had to crawl through the line and when he come out, well, he wasn't in shape to sit down for several days.

Well, we, uh, made our own beverages, you know, just like they do in some of the church, what is it, monasteries. We got to be, sort of, experts at makin' home brew. I remember one batch that we made, one of the first batches that we made, we just heard about home brewin', we had managed to steal about twenty-five or thirty bottles off a guy that hid some in a corn field. We was out fishin' one day and we got to stumblin' on to these bottles, so we just picked them up and brought up to the gang house and drunk 'em and they tasted pretty good, so we decided to make us some. So, we heard the directions was to get one cake of yeast and let it ferment three days but we figured it out that we used three cakes of yeast, keep a good hot fire by it, that it would ferment in one day. So, we got five gallons of water, we got us some malt and hops and poured in it and throwed in three cakes of yeast, and we all carried wood all day long. Went over to an old house and like to tore the house down hauling wood to keep our fire going, you know, to boil our home brew up. And way before night, it was just a-foamin' and jumpin' like a whole pond full of frogs. And so, it was boilin' out the bung hole. Anyway, we thought, well boy, if there was any home brew in the world, this is it. So, we jugged it up. We put it up in some half-gallon fruit jars and backed it up on the school ground. After night, about midnight, we all proceeded then to see what our brew had turned out to be. We all got sick on it, liked to died. A bunch of us did.

We was all the time doin' somethin' there. I can remember lots of time, we used to choose up, just to pass the time away, we would take, uh, go down on the highway, they just put a chat highway through town and that was something we hadn't seen before. We'd take coaster wagons down to the highway and fill it up with rocks. We would come up to this gang house and it would be six or eight of us get inside the house and six or eight of us outside the house, how many ever there was that night, and then, for no good reason at all, we would just have a little war to pass the time away. And, uh, I told you about that before, well.

AL: How old were you then?

WG: I was about fifteen, sixteen.

AL: Were you going around to dances? Were you going to see girls at that age?

WG: No..., I just beginnin' to, you know, that was just beginnin' to break on me. I don't know, the rest of the boys, they, we was all kind of eyeing the gals up and down, but then we did not know for sure about that dancin' business. We didn't start until about two or three years later. But then, I went out on a farm there, about seventeen miles north of town and stayed out there for a long time with a family of people and that is where I first got acquainted with square dances. They always had their fiddle and their old guitar and everybody from all over the whole countryside would come and they would call them ice cream freezings or house parties or, uh, they'd all come out there and usually, the boys would come in and tie all their horses up to the hitchin' post outside and then come in and usually before a dance, a square dance was complete, why, there would be anywhere from two gang fights on up and about fifteen or twenty good fast singles, just fist fights, you know.

AL: Well, did the boys do a lot of drinkin'? Was that one reason that they, uh, got a little tough with each other sometimes?

WG: Well, yes, they, they done some drinkin' alright. They, uh, of course, they never did drink, unless, they was...they wasn't bad boys, they just, uh, liked to have a good time. They wouldn't have a drink a drop of nuthin' unless they was by theirsself or with somebody.

AL: Well, how did this drinkin' happen, I mean, what would you say, what would a guy say to you when he wanted you to have a drink? Would ya ever say a rhyme or anything with it?

WG: Well, down in that, uh...

AL: Have a drink and tell us about it, Woody.

WG: Down in that country, uh, we had Prohibition in them days so there was lots of moonshine whiskey and there was lots of bootleg liquor stills around all over the whole country and pretty near every family made their own, uh, rye whiskey, you know. Here is an old whiskey song they used to sing at pretty near all the dances or you could start singin' it and everybody would join in with you:

Disc 1: TRACK 6 – "RYE WHISKEY" [AFS 3408 B1, 2, 3, 4]

WG: (singing)

Rye whiskey, rye whiskey, rye whiskey I crave
If I don't get rye whiskey I'll go to my grave

Rye whiskey, rye whiskey, rye whiskey I cry
If I don't get rye whiskey, I surely will die.

I'll eat when I'm hungry, I'll drink when I'm dry
And if whiskey don't kill me, I'll live 'til I die

I'll drink my corn whiskey and rye whiskey, too,
And the ones that don't like me can leave me alone.

Disc 1: TRACK 7 – SOME OLD-TIME SQUARE DANCE TUNES

AL: Well, did the boys ever say toasts when they were givin' out drinks round back of the house or something like that? Do you remember any of 'em?

WG: Yeah, well, once in awhile, I say.... The, uh, here is one pretty good one here that I heard down in that country. I don't exactly know how to say it: here's to her, to her again, if you can't get to her, let me to her, 'cause I am used to her.

AL: Well, uh, some of them were even worse off than that, weren't they Woody, in the way of being a little bit off-color or somethin'?

WG: Well, yeah, they started there and went on down.

AL: Where'd they go? Where was the next stop?

WG: Well, let's hear you say one and then I'll be rememberin' mine.

AL: Well, I wasn't brought up that way, Woody. Take a drink and maybe that will help ya. You see, I didn't grow up in the country. I grew up inside of a brick house and uh, I didn't have that kind of experience. I wish I had.

WG: I guess you, you started in where we left off. Well, here is one here, if I can remember it, ya' know that I didn't never remember too many of them dang gum toasts. Why...no, I can't think of them.

AL: Well, look, Woody, when you finally began to go to square dances, what were some of the tunes did they played out there?

WG: Well, they played a bunch of them. "Madeline." They played "Wagoner," "Old Joe Clark," and "Arkansas Traveler," "Comin' Round the Mountain," everything you can think off, all the old time square dance pieces are the pretty near the same wherever you go, the "Beaumont Rag" and...

AL: The Beaumont Rag, what's that?

WG: The old waltzes that they play everywhere, the "Tennessee Waltz," the "Green Valley Waltz," and...

AL: Why don't you give me sketches of a few of these tunes because I may have heard them, but I don't recognize a lot of those names.

WG: Well, let's see here. How about a little "Joe Clark" first?

AL: Alright, that would be good and if you know any words, I'd like to hear them, too.

DISC 1: TRACK 8 – "OLD JOE CLARK"

WG:

Old Joe Clark is dead and gone
And now I wish him well
He made me wear the ball and chain
Made my ankle swell

It's round and round
Old Joe Clark
Goodbye Betty Brown
Round and round
Old Joe Clark
I'm going to leave this town

Old Joe Clark killed a man
And throwed him in the branch
And old Joe Clark is gonna get hanged
Ain't no other chance

Round and round
Old Joe Clark
Round and round I say
Round and round
Old Joe Clark
I'm gonna leave today

I went down to Old Joe's house
He lived out of town
Every tooth in old Joe's head
Is a mile and a quarter round

It's round and round
Old Joe Clark
Goodbye Betty Brown
Round and round
Old Joe Clark
I'm going to leave this town

Wished I had a nickel
 and I wished I had a dime
 And I wished I had a pretty gal
 I'd kiss her all the time.

Round and round
 Old Joe Clark
 Round and round I say
 Round and round
 Old Joe Clark
 I'm gonna leave today

Disc 1: **TRACK 9 – ALAN LOMAX ASKS FOR A TUNE**

AL: How does this “Beaumont Rag” go, Woody?

WG: That’s a pretty hard one, that’s a pretty hard one, I don’t know whether I can play that one...

(plays instrumental)

Disc 1: **TRACK 10 – “BEAUMONT RAG”**

Disc 1: **TRACK 11 – ALAN ASKS FOR ANOTHER ONE**

AL: Are you too, uh, out of breath to give us a little bit of the “Green Valley Waltz”?

WG: Yeah, that’s a pretty beat.

AL: What is the “Green Valley Waltz”?

WG: Uh, “Green Valley Waltz.” That’s just an old waltz that got started...I don’t know.

AL: Do you know where the Green Valley is?

WG: No, I don’t, Alan, I sure don’t. I have heard fifteen different ways myself. I don’t know whether I sing it right or not. Down in that country, you hear a piece you know, some night, at a square dance, and say you hear some ole boy over there about two thirds lit up and he gets to singin’ to beat the band and maybe he forgets the tune and so he throws on a couple or three verses his own way and everybody goes off down the road, you know, maybe to the next square dance, they are a little the same way, about two, three sheets in the wind and, uh, they forget what he said, so they throw one or two verses of their own. But anyway, the tune always stays just about the same and the title stays just about the same and no matter how ya hear it sung they always call it the “Green Valley Waltz,” or the “Tulsa Waltz” or the “Wednesday Night Waltz” – all them old waltzes. Here is the “Green Valley Waltz.”

Disc 1: **TRACK 12 – “GREEN VALLEY WALTZ” [AFS 3409 A]**

AL: Is that the same as the “Tulsa Waltz”?

WG: Oh, do you want me sing? I forgot to sing.

AL: Yeah, let’s hear a little of the words.

WG:

Who is gonna shoe your pretty little feet
 Who is gonna love your hand
 Who is gonna kiss your red ruby lips
 When I'm in a far distant land?

Momma will shoe my pretty little feet
 Daddy will glove my hand
 Sister will kiss my red ruby lips
 Whooo, whooo, whoooo.

AL: Is that all you know, Woody?

WG: That's all. Well, there it goes, let's see.

AL: Well, look, Woody.

WG: That's all I know.

Disc 1: TRACK 13 – THE TROUBLES AND TRAGEDIES THAT FRACTURED WOODY'S FAMILY IN OKEMAH

AL: How did you people live out there in Oklahoma? Did you live pretty well?

WG: Well, uh...

AL: A place to eat, a place to sleep? How was it?

WG: I don't know, Alan. To start with, I was a little bit different from... I wasn't in the class that John Steinbeck called the Okies because my dad to start with, was worth about thirty-five or forty thousand dollars and he had everything hunky-dory and then he started havin' a little bad luck. In fact, our whole family had a little bit of it. I don't know whether it is worth talkin' about or not. I never do talk it much. But then, uh, when this six-room house burned down that I told you about, just a day or two after it was built...it was supposed to be one of the biggest and finest in that whole country, well, right after that, my fourteen-year-old sister either set herself afire or caught afire accidentally. There's two different stories got out about it. Anyway she was having a little difficulty with her school work and she had to stay home and do some work for my mama. She caught afire while she was doing some ironing that afternoon on the old kerosene stove.

It was highly unsafe and highly uncertain in them days and this one blowed up and caught her afire and she run around the house about twice before anybody could catch her. The next day, she died. And my mother, that one was a little bit too much for her nerves. Or something, I don't know exactly how it was. But anyway, my mother died in the insane asylum at Norman, Oklahoma. Then, uh, about that same time, her...my father, mysteriously, for some reason or other, caught afire. There is a lot of people say that he set hisself afire and others say he caught a fire accidentally. I always will think that he done it on purpose, because he lost all his money, lost his hog ranch. He used to raise some of the best Poland China, pure blood hogs in that whole country and had something proud to work for and felt like that he was part of the world and was doing some good and workin' hard. All my brothers and sisters...I got another sister and two brothers and they all felt pretty good until all these things happened and they found their selves scattered; all us kids had to scatter out and be adopted by different families. I lived with a family of people, there was eleven of us. Lived in a little two-room shack. I lived with these people several years. And their name is Sam White and his family and he still lives within about a half a block of the same old house that he lived in, in them days. And in the old house, with eleven of us sleeping in two rooms, why, us kids were big boys and girls, we had to all sleep, uh, we had two or three beds, you know. So, we would sleep with some of us at the head and some of us at the foot, and had everybody's feet in everybody's faces, you know how that is. And, uh, after that, I don't know, I kind of took to the road. I hit the road one day, the first day that I ever hit the highway, to be what's called to be ramblin' man or a hobo or a tramp, was in 1927.

AL: How old were you then?

WG: At that time, I was about seventeen years old. [Woody was 15 years old in 1927.]

AL: What caused you to leave on that particular day, at that time, do you remember or is that something that you don't want to talk about?

WG: Well, I was, uh, adopted then by another family of people that had a little more money and little more everything, and uh, was members of the very high and important lodges around over town and they said it was a pity that so many of us had to live the way we did and not know where our next bite was coming from, so they said that in order to relieve me and the suffering of this family too that I was living with, that they would take me up to their house and I could live with them, so I went up and lived with them. And they had a dadgum, dadgum little old bandy hen that sat out on the icebox and roosted out there like she owned that whole part of town. And my job, mainly, while I was living with that family of people, was to keep track of that cussed bandy hen. I'd have to go find her eggs, where she laid the egg, what time of day she laid the egg, bring the egg in, I'd sort the egg, lay the egg up, tell the Miss Pride, tell the lady about the egg and then go show her the hen. And then she'd go out and pet the hen and then when night come, I would have to go get the hen again and set her back up on the icebox, to where she could be safe from all harm. And I used to carry her hay fourteen blocks across town from a livery stable in a tote sack. I would have to make a trip or two each month, by George, to get that hay for the bandy hen. So I thought, well, hell's bells, rather than be a chambermaid to a bandy hen, ladies and gentlemen, I am going to take to the highways. So I went to Galveston, Texas, went down to see the Gulf of Mexico and the ocean, and all such stuff as that. And I also knew some people down there and hoed figs and all them orchards down in that country and helped drill water wells and irrigated strawberries and helped a carpenter down there to tear down a whole bunch of houses and post a bunch of land off with posts. At that time, I was about eighteen.

AL: Were you a singer in those days? Was your family interested in music particularly? Or were you yourself?

WG: No, I did not know one note from another and still don't. I never had thought of it at that time.

AL: I mean, did you sing just for your own amusement or anything?

WG: No.

AL: You weren't singing?

WG: Oh, maybe so, yeah, a bunch of us would get together and holler and make a bunch of racket and sing whatever come into our heads. But then, I couldn't play a guitar. In fact, I never started that until just here awhile back. Anyway, that was...that trip to Galveston was my first trip. And in them days, there was lots of people that was just like I was and they was hit pretty hard from one direction or the other. There was...and I believe in them days that there was people who did not know where in the heck to go to, so they just took off down the road.

[AFS 3409 B1, 2]

AL: Oh, well, Woody, did you begin to sing about this time? How did that happen? Tell me the story and tell me about some of the first songs you learned when you began to sing.

WG: Well, when I come back from this trip to the Gulf of Mexico that I told you about, why then I went back into the panhandle of Texas, the big wheat belt, up around Amarillo Texas, north of Amarillo, Texas and, uh, found Borger, and Canadian, and Pampa and all those oil fields up in there, big oil fields had just broke out, and there was a big boom on and a lot of people from down in my country was going out there to get a job of work. And times had got pretty hard in Oklahoma and everybody was drifting out that way so I drifted out there with 'em. And when I got out into that country, the, uh, I got a job about the third day I was there. I got a job with a fella that was, uh, he owned a root beer stand, supposedly, and he said he would give me three dollars a day to stand behind the counter and sell people root beer, so I told him I had the intelligence enough to do that so I got round behind the counter and uh, he told me, he said, now in

addition to this root beer, he said, here's some bottles here of another description. He says, uh, if anybody comes up and lays a dollar and a half on the counter here, why you reach down and gently and firmly let 'em have one of these here bottles. So I sold these bottles and root beer and everything else down there for about three or four weeks. And, I, uh, never did get right inquisitive about it, but one day my curiosity got the best of me and I got to wondering what the devil was in them bottles, so I opened up one and tasted of it and it was nothing in the world but just pure unadulterated corn whiskey. So, uh, we was a-wheeling and a-dealing there in the whiskey business for a long time.

And this guy had a guitar that laid around there and I, a lot of times, there wouldn't be any customers in the place and I would grab up this guitar and got to pickin' around on it and I thought it sounded awfully pretty and I learnt little ole chords, you know, just (plays), just chords like that, you know, just how to barely chord along and finally learned a few little ole songs and then, I dunno, I just kind of drifted into it. I never did own a guitar, though.

AL: What were some of the first songs you began to sing out there in the panhandle, Woody?

WG: Some of the very first ones? Here is an old song here that they sang back down in that country, almost everybody knows it. The name of this one here is "Greenback Dollar."

Disc 1: **TRACK 14 – "GREENBACK DOLLAR"**

I don't want your greenback dollar
 I don't want your silver change
 All I want is your love, darlin'
 Won't you take me back again

Once you was my fond affection
 And you thought this world of me
 Then you left me for another
 In my grave I'd rather be

I don't want no greenback dollar
 I don't want your silver change
 All I want is your purty little daughter
 Won't you take me back again

Disc 1: **TRACK 15 – LOMAX ASKS ABOUT THE BOLL WEEVIL**

AL: Did they sing about the boll weevil out there, Woody, in your part of the country?

WG: Well, uh, yeah, they did, uh, Alan, but it wasn't because they growed so much cotton around in that country because that's the big...one of the biggest wheat belts that there is. But, then, uh, all these people that had come to work in the oil fields in the Texas plains, up on the high, dry, windy plains, they was from down my way and uh, ninety nine out of a hundred of 'em sung the old "Boll Weevil" song and here's the way it went, let's see.

Disc 1: **TRACK 16 – "BOLL WEEVIL"**

Farmer said to the boll weevil
 I see you at my door
 Yes, sir, said the boll weevil
 I've been there before
 Gonna get your home, gonna get your home

Farmer said to the grocer man
 I want some meat and meal



FOUR FAMILIES, THREE OF THEM RELATED WITH 15 CHILDREN, FROM THE DUST BOWL IN TEXAS IN AN OVERNIGHT ROADSIDE CAMP NEAR CALIPATRIA, CALIFORNIA, MARCH 1937. U. S. FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPH BY DOROTHEA LANGE.

DUST BOWL FARM. COLDWATER DISTRICT, NORTH OF DALHART, TEXAS, JUNE 1938. ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE HOUSES IN THE AREA WERE ABANDONED, THIS ONE WAS STILL OCCUPIED AT THE TIME. U. S. FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPH BY DOROTHEA LANGE.



Get out of here, you son of gun, you got boll weevil in your field
Gonna get your home, gonna get your home

Farmer said to the banker
I want to make a note
Get out of here, you son of a gun, you got a boll weevil on your coat
Gonna get your home, gonna get your home

Farmer said to the dry goods man
I want to cash a check
Get out of here, you rascal, boll weevil down your back
Gonna get your home, gonna get your home

Farmer said to the finance man
I'd like to get a car
Get out of here, you so and so, you got a boll weevil in your hair
Gonna get your home, gonna get your home

Disc 1: **TRACK 17 – JAILHOUSE SONGS [AFS 3410 A1, 2]**

AL: Uh, Woody, did you learn any jailhouse songs out there in west Texas when you were around songs men sing when they wind up in jail or in trouble?

WG: Well, uh, one of the best old-time jailhouse songs that I know of I learnt right then and there and the name of it is "The Midnight Special." Did you ever hear of that one?

AL: Yeah, I have, but I would like to hear your way, but first I would like to know where you learnt the song. Do you remember who taught it to you or anything about it?

WG: Well, no I don't, Alan, no for sure. I got an uncle that is quite a fiddler. He used to play for all the square dances around there before and I don't know, I, I forget now just where I did learn it, but then I...uh.

AL: Well, how did the, what does the Midnight Special mean, Woody, do you know? What does it mean to you anyhow?

WG: I don't know what it means, Alan. I never did get it quite straight figured out, but then I heard two or three different tales about it. One tale that I heard was that the Midnight Special was, uh, a train that come by this prison every night. I don't know just exactly whether that is right or not. Is it?

AL: I don't think anybody knows, Woody.

WG: And that, uh, these two guys was plannin' to get out of jail. This man was in jail and his wife, his girl, his sweetheart, was gonna come in on this train and she was gonna bring the papers and gonna get him out jail by midnight and take him back to freedom again and so, uh, that was why he was prayin' for the spotlight of this midnight train to shine his light on his jailhouse wind'er and let the Midnight Special shine her light on me, let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me. That's to the two convicts, one of 'em talkin' to the other one, lookin' for the midnight hour to come and his gal to bring the papers.

Disc 1: TRACK 18 – “THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL”

Well, let the Midnight Special shine her light on me
 Let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me
 Yonder comes my woman
 Tell me how do you know
 I can tell her by her apron and the dress she wore
 Umbrell-y on her shoulder
 A piece of paper in her hand
 Marchin' up to the warden
 Says I want my man

Oh, let the Midnight Special shine her light on me
 Let the Midnight Special shine her ever-lovin' light on me

Disc 1: TRACK 19 – WHEN THE GREAT DUST STORM STRUCK

Well, and then, uh, that was all about all that I ever knew about it, except that I knew that there was some more of it, so I bummed around all over the country then, uh, in this part of Texas where I was workin' in this whiskey store, why, I got, well, some of the worst dust storms in the history of the whole world, I guess, broke loose right there in that country. That was the big middle of the dust bowl. John Steinbeck talks about one end of the dust bowl and that's the Oklahoma end of it and other people talk about the Colorado and the New Mexico end of it, but if you want to find the very big middle of these dust storms where they get the blackest and the thickest, where the wheat grows, the oil flows, and the farmer owes, why, you just go to Amarillo, Texas and, uh, you can spit within half-walkin' distance 'round there and you will find you a good dust storm to deal with. Here is a picture here, Alan, I'd like you to look at that. That there is the little town of Pampa, Texas. That's where my wife and three children are livin' right now and I hear about 'em, from 'em about twice a week. This is March and it is their windy season down there again and she says that they are still havin' the same ole dust storms and you rest me up here a minute or two, what do you think about that picture?

AL: It look like about the most awful thing I ever saw, a black cloud about two miles high comin' over some little ole shacks and chicken houses and stuff. Is that the kind of house that people live in down there in Pampa?

WG: Oh, yeah, yeah, them's dwellin' houses, them ain't for chickens, them for...

AL: Well, what happened the night that first dust storm hit, or the day it first hit? Do you remember just what exactly you people did, and what you said?

WG: Well, uh, now you see this picture here, it shows you the big dust storm coming up and, uh, you know, just to see a thing of that kind a-comin' towards you, you wouldn't know exactly what it was, because it is a freak looking thing, you never saw anything like it before, but we all sat there. We had seen dust storms of ever other different color, flavor, description, style, fashion, shade, design, model. We had seen them old-fashioned and streamlined, and, uh, well, some of the old timers around there even got to where they could tell you within about forty-five or fifty miles of where these dust storms was blowin' in from. Anyway, I remember the particular evening of April 14, 1935, that this dust storm here blowed up. I was standin', a whole bunch of us was standin', just outside of this little town here that you see. And so we watched the dust storm come up like the Red Sea closin' in on the Israel children and any way, we stood there and watched the son of a gun come up and I am a-tellin' you that it got so black when that thing hit, we all run into the house and all of the neighbors had all congregated in different houses round over the neighborhood and around over town and we sat there in a little old room and it got so dark that you couldn't see your hand before your face. You couldn't see anybody in the room. You could turn on an electric light bulb, a good strong electric light bulb, in a little room just 'bout the size of this studio here and that electric bulb hanging in the room looked just about like a cigarette a-burnin' and that was all of the light that you could get out of it and with the help of the light in the room when the dust storm was on, you still couldn't see your hand before ya nor anybody in the room. So, we got to talkin', ya know, and, uh, a lot of people in the crowd that was religious-minded and they was up pretty well on the scriptures, they said, "Well, boys, girls, friends, and relatives, this is the end."

Disc 2: TRACK 1 – THE END OF THE WORLD [AFS 3410 B1, 2, 3]

AL: So these people believed that the world had come to the end, huh?

WG: Yep.

AL: Were the women cryin' and screamin' and goin' on?

WG: No, Alan, you'd be surprised. They wasn't. Wasn't nobody in that whole crowd was that way. There was two or three of us that said, well, I always thought that if I just got bottled up somewhere in a big black box to where I couldn't get out and knew I couldn't get out, and I knew I had to sit right there and die, that I would have some kind of fit or go to makin' a bunch of racket or noise of some kind but then, when you see the real thing right face-to-face with you, why, most people are pretty level-headed. They just said, well, this is the end. This is the end of the world. People ain't been livin' right. The human race ain't been treatin' each other right and robbin' each other in different ways, with fountain pens, guns, and havin' wars and killin' each other and shootin' round. So, the feller that made this world, he's worked up this dust storm and there has never been nothin' like it in the whole history of the world, even the old timers that'd lived there for fifty years said they had never seen anything like it, to even compare with it. And they said, yep, that's right. Somebody has robbed somebody, some of us is about to starve to death, others spend five or six thousand dollars on a little party at night, some lose five or ten thousand across a gamblin' table at night, just naturally ain't been livin' right. So, this dust storm is the end and their conversation just run like that, about the, uh, what is right, and what is wrong, and they kindly was wonderin' if they had done right all their life and anyway, they, uh, was hopin' they had because the time had come when the river was there to cross and everybody said well, so long, it's been good to know ya. Let 'er come. Most of 'em took it just that way and we even got to laughing and talkin' in the deal and we thought, well, maybe it'll break, maybe it won't, but then, anyway, it lasted about all that night, the same way. And...did you start to say somethin'?

AL: Yeah, didn't the preachers have anythin' to say about all this – the world comin' to the end?

WG: Well, I was just about to start gettin' to that, yeah, what do ya want me to do?
There was, uh...

AL: I believe you sang a song about that the other day, Woody.

WG: Yeah, I sung one about that, about all the church houses was full, ya know, around over the whole country and they was phonin' up from one place to another, all the church people was, tryin' to get 'em to come up to church for the last time and to get straight and get right and get on the good side and, uh, go across white as snow. So, we was, uh, I made up a little song there, that's kind of one of my own makin', though, it's called "So Long, It's Been Good to Know Ya."

AL: How'd it go?

WG: Ah, you got another book there? Huh?

AL: No.

Disc 2: TRACK 2 – "SO LONG, IT'S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YUH"

So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
This dusty ole dust is a-blowin' me home
I've got to be rollin' along

I'll sing this song, but I'll sing it again
Of the place that I lived on the West Texas plains

In the city of Pampa, the county of Gray
Here is what all of the people there say

Well, it's so long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
This dusty ole dust is a-blowin' me home
I've got to be driftin' along

Anyway, like I told ya, the ole dust storm hit there and these people all congregated in their little houses and in the room in the house that I was in, there was twelve or fifteen people and while we was there, tellin' each other so long, it's been good to know ya, the dusty ole dust is a-blowin' me home and I ain't got long to stay, I got to be a-driftin' along. Well, here is what happened.

The telephone rang and it jumped off the wall,
That was the preacher, payin' his call,
He said, look at the shape that the world is in,
I got a cut price on salvation and sin

So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
This dusty ole dust is a-drivin' me home and I've got to be driftin' along.

The church houses were jammed and packed
People was sittin' from front to the back
It was so dusty the preacher couldn't read his text
So he folded his specs and he took up collection, said:

So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know ya
So long, it's been good to know you
This dusty ole dust is a-rollin' me home
Gotta be driftin' along

Disc 2: **TRACK 3 –DUST STORMS DEVASTATE THE FARMLAND**

AI: Well, I guess after that it was pretty hard to be a...to farm, or to do anything else down in that country, wasn't it? Uh, after those dust storms hit and hit again, I guess it hurt the crops and when it hurt the crops, it hurt the people in the towns and you had to find somethin' else to do.

WG: Well, yeah, Alan, it did. A lot of my relatives that lived right south of Pampa, Texas there, settled there about fifty years ago and they dug big dugouts, big holes in the ground, that they lived in the first three or four years they were there. So for about fifty years every year they farmed about six hundred and forty acres of wheat land.

[AFS3411 AI, 2]

WG: This six hundred forty acres of wheat land in them days required the work of this whole family. Lots of times when harvest come it took the work of about thirty men and the grocery bill to feed these men every week was over a hundred dollars and my relatives still sit around and tell of the times when it took all that work and all these men comin' through the country to help gather the wheat. But, anyway, when the old dust storms struck...they have just been a late thing. All the old timers that's out on the prairies and plains around Amarillo, Texas; Lubbock; Canadian, Texas; Elk City, Oklahoma; Dodge City, Kansas; Denver, Colorado; Clovis, New Mexico – even up into Nebraska and all that country, they swear that these

dusters are somethin' new to them. When you look up out of your winder, maybe some afternoon and you see green wheat volunteerin' – springin' up, just like green grass sorta spreads around over the ground a little bit before it starts growin' up, ya know, into a stalk or to head out and make wheat. And a lot of times, you'll have a look out your winder and you'll see all these acres and acres and acres and miles and miles and miles of green wheat. And then after these dust storms come and jump on top of you and hit like this one did, or like they have been hittin' for about the past seven or eight years, well, you're liable anytime to get up and look out your winder and see absolutely a good-sized hill, what I mean, a good-sized hill, enough at least to cover up a good-sized tractor or enough to cover up a nice-sized little barn, at least so the dogs and chickens and hogs and cows get up on top of the barn by just simply wadin' the dust up to the top of the barn, they get up on top of the barn, always tryin' to stay on top. But, anyway, you look out across there and you just see an ocean of ripply dust. Just like it ripples on the ocean, why, these dust storms, when they leave the country laid waste, why, it is all in ripples, just exactly like lookin' out across an ocean, only instead of bein' water, it's dust.

AL: What did you people do then? Have you got, uh, I mean, boil it down, what happened to your folks, your relatives and neighbors and acquaintances, and people like you all through that country, um, from the panhandle to Nebraska. What did they do when this...?

WG: Well, Alan, they, uh, they didn't know what to do. They sat around and talked there, for weeks and weeks. Hated to give up what they'd worked there for fifty years and been born and raised on and had their kids on and their kids had been born and raised and married on and had their kids on this land and they didn't know just exactly what to do. They couldn't pay their debts, they owed the bankers thirty-five hundred, four thousand dollars on a combine harvester, eleven hundred dollars on a tractor, they owed 'em a year's fuel bill, which always amounted to several hundred dollars. They owed the grocery bill for about a year. They owed all kinds of bills...seed bills, and everythin' else. When they couldn't pay 'em, well, naturally, they come down with a mortgage, and took their land. These people didn't have but one thing to do and that was just to get out in the middle of the road. Incidentally, the Sixty Six highway runs just about a mile north of this place that I've got in mind as I sit here and tell you this story. That name Sixty Six is awful famous name, it's almost as famous as another name that they have given the Sixty Six highway, the Will Rogers Highway.

These people just got up and they bundled up their little belongings, they threw in one or two little things they thought that they'd need. They couldn't take it all because they didn't have room and they didn't have car and they didn't have gasoline and they didn't have the money, but anyway, they had heard about the land of California, where you sleep outdoors at night, where you work all day in the big fruit orchards and make enough to live on and get by on and live decent on and you work hard, and work honest, and you...supposed to be, according to the handbills they pass out down in that country, you're supposed to have a wonderful chance to succeed in California. So, they, just naturally drift that way. Here's, just to boil it down, though, and get it all down in just a little bit, I've got what I call here the "Talkin' Dust Bowl Blues." It tells about several hundred thousand people, it just don't tell about me. I wrote it just to tell about me but then I found out that it fits about several hundred thousand.

Disc 2: **TRACK 4 – "TALKING DUST BOWL"**

Back in 1927
 I had a little farm and I called it heaven
 Prices up, and the rain come down
 and I hauled my crops all into town
 I got the money
 Bought clothes and groceries
 Fed the kids
 Took it easy

The rain it quit
 and the wind got high
 and the black old dust storms filled the sky
 and I swapped my farm for a Ford machine
 and I filled it full of this gas-i-line
 and started. Rollin' and a-driftin' to California

Way up yonder on a mountain road
 I had a hot motor and a heavy load
 I was a goin' pretty fast, I wasn't even stoppin'
 I was a-bouncin' up and down like popcorn poppin'
 Had a breakdown, sort of a nervous bustdown,
 of the mechanism there of some kind, the eng-ine trouble

It was way up yonder on a mountain road
 I wasn't feelin' so very good and I give this rollin' Ford a shove
 and I was gonna coast as fer as I could
 Commenced a-rollin', pickin' up speed,
 and there was a hairpin turn and I couldn't make it

Man, alive, and I'm tellin' you,
 the fiddles and the guitars really flew
 That Ford took off like a flying squirrel
 and it flew halfway around the world
 Scattered wives and childrens all over the side of that mountain

[AFS 3411 B1, 2, 3]

Man, alive, I'm a-tellin' you
 the fiddles and the guitars really flew
 That Ford took off like a flying squirrel
 and it flew halfway around the world
 Scattered wives and childrens all over the side of that mountain

We got to old Los Angeles broke
 So dadgum hungry we thought we'd choke
 And I bummed up a spud or two
 And my wife cooked up a tater stew
 Fed the kids a big bade of it
 But that was mighty thin stew
 So dadgum thin you could pretty near read a magazine through it
 Hey, if it had been just a little bit thinner, I've always believed,
 if that stew had been just a little bit thinner,
 some of our senators could have seen through it.

Disc 2: TRACK 5 – MIGRANTS ARRIVE IN CALIFORNIA

AL: Well, how did they treat you when you got to California? You people, in these old jalopies, and broke-down trucks and everything. How did they...did they welcome you with bands and banners (Woody laughs in background) and everything? How was it?

WG: Not with music bands. They had a little different kind of band that fitted on your leg. It had 13 links on it and they, uh, had another kind of, uh, orchestra – they called it the Pea Patch Papas. And, uh...

AL: What would that be? Pea Patch Papas?

WG: Well, if you didn't, if you was out of work, see, of course it was highly unsanitary to be out of work. What I mean by that is, that, uh, in most towns all over the country, it's a jailhouse offence to be unemployed. And, uh, in that country, they enforced that when they took a notion. In other words, uh, you, uh, when you come to that country they found different ways of puttin' that vag law on ya and puttin' ya either to workin' free in some pea patch or garden or hay or washin' dishes

or somethin' but, anyway, you was always a-workin' and ya wasn't gettin' nuthin out of it. No, they didn't greet us with bands or nothin'. They asked us questions when we come across the line, asked us where we was from and all about it, and then, uh, they tried to turn a lot of us back, the hobos, the boys that was ridin' the freight trains and hitch-hikin' down the road that didn't have any money in their pockets, why, at the state line, they made several attempts to, uh, turn us back and to arrest us or to make us go back to where we come from. But we knew, we remembered the old tractor settin' back down there covered up with dust, the cows standin' on top of the barn and lookin' out across that dead sea of dust and we said, no, mister, I'd rather be in jail here than sittin' down there on that farm.

AL: Was it a matter of havin' the money, wasn't it?

WG: Yeah, it's the matter of havin' the money, that's it. They don't ask you where ya got it, how ya got it, who you got it off of or nothin' else, just so you got the do-re-mi boy. That's the main thing. You can gamble for it, lie for it, steal for it, bum for it, beg for it, do anything else in the world for it, you can even chase people out of their house and home for it – do-re-mi. I made up a little song about that. I called it the "Do-Re-Mi" and this is how...I'll show ya how it goes here. "Thousands of folks..." I believe I will play that here on my flute, if you don't mind.

Disc 2: **TRACK 6 – "DO RE MI"**

Lots of folks back East, they say, is leavin' home every day
and beatin' a hot old dusty way to the California line
Cross the desert sands that roll,
Tryin' to get out of the ole dust bowl
They think they are goin' to a sugar bowl, but here is what they find
The police at the port of entry say
You're number fifteen thousand for today
Oh, if you ain't got the do re mi, friend, if you ain't got the do re mi,
You better go back to beautiful Texas
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee

California is a garden of Eden
A paradise to live in or see
But believe it or not
You won't find it so hot
If you ain't got the do re mi

If you want to buy a home or farm
That can't do nobody harm
Or take your vacation by the mountains or sea
Don't trade your old cow for a car
You better stay right where you are
You better take this little tip from me
Cause Governor Merriam on the radio one day
He jumped up to the microphone, and he did say, oh...

If you ain't got the do re mi, friends,
If you ain't got the do re mi
You better go back to beautiful Texas,
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee

California is a garden of Eden
It's a paradise to live in or see
But believe it or not, you won't find it so hot,
if you ain't got the do re mi.



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ONE OF THE ORIGINAL DISCS WOODY RECORDED FOR THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

WG: That's all.

AL: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Guthrie.

WG: Thank you, Mr. Lomax.

AL: This record was made by the Department of Interior Radio Broadcasting Division on March the 21st, 1940. Alan Lomax speaking.

Disc 2: **TRACK 7 – "HARD TIMES" [AFS 3412 A]**

Every day's just the same
 Not a nickel to my name
 And I'm a havin' a hard time and
 a hard time

AL: Ready? Okay, just give us a signal. This is March the 22nd, 1940 and we are continuing with Mr. Woody Guthrie's records of dust bowl songs from Texas, Oklahoma, and California. Mr. Guthrie is now going to sing us "It's Hard Times."

I've been havin' the hard time
 Hard time
 I've been havin' the hard ole hard time
 Every day's just the same
 Not a nickel to my name
 I've been havin' a hard time and a hard time

Brother's havin' a hard time
 Hard time
 Brother's havin' a hard time
 Hard time
 He's a-pullin' a cotton sack
 He's in debt up his neck
 And my brother's havin' a hard ole hard time

And my father's a-havin' a hard time
 Hard time
 Father's havin' a hard time
 Hard time
 He can't get no liquor and gin
 Cause he ain't got a cent
 And my daddy's havin' a hard ole hard time

Mother's havin' a hard time
 Hard time
 My mother's havin' a hard time
 Hard time
 She's got children sweet to raise
 Not a nickel on the place
 My mother's havin' a hard and a hard time

And my sister's havin' a hard time
 A hard time
 Sister's havin' a hard ole hard time

When sister blows her nose on her clothes,
Well, it shows
That my sister's havin' a hard and a hard time

Everybody's havin' a hard time
A hard time
Everybody's havin' a hard time
I'm askin' you, Lord, what are we gonna do, Lord?
Everybody's havin' a hard and a hard time.

Disc 2: TRACK 8 – SONGS ABOUT HARD TIMES

AL: Woody, where did ya learn that song?

WG: Well, Alan, there's a whole lot of them old hard times songs, you know. There is hard times in the Crowder jail, hard times down south, hard times here, and hard times everywhere. Those are songs, I guess, you know more about them than I do, but there are a lot of 'em. But, then, I was always gettin' requests to sing these hard times songs and I never could, I don't know how it was, I just never could get ahold of the words to one, so that's a old-time tune and a easy old tune. It's forty-seven hundred songs to that same tune, but I just wrote that down and called it "Hard Times."

AL: It's your own song, then?

WG: Oh, yeah, just to...

AL: Where did you make that up? Out in California?

WG: Yeah, Los Angeles.

AL: I see. You don't, do you know any of these other hard times songs, like "Hard Times down South"? Do you know any pieces of it even? Or "Hard Times in the Corn Fields"?

WG: I don't believe I do, Alan. I'm just sitting here trying to think of one, but I believe you got me there. That's the reason I scratched that one down, so I'd have one. That's the only one I've got but there is plenty of material to work on there.

AL: Well, I've never have heard you sing a good love song yet, Woody. Let's hear what you sound like.

WG: Sing a love song (laughs)?

AL: Yeah. Maybe you never were in love, I don't know.

WG: Yeah, well, uh, no, I never was out. Here's a...here's an old-time song, Alan, I guess you've heard of it about, uh, it is one of the oldest ones I ever know, uh, "Bring Back to Me My Blue-Eyed Boy." You've heard that one mentioned or heard of it, ain't ya?

AL: No.

Disc 2: TRACK 9 – “BRING BACK TO ME MY BLUE-EYED BOY”

I fell in love with a blue-eyed boy
 He gently held me by the hand
 Then he went wanderin' far away
 To dwell in a far and distant land

Must I go bound to him or go free
 Love him when we are far apart
 And love this boy that don't love me
 And love this boy that broke my heart

I'll fall in love with a brown-eyed boy
 Whose love, this heart is all for me
 My blue-eyed boy may always roam, roam, roam
 My blue-eyed boy forsaken me

There's many a handsome, dashing lad
 Who'd oh so gladly hold my hand
 Who'd oh so gladly kiss my lips
 And never go to a distant land

Oh, bring me back me back my blue-eyed boy
 Bring my blue-eyed boy to me
 When his heart is full of joy
 And I'll forever happy be.

WG: That's higher than a kite (laughs).

AL: Do you believe in true love and stuff like that, then, Woody?

WG: Yeeaah, true as average. Uh, well, uh, I don't know whatcha mean, you about got me there, Alan, you are stickin' me this mornin'.

Disc 2: TRACK 10 – SONGS ABOUT OUTLAWS [AFS 3412 B]

AL: Woody, do you know any songs about outlaws, desperadoes, bad men, bank robbers, or anything of that kind?

WG: Yeah, that's what I'm, them's my long shots. Uh, of course, I guess you know the one about Jesse James and his boys. I know of one that's a little bit later than that. A song, of course, 'bout Sam Bass, Jesse James, Bob and Emmett Dalton, Belle Starr, and Billy the Kid...

AL: Do you know all of those?

WG: Cole Younger, huh?

AL: Do you know all of them songs?

WG: No I don't. I just...

AL: Know about them?

WG: Yeah, I just heard about 'em. But I know Jesse James, know Billy the Kid.

Disc 2: TRACK 11 – “BILLY THE KID”

Was on the same night
 That old Billy died
 Said to his friends
 I'm not satisfied
 There's 21 men that I've put bullets through
 And the sheriff of this county will make 22

(laughs)... That's "Billy the Kid."...

AL: Do you know any more of it?

WG: Yeah, part of it.

I'll sing you the song about Billy the Kid
 Tell all the wonderful deeds that he did
 Way out in New Mexico, long long ago
 Where a man's only chance was his old .44.

It was out in New Mexico state
 Where Billy the Kid, the boy met his fate
 Started to gamble and started to sin
 Had notches on his pistols for 21 men

Disc 2: TRACK 12 – BILLY THE KID AND PRETTY BOY FLOYD

At the age of 12 years, Billy killed his first man, I forget how it all of it, Alan, but here is one that I do know all of. This here one is about a outlaw that's really come from about seventeen miles from where I was born and raised and I know people all through his section of the country and he knows people all through my section of the country and for years and years now, uh, well, for about four or five years, we won't make it sound too ancient because he's sort of a late name on the outlaw list, but he did make a name and he made a pretty name. Pretty Boy Floyd, they called him.

AL: Why was that anyway? Why did they call him Pretty Boy?

WG: His first name was Charles and they called him Pretty Boy. Pretty Boy was, uh, was a name that, he wasn't the only guy in that country that got to be called "pretty boy." I remember when these here bell bottom, balloon bottom britches first come out, ya know, and the boys started wearin' them, uh, all around over the country. Why, eh, (laughs) when the first ones bought them and come walkin' down the street, why, we had a habit of callin', uh, hollerin', "Hello, pretty boy" and, uh, Pretty Boy Floyd was, uh, sort of a mild-natured man, the way I hear it, sort of smilin', easy-goin' man, but then he did have somethin' in his system that fought back and, uh, but that very seldom come out. He was generally pretty good-natured and he was a nice lookin' man. He weighed about one hundred eighty-five or ninety pounds and was built up nice and so they just called him Pretty Boy, not naturally because he was a sissy or anything like that, but it just got to be a nickname on account of his looks and his actions.

Here's an old song, though, that uh, is made up of verses that I heard all around over that country. Some of 'em are tales and legends and stories that the sharecroppers and the farmers and the people that live out, uh, well, kinda like wild hogs on a river bottom. These people knew Pretty Boy Floyd because he, his people, I believe, were farmers also in that part of the country. He lived close to a town called Shawnee and, uh, the story that I heard was that his outlaw career started in the little town of Shawnee, Oklahoma one Saturday afternoon when he come into town and tied his horses up to a hitchin' rack. He had his wife beside him on the old spring seat of his buckboard wagon and they had made a new ruling since Pretty Boy had been in town the week before, about tyin' your horses and...automobiles was gettin' pretty thick down there and so there was a deputy sheriff come out and proceeded to bawl Pretty Boy out for tyin' his team up there and his language, uh, wasn't quite suited to the occasion, and uh, he sort of (laughs), well, he...Pretty Boy's temper just got away from him there when he

heard in the presence of his wife, that's one thing that Oklahoma and Texas and all that country is pretty strict about, is, uh, language that you use in the presence of the women unless you, uh, you know, unless it is personal or friendly or somethin' like that. But, then, when it comes to a certain tone of voice, you better smile or (laughs), or duck. So, the deputy said it and he didn't smile and he didn't duck and Pretty Boy grabbed a log chain out of the wagon that he was in and the deputy went for his gun at the same time. They had quite a fist fight, uh, without fists, and uh, the deputy lost. Pretty Boy took off to the trees and timbers and lived along the river bottom with the farmers for a long time there and uh, in them days, you know, why, there was lots of banks for some strange reason going broke. They was going broke for every kind of reason. If you sneezed out the wrong winder, why, by George, a bank would go broke. If you come in the wrong door, the bank would go broke. If, for the least little excuse the bankers could think of, why, they went broke. So there was several thousand around over the country that went broke and the government stepped in and said, "Boys, now you can't go broke so fast, you're gonna have to change tactics, you're gonna have to make up some new excuses to go broke." So the bankers said, "Well, uh, okay, we'll watch it." So, they thought well, now, if we could just get somebody to rob us, by George, from the inside everything would be hunky-dory. So, when Pretty Boy Floyd was hidin' out from the officers of the law because of the deputy sheriff fight that he had, why, uh, there come reports from all over the state, three or four hundred miles away that Pretty Boy Floyd and a band had just robbed a bank when about twenty five or thirty farmers knew damn well that he was sittin' right there, right then.

[AFS3413 A]

WG: Well, at that time, that got to be a pretty big joke around over Oklahoma, Alan, in fact all over that country. Banks was being robbed by Pretty Boy Floyd, Pretty Boy Floyd, Pretty Boy Floyd here, yonder, everywhere. He was worse than quintuplets, man, he was runnin' all directions at the same time, had three guns in each hand and a whole bunch more in his pocket, but anyway, there was lots of people knew where he was and what he was doin', so it got to be quite a joke. And so these farmers hid him out. Down in that country, they always hid him out because they knew that although he might have been a bad man he wasn't being given a fair chance.

AL: Well, how did he get those thousand-dollar bills Woody?

WG: Well, uh, a little bit later, his, he went his limit again and I guess his temper got the best of him and it is said that he said, they, uh, they are makin' me a outlaw, they're gettin' the money and I am gettin' the advertisement. He said, I think I will just reverse the deal, he said that. I'm gonna take the cash and let the credit go. So he took out with a six-shooter in each hand. Here's a little story I believe I'll sing about it. I want to say, though, that Pretty Boy did get shot down like all outlaws and his character gets shot down some way or the other, by one of their own men or by one of the Judases in the deal or one of the dirty little cowards in the Jesse James songs. Pretty Boy got his and he is laying in his grave right today, but I want to venture to say without stretching the truth, that Pretty Boy Floyd is sung about on more lips and more mouths than and thought better of, in more hearts. He's all-around more popular than any governor that Oklahoma ever had.

Disc 2: **TRACK 13** – "PRETTY BOY FLOYD"

Come and gather round me, children
And the story I will tell
Of Pretty Boy Floyd, the outlaw
Oklahoma knew him well

It was in Shawnee, Oklahoma
On a Saturday afternoon
His wife beside him in his wagon
And into town they rode

There a deputy sheriff reproached him
In a manner rather rude
Using vulgar words of anger
And his wife, she overheard

Now Pretty Boy grabbed a log chain
And the deputy grabbed his gun
And in the fight that follered
He laid that deputy down

Then he took to the trees
and timber along the river shore
Hiding on the river bottom
And he never come back no more

Yes, he took to the trees and timber
To live a life of shame
Every crime in Oklahoma
was added to his name

But there's a many a starving farmer
The same old story told
How this outlaw paid their mortgage
And he saved their little home

Others tell you 'bout a stranger
That come to beg a meal
Underneath his napkin
Left a thousand-dollar bill

It was in Oklahoma City
It was on a Christmas Day
There was a whole carload of groceries
Come with a note to say

Well, you say that I'm an outlaw
You say that I'm a thief
Here's a Christmas dinner
For the families on relief

Yes, as through this world I've hoboed
I've seen lots of funny men
Some will rob you with a six-gun
Some with a fountain pen

But as through your life you ramble
Yes, as through your life you roam
You won't never see an outlaw
Drive a family from their home.

Disc 2: **TRACK 14 – JESSE JAMES**

AL: Well, Woody, what about singing a little bit of that Jesse James song that you said was a late model?

WG: Well, I got one here I call "Jesse James and his Boys," Alan. I've seen a lot of different ways of singin' "Jesse James." I guess you know it's got a hundred or more different tunes to it, uh, verses to it. You can sing it all night long. Here's the way....

[AFS 3413 B1, 2]

AL: Woody, do the folks still tell stories about Jesse James out in your country?

WG: Uh, yeah, they talk about him almost like he was one of the family.

AL: Really? Still? I mean, everybody, young, old, rich, and poor knows about Jesse James still?

WG: Yep.

AL: You heard about him all of your life?

WG: All my life. About Jesse James, why there's fellers down in that country that, cause Jesse is talked about so much, he's liked so good down in there, that's there about ten or fifteen guys in ever town that claims to be him and they got the bullet holes to show it. I remember one old feller down there that lived in Okemah for years that claimed to be Jesse James and had a big long beard and nobody knew how old he was but they had to throw him in jail about once ever' six months and turn the local fire hose on him in order to give him a bath. And he had the bullet holes, when they stripped him off, he had the identical bullet holes that the real Jesse dang James was supposed to have but, uh, there was a lot of other guys around there too and they all had so many bullet holes in 'em that they couldn't decide on a pattern so Jesse is done gone but he is still with us.

Disc 2: TRACK 15 – "JESSE JAMES AND HIS BOYS"

Jesse James and his boys rode the Dodge City Trail
And they held up a midnight Southern mail
Every sheriff knew them well
On that Dodge City Trail
But they couldn't keep Jesse in a jail

Oh, Jesse had a wife. She was proud of her life
Three children they were brave
But that dirty little coward
You call Robert Ford
He has laid poor Jesse in his grave

Jesse James and his boys
Stopped the Coffeyville Express
Caught the agent at the station door
With the agent on his knees
He delivered up the keys
To the muzzle of Jesse's forty-four

Now Jesse had a wife
Who mourned for his life
Three children they was brave
But the dirty little coward
You call Robert Ford
He has laid poor Jesse in his grave

The outlaw Jesse James
Would never rob the poor
Or frighten a mother with her child

But he took it from the rich and he gave it to the poor
And they laid poor Jesse in the grave

It was Mr. Robert Ford
A man who was a coward
He paid Jesse James a friendly call
Robert Ford, it's a fact,
Shot Jesse in the back
While Jesse hung a picture on the wall

Now Jesse had a wife
Who mourned for his life
Three children they were brave
But that dirty little coward
You call Robert Ford
He had laid poor Jesse in his grave

Disc 2: **TRACK 16 – TAKIN' IT FROM THE RICH AND GIVIN' IT TO THE POOR**

WG: Well, I guess you know that, uh, there has been similar incidents of that kind take place where a man come down through the country talkin' about takin' it from the rich and givin' it to the poor. Usually, that's a pretty interestin' subject. I'm not a very smart feller, but I know that sounds awful good to everybody where I come from and I've got another song here that I want to sing because it's about a man I suppose was more popular than anybody in his own day and time, I think he was called an outlaw. Mighty unpopular to be called a Christian in the days that this man was livin'. The name of this one is "They Laid Jesus Christ in his Grave."

Disc 2: **TRACK 17 – "JESUS CHRIST"**

Jesus Christ was a man that travelled through the land
And a hard-workin' man and brave
He said to the rich, "Give your goods to the poor"
And they laid Jesus Christ in his grave

Yes, Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand
His followers true and brave
One dirty coward called Judas Iscariot
He has laid Jesus Christ in his grave

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

When Jesus come to town, the workin' 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 the grave

Yes Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand
His followers true and brave
One dirty coward called Judas Iscariot
He has laid Jesus Christ in his grave

The poor workin' people
 They followed him around
 Singin', shoutin', gay
 But the soldiers and the cops
 Nailed him in the air
 And they laid poor Jesus in his grave

Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand
 His followers true and brave
 One dirty coward called Judas Iscariot
 and they laid poor Jesus in his grave

[AFS 3414 A1, 2]

Yes, Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand
 His followers true and brave
 One dirty coward called Judas Iscariot
 He has laid poor Jesus in his grave

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

This song, it was wrote 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

Yes, Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand
 His followers true and brave
 But one dirty coward called Judas Iscariot
 He has laid poor Jesus in his grave

Disc 2: **TRACK 18 – SONGS ABOUT BANKERS**

AL: Well, Woody, you keep talkin' about the bankers all the time. Did you ever make up any songs about these bankers? Uh, to try to give the sentiments that some of these outlaws and some of your sharecropper friends in Oklahoma and some of your dust bowl friends from California, the way, what they think about the bankers?

WG: Well, yeah, Alan, I got one or two songs here. Got one called "Ain't Got No Home in the World Anymore." That one there has got a pretty good banker angle in it.

And then I got one called "I'm a Jolly Banker" or "The Banker's Lament." You can call it either one you want to. (laughs) And, uh, let's see here, how that goes. I'll try to sing you that.

Disc 2: **TRACK 19 – "THE JOLLY BANKER"**

My name is Tom Cranker
 And I'm a jolly banker
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I
 I safeguard the farmers and widows and orphans
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I

When the dust storms are sailing and the crops they are failing
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I
 I check up your shortage, and bring down your mortgage
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I

When money you're needin'
 And mouths you are feedin'
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I
 I'll plaster your home with a furniture loan
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I

If you show me you need it, I'll let you have credit,
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.
 Just bring me back two for the one I lend you,
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.

When your car you're a-losin', and sadly you're cruisin',
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.
 I'll come and foreclose, and get your car and your clothes,
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.

When the bugs get your cotton, the times they are rotten,
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.
 I'll come down and help you, I'll rake you, I'll scalp you,
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.

When the landlords abuse you, or sadly misuse you,
 I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.
 I'll send down the police to keep you from mischief,
 Singin' I'm a jolly banker, jolly banker am I.

Disc 2: **TRACK 20 – ANOTHER SONG ABOUT THE DEPREDATIONS OF THE BANKERS**

AL: Woody, what was that other song about the banker you were talking about? Do you remember all of that?

WG: Yeah, that's called "I Ain't Got No Home in the World Anymore," Alan. That there's the one about farmin' on the shares and always I was poor...let's see here, here it is. This one here is one that I wrote in Los Angeles, California. This was originally, I guess you heard the old, uh, hymn, you know, "I Don't Feel at Home in the World Anymore."

AL: Yeah.

WG: This is that same tune or just thereabouts. The name of this one is "I Ain't Got No Home in the World Anymore."

Disc 2: **TRACK 21 – "I AIN'T GOT NO HOME"**

I ain't got no home, I'm just a-ramblin' 'round,
 I work when I can get it, I go from town to town.
 Can't feel at home, no matter where I go
 Cause I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

I was a-farmin' on the shares, and always I was down,
 My debts so many, my pay wouldn't go around
 The drought got my crop and the banker let me go
 Now I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

[AFS 3414 B1, 2]

I'm stranded on that road
That goes from sea to sea
A hundred thousand others
Are stranded same as me

A hundred thousand, yes
A hundred thousand more
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore

I mined in your mine
I gathered in your farm
I've been a workin' man since the day that I was born
Now I worry all the time
Like I never done before
'Cause I ain't got no home in this world anymore

Six children I have raised
They're scattered and they're gone
My darling wife to heaven she has flown
She died with the fever
On my cabin floor
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore

Now I just ramble round
To see what I can see
This wide wicked world
Is a funny place to be
The gamblin' man is rich
And the workin' man is poor
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore

Disc 2: **TRACK 22 – HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS MADE HOMELESS**

WG: Well, sir, that there old song there is a, that's one of them old-time easy pieces that's got sort of a spiritual hymn tune to it but, uh, the, uh, I don't know why. I wrote that song because, uh, after I was on the highway to California I made about three trips back to Texas and back to Oklahoma and back to California again, by freight train. And every time I saw hundreds and thousands and hundreds and thousands of my relatives and the Okies – people from Oklahoma and Arkansas and Texas and New Mexico and Kansas – that couldn't live in the drought and in the dust and in the conditions back down in there anymore. They owed more money to the banks than they could ever pay, so they just packed up what little goods they had and took out down the road and it...as I rambled round over the country and kept lookin' at all these people, seein' how they lived outside, like coyotes, around in the trees and timber and under the bridges and along all the railroad tracks and in their little shack houses that they built out of cardboard and tote sacks and old corrugated iron that they got out of the dumps, why, it just struck me to write this song called "I Ain't Got No Home in the World Anymore." Uh, let me see here, here is an old song here, have we got time for it? Here is another here that is pretty famous around over the country. This here one has been called the "Cannonball Blues" and it starts off in Washington, on a jumper, and starts with an overhaul to catch a train you call the Cannonball from Baltimore to Washington. Anyway, I got a little different version of that here and I want to play it. The name of this piece is "Dirty Overhauls."

Disc 2: TRACK 23 – “DIRTY OVERHAULS”

You can wash my pair of dirty overhauls
I'll ride that train you call the Cannonball
From Baltimore to the Frisco Bay

I worked six months
in a lumber town this fall
And all I've got's these dirty overhauls
Ain't got a dime
Ain't that a shame

I worked six months
A-dynamiting coal
All I've got's these dirty overhauls
A dirty shame
Now, who's to blame

Good gal, listen. Please don't turn away
I'll have a car and a suit of clothes some day
Now honey babe
These overhauls

Honey gal, sweetheart
I do the best I can
I'm just a poor boy and a hard-workin' man
My money's gone
When I get done

If you leave me, I'll be so sad and blue
What is there for a workin' man to do
These overhauls are killin' me

I seen a rich man ridin' in his car
He had a woman for every cylinder
And a good warm bed
And a bottle of gin.

[AFS 3415 A1, 2]

I seen a rich man
Drivin' in his car
He had a woman for every cylinder
and a good warm bed
and a bottle of gin

I work like a dog
I'm broke all the time
Couldn't buy a woman
A two-bit bottle of wine
If I get out of these overhauls
These overhauls smell too bad

Rich man took my woman
 Woman away from me
 He'll be sorry, sorry wait and see
 When I get out of these overhauls

Cops oughta put that money man in jail
 He stole my (indecipherable) and money
 And took away my gal
 And now who's gonna wash
 My overhauls

Disc 2: **TRACK 24 – THE STORY OF MARY FAGAN**

WG: By George, you know, huh... (laughs)

AL: Did you ever hear anything about a little girl named Mary Fagan, Woody?

WG: Oh, yeah.

AL: What's the true story about Mary Fagan? Do you know any facts about her or any legends or anything?

WG: Well, no I don't. This Mary Fagan, I think, was an English, she got famous over in England for somethin' or other. I heard two or three different stories. One story that I heard about her was she was, uh, quite a noble lady at one time in her life and was in love with a feller, ya know, that was a pretty high class feller, too. He was up in the noble business. I forget if he was a duke or a duke and a half, but then he was somethin' like that, ya know, where they, where they, you know, they put the earl in (indecipherable) to each other, I don't know just how that is. And, uh, she, uh, was a spy. This guy was a spy or a government agent and he was tryin' to get a secret message to his army, to the British army and if he could get the message to the British army they would win the war. So he struck out to give this, uh, secret spy message to the captain of the army. It was a rainin' and a stormy night, you know, and the ocean was jumpin' around there, so this feller got shot. He didn't make it. But his sweetheart, little Mary Fagan, grabbed up the note up off the...took it out of his coat pocket, and she struck out through the rain to win the war for England, but she was caught by the enemies, too, and she got twenty-five years in one of the concentration camps over there for being a spy, you know. Then she got out of the pen and she come back to her old home town and she was sittin' in London, down in a saloon, one day, and, uh, at a table. She didn't look like she used to look, she was down and out, been in prison all these years and she didn't have a nickel to her name. Very few people remembered the wonderful thing she tried to do for her country. But, uh, she overheard a bunch of young noble...pair of society women, you know, just poppin' off at the mouth about things that had happened in the past and by accident they got to talkin' about, uh, little Mary Fagan and little Mary stood it as long as she could and then she got up and gave them a piece of her mind and, uh, told 'em all about it. Here's a song the way I know it of. I'll show you how it goes here. This may not be the real Mary Fagan. If it ain't, we will call it Marie Fagan and got another.

Disc 2: **TRACK 25 – “MARY FAGAN”**

In a London tavern
 Who there should I spy
 Little Mary Fagan was a-drinkin'
 Rum and rye
 Some ladies at a table
 with foolish idle tongues
 Spoke of Mary Fagan and
 the things that she had done

I'm little Mary Fagan
 My name I'll never deny
 Twenty five years in prison
 My sweetheart's crime to hide

He was a royal noble man
 And a noble lady I
 I'm little Mary Fagan
 And my name I'll never deny

He had a secret message
 That would the war decide
 But a rebel bullet struck him
 And there my sweetheart died
 I took the letter from him
 and I set out through the rain
 To win the war for England
 But I got the ball and chain.

I'm little Mary Fagan
 And my name I'll never deny
 Twenty five years in prison
 My sweetheart's crime to hide
 He was a royal mogul man
 and a noble lady I

I'm little Mary Fagan
 My name I'll never deny

You noble-minded ladies
 May talk and tell your tales
 How little Mary Fagan
 Got twenty five years in jail
 Your magazines and papers
 was full of rotten lies
 I'm little Mary Fagan
 My name I'll never deny

Little Mary Fagan
 And my name I'll never deny
 Twenty five years in prison
 My sweetheart's crime to hide
 He was a royal mogul man
 and a noble lady I
 I'm little Mary Fagan
 My name I'll never deny

Disc 2: **TRACK 26 – THE ORIGINS OF THE SONG**

AL: Say, Woody, where'd you learn that song?

WG: Well, I wrote it up there the way that it's wrote up there.

AL: Where did ya hear about this thing first anyway? Did you ever hear a song about Mary Fagan?

WG: Well, yeah, I heard it, but I didn't know how it went, all I knew was the chorus, about my name I'll never deny. And, uh...

AL: Did you remember the story?

WG: Huh?

AL: Do you remember the story of it or did you make that story up?

WG: Well, when ya hit a big town, Alan, like New York City, for instance, or any of these port towns, Los Angeles was the one that I was most familiar with, it and Stockton, California, and some of the...San Diego, where the ships come in...why, you go down into a saloon, you know, when you hit town and you ain't got a dime and the first place you light out for with your guitar is to a saloon. And so, ya go down to these saloons and they'll ask you to sing songs and every nationality because there will be boys there, a boat from England, a boat from Scotland, one from Germany, and you just sorta got to sing their language.

Disc 3: **TRACK 1 – ORIGINS OF THE SONG, CONTINUED [AFS 3415 B1, 2]**

WG: Well, uh, when you hit one of these places you're gotta talk their language, you know, and you hear all kinds of different tales from the sailors. Sailors are the greatest men in the world, uh, to tell stories because most of 'em are a long ways from their old stompin' grounds, you know, and they'll sit around and tell every kind of tale in the world about what happened back home. So, they told of, uh, all the wars – the French wars and the Napoleon wars and all them and they told a story about a, uh, a girl that, uh, did, uh, she got in jail, got in the enemy's prison trying to do her a country a great duty. And so I thought, well, one day a feller asked me if I knew "Mary Fagan" and he wanted me to sing it on the radio station out there that I was gonna play on one day, so, uh, he asked me to sing "Mary Fagan" and I said I didn't know nothin' but the chorus so I went home and I got to settin' and he told me before I left that he would come from England so I said by George, I'll just, I'll just, uh, patch up a song here and so I did about the story I heard the tailors...sailors tellin' about the girl over there. Here's one here a, a little bit different order, this one here is. This here'n, the name of this one is "A Chain Around My Leg."

AL: When did you make that one up, Woody?

WG: This one?

AL: Yeah.

WG: The other day up in your office. (laughs)

AL: What?

WG: Yesterday, up in your office (laughs)

AL: Where did ya get the idea for it?

WG: Well, I was lookin' through a magazine here a while back and it was showin' conditions down South. Down, ya know, where I come from and all around there in McAlister, Oklahoma at the state penitentiary there, they, uh, have what they call chain gangs. All the southern prisons do, I guess all of 'em do everywhere. Anyway, I was lookin' at all these pictures and I saw as fine a boy as, uh...they was layin' out in the sun just completely exhausted from makin' big 'uns out of little 'uns and uh, big chain, the biggest thing in the picture was a chain that was around one of the boys' legs and runnin' around all the boys' legs and the chain had, uh, what I could count there, six links, about six links, six big links between every man, so I just got to thinkin' what each one of them links could stand for and I made up this here song called "Chain Around My Leg." (sings)

AL: Let us hear it.

WG: Nothin' to lose but the chain.

Disc 3: TRACK 2 – "CHAIN AROUND MY LEG"

Gotta mighty long chain on my leg
Mighty long chain on my leg
Lost everything in the world except
That chain around my leg

First link is trouble,
First link is trouble
First link is trouble, boys,
The chain that's around my leg

Second link is sorrow
Second link is sorrow
Second link is sorrow, boy
The chain that's around my leg

Third link I work hard
Third link I work hard
Third link I work hard, boy,
The chain around my leg

Fourth link's my sledge
Fourth link's my sledge
Fourth link's my sledge, boys,
The chain that's 'round my leg.

Fifth link's no money
Fifth link's no money
Fifth link's no money, boys,
That's the chain that's around my leg.

Sixth link's my sweetheart
Sixth link's my sweetheart
Sixth link's my sweetheart, boys,
The chain that's around my leg.

Nothin' to lose but this chain
Nothin' to lose but this chain
Done lost everything else 'cept
that chain that's around my leg.

Disc 3: TRACK 3 – LET'S SING SOME BLUES

AL: That's a mighty sad song. You wouldn't hardly call that a blues, but, uh...

WG: I don't know what that is, what is that?

AL: I've heard the tune before. Do you know the name of it?

WG: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's the same tune, that, uh, tellin' who ya heard sing it. Lead Belly sang a song called "Irene, Irene."

AL: Oh, I see.

WG: That's the same tune.

AL: Woody, let's, uh...

WG: It's an old, I think though, that, very possible before the Lead Belly's song got to be named "Irene" that it, that old tune was a chain gang tune. That's what it sounds like to me. That's why I liked it.

AL: Woody, let's, uh, sing some blues.

WG: Blues?

AL: Just blues. Whatever blues ya know, whatever blues you've learned

WG: Well, let me see, let me see in here, I have got my blues.

AL: What all those blues you were singin' the other day, do you remember that one, you were singin' up there in that lady's apartment? Let's put that one up.

WG: Huh, oh, yeah, yeah, sure. It has to be one of these, let's see. This here's one the Jimmie Rodgers-type blues, uh, that you hear, huh?

[AFS 3416 A]

AL: Woody, on these next two records, let's try to remember the blues that you remember. From one end of the country that you've been traveling. I'd like to hear what you think about the blues, what is your theory about how they got started and why people sing 'em, and why they have them.

WG: Why folks has the blues?

AL: What are the blues?

WG: Well, the blues, Alan, is, uh, I always just called it just plain old bein' lonesome. Uh, a lot of people don't think that is a big enough word, but then you can get lonesome for a lot of things. People down where I come from, they're lonesome for a job, and lonesome for some spending money, lonesome for some drinkin' whiskey, lonesome for good times, lonesome for pretty gals, wine, women, and song like they see stuck up in their face every day by other people. Thinkin' maybe that you're, you know, down and out and disgusted and busted, can't be trusted, why, it gives ya a lonesome feelin' that, you're cut...that somehow the world's sorta turned against you or there is somethin' about it that you don't understand. Bein' out of work, bein' lonesome, or if you're there, bein' in jail, naturally some of the best blues come from the jailhouses, uh, where people are put, uh, for different reasons. They... (laughs) Blues, awful popular in jails. And, uh, blues, is just a...I always thought, too, that a guy...blues is sort of a complaint or I mean a lament or I mean sort of a hell raisin' in your own system or somethin' ya want to get out, ya want to sing about, ya know there is somethin' wrong and you look around and you see a lot of things that you think's sorta causin' things to be hard and you just kinda get to singin' the blues or somethin'. A lot of blues gets started that way and then there's sorta, then there's another kind of blues too, ya know, that don't really say nothin, they just ramble along, just little words that rhyme and everything's fine and dandy and hunky-dory and all that stuff, sort of the Broadway or whipped-up blues, more to dance by the music instead of to listen to the words. And here is an old blues, of course, there is a lot of blues, here is the bluest blues in the whole outfit and that's some. The very lonesomest blues in the whole world is the ones that's played in a minor key. Of course, I don't know whether you call them blues or not, but there's some blues that are played in minor keys and they're awfully hard to play for me, but here's one:

Disc 3: TRACK 4 – “NINE HUNDRED MILES”

Well, I pawned you my wagon
 and I pawned you my team
 Pawned you my big diamond ring
 And if the train runs right
 I'll be home tomorrow night
 'Cause I'm nine hundred miles from my home

I have been to the east
 And I've been to the west
 A thousand times or more
 And the train that I ride on, boy,
 It's fourteen coaches long
 You can hear the whistle blow
 a hundred miles

AL: Why don't you put the capo on and lift it up into a little bit higher key? That is such a beautiful tune.

WG: Huh, it is?

AL: Yeah, where did you learn that one?

WG: I don't know, that's tough. Got a little Indian mixed up in it, or African or somethin'. I couldn't say just what that is. My dad used to sing that song all the time, though. I could...picked up those two verses of it. I'll try a little bit higher key here. Everythin' is a little high here.

Well, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh
 Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.
 Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.

Well, I pawned you my wagon
 I pawned you my team
 Pawned you my big diamond ring
 If that train runs right
 I'll be home tomorrow night
 Cause I'm nine hundred miles from my home

I have been to the east
 And I've been to the west
 A thousand times or more
 And the train that I ride on, boy,
 It's fourteen coaches long
 And I hate to hear that lonesome whistle blow

Yes, I've been down this line
 A hundred, hundred times
 A thousand times I know
 When that train blows that whistle
 When that train whistle blows
 You can hear that whistle blow a hundred miles

Disc 3: TRACK 5 – “WORRIED MAN BLUES”

AL: Do you know the “Worried Man Blues,” Woody?

WG: Yeah, that’s uh...

[AFS 3416 B1, 2]

It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
I’m worried now
but I won’t be worried long

I went across the river
and I laid down to sleep
I went across the river
and I laid down to sleep
Went across the river
and I laid down to sleep
When I woke up
I had shackles on my feet

I’ve twenty-one links of chain that was around my leg
There was twenty-one links of chain around my leg
Twenty-one links of chain around my leg
And on each link there’s the initial of my name

It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
I’m worried now
but I won’t be worried long

I asked that judge, “What’s gonna be my fine?”
I asked that judge, “Say, what’s gonna be my fine?”
I asked that judge, “What’s gonna be my fine?”
Said, “Twenty-one years on the Rocky Mountain Line.”

It takes a worried man
to sing a worried song
It takes a worried man
to singing him a worried song
It takes a worried man
He’s a-singin’ him a worried song
I’m worried now
but I won’t be worried long

Disc 3: **TRACK 6 – ABOUT THE “WORRIED MAN BLUES”**

WG: The ol’ “Worried Man Blues.”

AL: Where’d you learn the “Worried Man Blues,” Woody?

WG: Well, uh, the first time that I ever heard it, I believe, was the Carter Family, you know, uh, Carter Family. Marybelle and Maybelle and Pa Carter.

AL: Are those the words that they sang or did you make up your own?

WG: No, yeah, that’s their words, their “Worried Man Blues.” Well, that’s another kind of blues. Of course, that’s sort of the...the “Worried Man Blues” is not really a blues, uh. It’s got a blues name and the words in it are blues but then it sort of got a church house lick to it. A lot of songs, ya know, sort of got a church house lick to ‘em and uh singin’ the blues at the same time. What I mean, they’re spiritual songs but they’ve got the blues in ‘em. I call them, I always call them church house blueses. (Laughs) They, uh...

AL: Do you know any more church house blueses?

Disc 3: **TRACK 7 – “LONESOME VALLEY”**

You gotta walk that lonesome valley
You gotta walk it by yourself
There’s nobody here can walk it for you
You gotta walk it by yourself

You gotta sleep in a lonesome graveyard
You gotta sleep there by yourself
Nobody here can sleep there for you
You gotta sleep there by yourself

There’s a road that’ll take you to glory
Through a valley not far away
Nobody here can go there for you
They can only point the way

But you gotta walk that lonesome valley
You gotta walk it by yourself
There ain’t nobody can walk it for you
You’ve gotta walk it by yourself

Some people says that John was a Baptist
Some people says he was a Jew
Oh, the Holy Bible tells us
That he was a creature, too.

You gotta walk, yes, you’ve gotta walk that lonesome valley (lonesome valley)
You’ve gotta walk it, you’ve gotta walk it by yourself (by yourself)
There is nobody here can walk in it for you (walk in it for you)
You gotta walk that lonesome valley by yourself (by yourself).



Franklin D. Roosevelt 1935
Over this bridge drought refugees are crossing the
Colorado River into California,
U.S. 80

Disc 3: **TRACK 8 – RAILROAD BLUESSES**

WG: Then there are lots of railroad blueses, Alan, I guess you know the kinds of blues that comes from the boys that ride the rods and walk the ties, knockin' off them railroad ties and uh, there...

AL: Have you done a lot of that, uh, knockin' off railroad ties, Woody? How many miles have you walked?

WG: There's not but about three ties that I haven't hit and I am gonna clip them off this summer. They was replaced, ya know, since I've been back through there (laughs).

AL: What railroads have you walked?

WG: It takes nine section crews, to, puttin' in the ties that I knock out.

AL: How do you walk on a railroad there?

WG: I hit every other tie. A lot of other guys hit, I don't know, I hit every other tie. But a lot of times they are not laid even, sometimes ya have to get two at a time for awhile and hit one a couple of times in order to get it straightened out. Some of 'em are closer together than others and a lot of boys get their foot caught in between these ties, you know, and there has been a lot of 'em get run over that way.

AL: Did you actually ever know anyone that got run over that way?

WG: Yeah, uh, one of the best friends that I ever had, lived right next door to me, Alan, about two doors up the street, his name was Miles Reynolds in Okemah, Oklahoma and when he was about seventeen years old, he had to take to freight trainin' it, takin' that wheat harvest out, ya know, on the plains, out in western Oklahoma and he fell down in between 'em and got run over and then there was another awful good friend of mine, a boy that rolled around all over everywhere and he was, uh, sortof a tramp worker and he was a writer, too. He was a pretty well-educated feller and he fell in between trains and cut off one of his legs and since that time he has turned out to be a playwright and he's wrote a whole bunch of plays now about, uh, the boys on the road and what put 'em there.

AL: And who is that?

WG: Huh? That is Albert Bind.

[AFS 3417 A]

WG: So, uh, this train, uh, finally started out and left all of us behind, the way it, the way they got us off of that train, they just backed up down the railroad track about three miles and they got a good fast start. It went so fast that couldn't any of us could catch it when it come by. There was one colored boy successfully caught it and, uh, there was two or three other guys tried to catch it and got bumped around a little bit and one of them got his head cut pretty bad, didn't amount to too much, though, but there was another train goin' out of there in about a hour and so we waited for it to come along. And while it was making up, switchin' around and hookin' all the boxcars onto each other and so forth, why there was a little fifteen-year-old boy there that was figuring on riding the train out too and uh, the railroad bull there in McAlister, let's see, what did they call him, McAlister Bob, I believe it is, or McAlister Bill or somethin' like that, but anyway, he's got a name, great big guy, weighs about two hundred pounds, and he had a gun on each hip and a blackjack in his hand. And he was chasing the hobos off the train while the train was making up. He wasn't gonna let 'em ride out and he have them to understand that they wasn't gonna catch that train out of there and he would call us up in great big bunches and he would say "Now, listen boys, I've got orders from the big boys, the big bosses of the railroad company said do not let you ride out of here and maybe, uh, a lot of you think you're going to ride, but you're damn sure gonna not ride." So, anyway, the little fifteen-year-old kid, he decided he was gonna ride and so when the train come by, the kid hit it, it was going pretty fast and this fifteen-year-old kid run and jumped at the boxcar and he caught on to one of them iron handles the wrong way. There is a right way and a wrong

way to catch 'em and he caught it wrong that time and he got knocked down. He didn't get killed, or nuthin' like that, but he got an awful bad cut on his forehead and he bled like a stuck hog around there and all these men swarmed around there and they got so damned mad at this railroad bull that they couldn't see straight and they was worse than a bunch of bees. So, the train went on and nobody rode it, but this little fifteen-year-old kid had tried to catch and got hurt at it, so when he did, why, these men just went over by the depot and one or two of them got up on some soap boxes there and they said, "Well boys, here we are. We are tryin' to get home, we are tryin' to get to jobs to work, we are goin' everywhere a-huntin' and lookin' – a lot of us ain't been home in years and we are tryin' to get back and put our feet on the table, see the family again, and eat some more of maw's cookin'. Some of us is married, doin' the best we can, can't make a living where we are, so we are having to go other places, and now here we are, herded around like a bunch of damn buffalos, and they dumped us off here and left us walking down the highway. I suggest we go up in town, this speaker said, I suggest that we go up in town and take us some damn brickbats and break a store window down and just go in there and start grazin', just like a bunch of reindeer. And if they want us to visit them, well, then they damn sure got to feed us." So, well, others said no, we don't want no trouble with 'em, we don't want to start no fights or beat up on nobody or tear down nothin'. All we wants is a job of work, a chance to make a living, a chance to get ahold of what we have been used to and was raised on, a piece of land or a farm or a house in town or something like that or an automobile, a few drinks of whiskey, and go to a dance once in awhile, and enjoy life like the rest of the guys do. We don't want to have no trouble. So, there's more peacemakers in the crowd than there was, uh, warriors, right at that time. So, they damn near, that was the closest that I ever seen a whole bunch of men start a regular riot but they didn't quite fight. But I have seen incidents of that kind all up and down the railroad, dozens and dozens of times all over California and Arizona. Saw one at the California line one time was pretty near that bad. That was at Yuma, Arizona, where you cross into California. They was stoppin' all the boys and making them go back and a lot of them was just havin' to walk back down across the desert there, just having to walk out there just like, by George, like they was a bunch of big lizards. Nothing to eat, no drinkin' water, no nuthin, just part down the road, just you and the blue sky. And a lot of them didn't much like it, they threatened to start breaking into stores and tearing up stuff, and some of them said the first I think that I'll just saddle up me some fast-shootin' six shooters and start taking it the easy way. To hell with this looking for work here. If you are out of work, when you can't get work, we would work if we could, then can't find it, travel across the continent five or six times looking for it. Put in every jail, by George, all across the whole country and run out of every town, called everything except humans and uh, that thing is it's something funny, it makes a feller think, as you bum around over the country, that there is plenty of room there for improvements. I mean, surely there is something them fellers could be doing, why in the hell don't they let 'em get out and widen the highways or somethin'? They tell me a lot of people getting killed on 'em. I know they'd do it. They think all that stuff. That's what makes outlaws, I think. They get tired of doin' that, they get tired of bein' treated like dogs, they see how these big gamblers live, bootleggers and crooks of all kinds, and they think, hell, take it the easy way and we won't try to work for it no more, we can't make it that way. Of course, I never did believe that but a lot of them do. And it is getting all too popular as time goes on, what I mean, until...one of the best things that happened to take care of that business was these government camps that they farm in the state of California where these migrant people could come in there, for ten cents a day and live and have their own government. Cops couldn't beat them up and all such stuff as that. They are pretty well satisfied there if they can get any kind of a job at all.

Disc 3: TRACK 9 – "WALKIN' DOWN THAT RAILROAD LINE" [AFS 3417 B1, 2]

WG: (playing) Freight Train, all you can say about is what you've seen. I say that's freight train time. Riding boxcars, catchin' the open ones, I say all you can sing about's what you've seen.

One foot up, one leg down
 One leg up, and a hole in the ground
 It's Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
 It's Lord, Lord, I'm walkin' down the railroad line

Ain't got a job, ain't got a cent
 If I ain't broke, then I'm badly bent
 It's Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
 Me, Lord, Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

From Frisco Bay to ole New York,
I've been lookin' for a job of work
It's Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

That Mississippi's full of ice
I oughta know 'cause I fell in twice
It's Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

That Susquehanna River was froze
Cold wind blowed right through my clothes
It's Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

Passed a train, it come by
I seen how the rich folks ride
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

Big black car come down the road
With a woman and a dog and a big fur coat
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

I'd give up this road today
For a good honest job and honest pay
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line

I'd give up this ramblin' life
For a good warm bed and a good warm wife
Lord, Lord, walkin' down the railroad line
Singin' Lord, Lord, Lord
Lord, Lord, Lord, walkin' down that railroad line

Disc 3: **TRACK 10 – INTERLUDE**

AL: Do you know any more railroad blues, Woody?

WG: Yeah. I know one, just a verse or two of one called "Goin' Down the Frisco Line." Do ya know it?

AL: No.

Disc 3: **TRACK 11 – "GOIN' DOWN THE FRISCO LINE"**

I'm goin' down that lonesome...
Let's see that's a little bit high (starts again)

I'm a-goin' down that lonesome Frisco line
I'm goin' down that lonesome Frisco line
I'm goin' down that lonesome Frisco line
Broke and ain't got a dime

I'm goin' down that lonesome Frisco line
 Yes, I'm goin' down that lonesome Frisco line
 I'm goin' down that lonesome Frisco line
 And I've got my troubles on my mind

I've got my bundle in my hand
 Yes, I've got my bundle in my hand
 I've got my bundle in my hand
 And I'm goin' down this lonesome Frisco line

Ten miles from good old Birmingham
 Yes, I'm ten miles from good old Birmingham
 Ten miles from good old Birmingham
 And I'm goin' down the lonesome Frisco line

Disc 3: TRACK 12 – RIDING THE RAILS

WG: I guess you have heard the Jimmie Rodgers blues, haven't you?

AL: Yeah I have. Uh, what happens to you when you hit a town and the railroad cops catch you? Did you ever have any mix-ups with those men?

WG: Plenty of 'em. I was, uh, in a division once down by McAlister, Oklahoma where they've got the Oklahoma State Penitentiary and I believe I saw, that was the nearest, I mean that was the biggest bunch of guys that I ever saw get throwed off a freight train. There was about a hundred and fifty of us a-ridin' this train and the car that I was ridin' in there was sixty two. We used to count the guys that was in the cars, you know. A lot of times it would be forty five, sixty two, seventy three. Kids all the way from fifteen years old plumb on up. Well, this, uh, train pulled a joke on us that we'd never had pulled before. What I mean, we thought we was old railroad riders, we could turn a train any way but loose, but anyway this...they pulled a trick on us that had never had happened before. They, uh, we had been through this country five hundred times before ya know, and know exactly just where to wait for a train to come along and we could guess just what speed it'd be traveling by the time it got to us according to the way the ground lay and what all the train was doing and how good a start it had and all that, but anyway, there was one place there where we always caught this train without missin' and uh, all at once this train backed way down around a curb and went to switchin' and poppin' around down there, fillin' up with water.

(There is no end to this story. It didn't pick up after a new disc was put on the recorder.)

[AFS 3418 AI, 2, 3]

AL: Woody, what was the most popular of all those bluesy songs among the people trampin' the railroads to California?

WG: Well, one of the most popular, uh, Alan, was the one that they chose for the *Grapes of Wrath* picture. "I'm Going Down that Road Feelin' Bad." That's got two or three names. A lot of people call it the "Lonesome Road Blues." Others call it "Goin' Down the Road Feelin' Bad." It's got all kinds of names. Anyway, in the picture, they, they sing it pretty classical. I don't know whether the Okies and the hobos will recognize it or not but then I'm not worried about that because I don't think that they'll be spendin' a quarter to get to see a bunch of grapes or stuff...I don't know whatever the devil that means, "grapes of wrath." Here's the ole song. It was wrote, uh, by, uh, a colored slave that run off from his master and went back up North. He was a Southern slave and he run up North and it was pretty cold up there. So, uh, he worked 'round up there a little bit and stayed in jails and everythin' and was treated like a dog, and so awful cold up North and so he wrote this song or got it started:

Disc 3: TRACK 13 – “GOING DOWN THE ROAD”

I'm goin' down that road feelin' bad
 Yes, I'm goin' down that road feeling bad
 I'm goin' down that road feeling bad, Lord, Lord,
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway

Well, I am way down in jail on my knees
 They got me way down in jail on my knees
 They got me way down in jail on my knees, Lord, Lord,
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

They feed me on cornbread and beans
 Yes, they feed me on cornbread and beans
 They feed me on cornbread and beans, Lord,
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

It takes a ten dollar shoe to fit my feet
 It takes a ten dollar shoe to fit my feet
 It takes a ten dollar shoe to fit my feet, Lord,
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

'Cause a five dollar shoe hurts my feet
 Lord, a five dollar shoe hurts my feet
 Yes, a five dollar shoe hurts my feet, Lord,
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

I'm goin' where the climate suits my clothes
 I'm goin' where the climate suits my clothes
 I'm goin' where the climate suits my clothes
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

I'm goin' where the chilly winds never blow,
 I'm goin' where the chilly winds never blow,
 I'm goin' down where the chilly winds never blow,
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

I'm goin' down that road feelin' bad
 Yes, I'm goin' down that road feelin' bad,
 I'm goin' down that road feelin' bad, Lord
 and I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.
 No, I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

Disc 3: TRACK 14 – INTERLUDE

AL: Woody, you talk a lot about the dust bowl. Let's sing some dust bowl songs. Maybe first we better sing some songs about farmers from back home. Do you know anythin' about seven-cent cotton?

WG: Part of it. (laughs) That seven-cent cotton kinda gets mixed up, too. It's sung about four hundred different ways, but then I'll sing a few lines of it, the way I know it.

Disc 3: TRACK 15 – “SEVEN CENT COTTON”

Oh, it's seven-cent cotton
and forty-cent meat
How in the hell can a poor man eat?

Seven-cent cotton and a two-dollar hoe
How in the hell can the kids wear clothes

I don't know it, Alan. I forgot it. Do you know how the verse for it goes? Let's see. Selling the hogs for three cents a pound, when you go to buy 'em back it's forty cents a pound in a paper sack, I forget how it goes.)

AL: Didn't you tell me you knew another song about...

WG: Hold it...

(sings)

Three cents a pound
Sellin' my hogs for three cents a pound
And then when I go to buy 'em back
Forty cents a pound in a paper sack.

WG: (stops singing and laughs) I don't know. What did you start to say? How about the boll weevil?

AL: You sang the boll weevil yesterday, but don't you know a boll weevil blues, too? Different from the other one that you sang?

WG: Uh huh.

Disc 3: TRACK 16 – “WISH I'D STAYED IN THE WAGON YARD”

You know I'm a jolly farmer
Last night I come to town
To sell the bale of cotton
I worked the whole year round

Put my team in the wagon yard
And I got me a bottle of gin
Went out to see them electric lights and
Watched the cars come in

Met a dude up on the street
Sure looked swell and fine
Said, "Come on, ole hayseed, and have a little drink, it's fine."

I must have took about a dozen more,
because it hit my pocketbook hard
Wished I had bought me half a pint
and slept in the wagon yard



CAMP OF ITINERANT STATUE MAKER AND AGRICULTURAL DAY LABORER ON POTEAU CREEK NEAR SPIRO. SEQUOYAH COUNTY, OKLAHOMA. JUNE 1939. U. S. FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSSELL LEE.

WOODY GUTHRIE SINGING AT A GATHERING OF MIGRANT WORKERS AT THE SHAFER FARM WORKERS COMMUNITY, SHAFER, CALIFORNIA, 1941. PHOTOGRAPH BY SEEMA WEATHERWAX.



Disc 3: **TRACK 17 – INTERLUDE [AFS 3418 B]**

AL: Woody, have you ever made songs about, uh, what happened to the dust bowl people in California?

WG: Yeah, I got several, Alan. One of them that pretty well tells the story of the people that used to be hard-working farm people back down in the South and in the dust bowl section. When they got to California, they wasn't called that anymore. All they was called was just Dust Bowl refugees. So here's a song that I wrote up called the "Dust Bowl Refugees."

Disc 3: **TRACK 18 – "DUST BOWL REFUGEE"**

I'm a dust bowl refugee
 Just a dust bowl refugee
 From the dust bowl
 to the peach bowl
 Just a dust bowl refugee
 Lord, that peach fuzz, it's killin' me

'Cross the mountains to the sea
 Come the wife and kids and me
 Down that hot ol' dusty highway
 Just a dust bowl refugee

Once that dust bowl was our home
 Now we ramble and we roam
 In the jungle by the railroad
 Just a dust bowl refugee

In your orchards and in your trees
 Days you're hot and nights you freeze
 Pickin' oranges, avocados,
 Just a dust bowl refugee

'Cross the desert and the plains
 Through the dust and wind and rain
 In the snow that caps your mountains
 Just the dust bowl refugees

Hard, it's always been that way
 Gettin' harder every day
 Mighty hot ol' windin' highways
 For a dust bowl refugee

We are ramblers, so they say,
 Yesterday here and here today
 Like a whirlwind on a desert
 Just the dust bowl refugees

Yes we ramble, yes we roam
 Since the tractor took our home
 Little whirlwinds make a cyclone
 That's the dust bowl refugees.

Disc 3: TRACK 19 – CONTRACTORS DUPING THE DESPERATE

AL: Woody, you told me a story that I would like you to put on the record about the old man you met in Oklahoma when you came back from California to Oklahoma the last time.

WG: Oh, yeah.

AL: Can you tell that kind of brief here, so that we can get it on the rest of this record?

WG: Well, ya know, I guess you know about the handbill situation, that uh, where they handed out all the handbills, you know, all down through that country tellin' that there was good work, good pay in California, plenty of cotton needed pickin', eight hundred people wanted, come on out, get 'em while they're hot. So, (laughs), they got about eight, well, uh, they got about pretty near three hundred thousand out there. That was just one successful advertising campaign. Anyway, a lot of people wonderin' how that same condition is today, if there is anything like that still takin' place. Well, the latest trick that I found and one of the worst, one of the stinkiest things that I've run on to down in Oklahoma, about a month ago. I was...I was hoboin' it down the road and I caught a ride on a truck. And I was sittin' on the back of the truck, with my feet hangin' off, just a-goin' and a-blowing, right on down the road, a-skipping through the dew and makin' about fifty miles an hour. All at once the truck driver stopped, threw on the brakes, and I looked back down the road there and there was an old man. He was, uh, well, he was a...little feller, he was about five feet five or six inches tall and he looked like he was about fifty five or sixty years old and he had a big heavy suitcase, great big pair of tough shoes on, and he needed about seven shaves and he was a-comin' right on down the road. When that truck stopped, well, why, he jumped in there like a jackrabbit – he made about three hops and he was in. But, anyway, he had a big heavy suitcase and I helped him get that up in the back of the truck and then I said "Where ya goin'?" "Ah," he says, "I'm a goin' up here to this next town." He said, "I gotta meet a feller up there on some business. I says, uh, "Where about's ya live?" "Oh, I live back down here now at this next town. It's called Common Wall. That's where I live. But then I'm a goin' to work, been lookin' for a job now for about ten years and I finally found one. And I says, "Whereabouts did ya find the job?" "Oh," he says, "I'm goin' to California to do the work. California. I know a feller out there he's a contractor, he said, I got acquainted with him last week and to take me out. I said, "Uh, what did you say that man was?" He said, "A contractor."

[AFS 3419 A]

WG: Well, uh, we, uh, drove along and I says, "A contractor, huh?" He says, "Yeah, the way he works is he goes to California and he contracts several thousand acres of land, you know, orchards, and he guarantees that he will furnish the men to pick the peaches and oranges and apricots and gather in all the stuff that grows, grapes and so forth." He says, "I'll make about five dollars a day out there. I sure can use it, too." (laughs) He says, "Uh, not work very hard, either, they tell me, just pick a little fruit. Five dollars. Every day. Gonna send for my wife, too, quick as I can get a few days in. She wants to see California and sunshine and figure out the ocean. She always did wonder what the hell the ocean was and what it looks like." So he is gonna write to her. So I said, uh, "What part of California are you goin' to?" He said, "Well, I'm goin' to a town," he says, "I don't know just where it is, but it is a little town out there called, uh, Los Angeles." I said, "Yeah, you will lose worst than that." (laughter) And I said, "Who is gonna take you out there? How're you gonna get out there?" "Oh," he said, "this contractor feller is gonna take me." I said "Sure enough? What's the, how come he seem to be interested in you?" "Oh," he said, "I pay him ten dollars to land me in Los Angeles. There are six of us gonna ride with him this trip." And he said, "Ten dollars apiece, we are goin' into Los Angeles and then he is gonna give us the name and address of this here feller that's gonna pay us the five dollars a day. Then we are gonna pick some fruit, a little fruit, and it will be fine to have a job," he said. And I said, "Well, I don't want to discourage you none, but I just been out to California. I slept under every important bridge there (laughter) and I said, uh, I just wanted you to know that, I don't want to try be a prophet or nothing, but I said, I'm gonna tell you just exactly what you'll do when you get to California. I said, you will go out to California and they will give you this card with his name and address on it and you will go meet this here feller, whoever it is, Tom Jones or whoever it is, Bill Brown or Pete Smith or Si Jackson or whoever the name is and you will go out to his place and he'll say, "Man, I never seen nuthin' like it before, the fruit's in awful shape and ain't gonna be worth nuthin' this year. I don't know if it is worth pickin' at the price they are payin'. I think I might just let it rot. But, of course, if you boys want to pick it, just naturally haven't got no job or nothin' to do, why, you can pitch in there and pick it if you want to. When you pick and pack and carry and load one ton of peaches, why, I'll give you a dollar. And, uh, I said, you're not gonna see a five-dollar bill while you are

in California, I don't care how long ya stay there, unless ya just go visitin' somewheres and curiosity at a bank or somewhere and stand there and look. (laughs). And, uh, he said, "Well, now, he says, I've heard that story. You are not the first feller to tell it to me. But, he says, here in Oklahoma, starvin', ain't got nothin', lost everything I ever had, worked for fifty or sixty years right here, born and raised right here and the wife was too, and got seven or eight kids, and they are all chasing around like a bunch of wild horses down here somewheres, never see 'em. But he says, uh, "Nothin' here for me and I've heard about the business out there. It's a chance and it's a promise, and he said I'm anxious to work and I'm gonna take it."

Disc 3: **TRACK 20 – THE DUST STORM OF APRIL 14, 1935** [AFS 3419 B1, 2]

AL: Woody, what is the worst dust storm you ever saw? That you were ever in yourself.

WG: Well, the worst one I ever seen was...was on the fourteenth day of April in 1935. I was livin' at that time about sixty mile north of Amarillo Texas up on the plains there, they're thirty-six hundred feet high and just as flat as a floor, a thousand miles wide and there ain't a thing in the world to stop that wind but just a barbed wire fence. I was a hundred miles north of there and it ain't got a barb on it. I showed you that picture a while ago, where it looked like an ocean was jumpin' on a snail. That's just the way the dust storm looked when it hit our town.

Disc 3: **TRACK 21 – "DUST STORM DISASTER"**

It was the fourteenth day of April
Nineteen thirty five
There come the blackest dust storm
That ever filled the sky

I stood outside and watched it
and a curtain of black rolled down
We thought it was our finish
As it fell across our town

The families they were huddled
Into their little shacks
You could not see their faces
It was so deathly black

We lit our lamps and lanterns
We set them in our rooms
But could not pierce the darkness
We thought it was our doom

The radio reported
We listened all night long
The country that was blackened
By that wild and windy storm

From Oklahoma City
to the Arizona line
Dakota and Nebraska
To the lazy Rio Grande

In Amarillo, Texas
The old-time settlers swear
They'd never seen such a dust storm
Since they'd been a-settlin' there



SMALL STUDIO, EIGHTH FLOOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, EIGHTEENTH & C STREETS NORTHWEST, WASHINGTON, DC.

In old Dodge City, Kansas
 The dust had rung their knell
 And a few more comrades sleeping
 On top of old Boot Hill

Was early in the springtime
 The wheat fields all was green
 Was turned into a desert
 When the sun broke through again

It covered up our tractors
 It covered up our barns
 It covered up our fences
 This wild, mysterious storm

We looked out in the morning
 Where wheat fields once had grown
 And there was a ripplin' ocean
 From sand the wind had blown

Our shacks and barns are rotten
 Our plows have turned to rust
 Our children took pneumonia
 From breathin' in that dust

Many and many a family
 Had raised both cattle and wheat
 And now within their cupboards
 There's not a bite to eat

Some packed up their belongings
 Loaded their children in
 They hit that government highway
 That road ain't got no end

(segues into another song)

If I was a-sittin' on that foggy mountain top
 I tell you what I'd do
 I'd sing my song to the whole wide world
 and the gal I love so true

Now when you go a-workin', boys
 and we tell you what to do
 Take off them ol' dirty overalls
 Put on your navy blues

I'm a-sittin' and a-sittin' on that foggy mountain top
 Lookin' away to the west
 It won't be long 'til I'll be in the arms
 of the girl I love the best

If I was on that foggy mountain top
 I tell you what I'd do
 I'd sing my song to the whole wide world
 and the gal that I love so true.

AL: This recording was done by Woody Guthrie in Washington, DC, uh, with the equipment and help of the Department of Interior Radio Broadcasting Division on March the 22nd of 1940.

Disc 4: **TRACK 1 – BREATHING IN DUST [AFS 3420 A]**

ELIZABETH LOMAX: This is Wednesday March 27th, 1940, Department of Interior, Woody Guthrie recorded and Elizabeth Lomax. Woody, you were telling me about the, uh, dust storm in the northern part of Texas. Can you tell me something about these people, how they reacted to these storms, the...how the wives, what the wives and kids were doing and what sort of houses they lived in and so on?

WG: Well, they...in all of the oil fields booms that I've chased and follered, the Kilgore, East Texas, the Longview and Henderson, East Texas booms, and the Seminole and Bowlegs slick, Sand Springs, Cromwell, Oklahoma, Pampa, Texas and Bulgar, Texas, Oklahoma City, Bristow, and Drumright and all the rest of 'em, there's one thing that is true of almost all of the oil fields, especially the ones that, uh, broke out on the West Texas plains. An oil boom is a thing what comes and it lasts for a little while and then it dies down again. And so nobody wants to build, a really and truly...a permanent living quarters there. They just sorta build up some kind of a little old shack house to live in, just somethin' to get in out of the weather. When all of this dust started blowing in up in the Texas oil fields, why, these peoples' houses, uh, wasn't built to keep out all this dust. So every mornin' when you'd wake up, why you'd see where the dust had drifted in through cracks in your house and it just made...lit all over the floor and had made, ripples and drifts all over the floor of your house and wherever the drafts of air went from one crack through all the rooms of your house. Why, when you woke up in the mornin' there would just be a big drift of dust in your house and in your hair, and your eyes and your whole face that stuck out from under the cover would be just covered up with dust and all of the combs and brushes and things on your dresser would be covered up with dust. And breathin' that dust, naturally, there was lots of people that took down with a sickness that was called the dust pneumonia.

EL: Well, have you got any songs about this dust pneumonia?

WG: Yeah, I got one here tellin' about the dust pneumonia.

EL: You made it up yourself, I guess

Disc 4: **TRACK 2 – “DUST PNEUMONIA BLUES”**

I've got that dust pneumonie
 Pneumonie in my lungs
 I've got that dust pneumonie,
 pneumonie in my lungs
 And it won't be long
 'til I'll be dead and gone

I got that dust pneumonie
 Dust got in my lungs
 I got the dust pneumonie
 And the dust got in my lungs
 Doctor told me
 Boy, it won't be long

That dust is a-blowin'
 Dust is in the air
 That dust is a-blowin'
 And dust is in the air
 When you breathe a pound of dust
 Every time you take a breath of air

Dust in my nose
 and dust is everywhere
 Dust in my nose
 and dust is everywhere
 My days are numbered
 But I don't seem to care

It got my father
 Got my baby, too
 It got my father
 and got my baby, too
 You come from dust
 and back to dust you go.

My left lung's wheezin'
 Right lung wheezin', too
 My left lung's a-wheezin'
 and my right lung wheezin', too
 I don't know nothin'
 that a hard-workin' man can do

I went to the doctor
 Here's what the doctor said
 I went to the doctor
 And here's what the doctor said
 Boy, it won't be long
 'til you'll be layin' dead.

That grave is dusty
 Dusty is my grave
 That grave is dusty
 Dusty is my grave
 But it is done too late
 to try my life to save.

[AFS 3420 B1, 2]

This whole wide world
 is just a cloud of dust
 This whole wide world
 is just a cloud of dust
 If you're a-walkin' or a-blowin'
 It don't make no difference much

That dust in the house
 Dust in the dishes and clothes
 Dust in the house
 And dust in the dishes and clothes
 Dust in your ears,
 Dust in your eyes and nose

Now, when I die,
 just lay me on the ground
 When I die,
 just lay me on the ground
 Let sixteen senators
 blow my dust around

And when I die,
 if the banker wants to see me
 When I die,
 if the banker wants to see me
 I'll be rollin' and a-blowin'
 in every grain of dust you see

Yes, it's dust pneumonie
 that laid me in my grave
 Yes, it's dust pneumonie
 that laid me in my grave
 but I would rather be there
 than to be a rich man's slave.

Disc 4: TRACK 3 – LEAVING THE DUST BOWL

EL: Well, that sounds pretty bad. Tell me, Woody, what was these people thinking about all this time?

WG: What was they thinkin' about?

EL: What were they talkin' about?

WG: Well, uh, we used to...all of us would get together in the little old shacks and houses there in the Dust Bowl and we'd talk about some place to go to and some place to move to and some place to pick up and go to where maybe we could get ahold of a piece of land, or a little farm of some kind, and get out of all that dust and all that dust pneumonia...And all of that, uh, wind that was up there on the Texas plains. People talked about going everywhere in the world. Once in awhile you would hear a feller say somethin' about going to Arkansas, to get him a little farm. Once in a while you would hear someone talking about going down on the Gulf of Mexico, to get him a little farm, and once in awhile you would hear someone talkin' about goin' down to the Rio Grande Valley to get him a little farm and start raisin' some kind of fruit or vegetables or watermelon or apples or orchards or somethin' that would be useful, you know, to where they could do honest work and make an honest living. But, most of 'em, most of the people in the Dust Bowl, talked about California. The reason they talked about California was that they had seen all the pretty pictures about California and they'd heard all the pretty songs about California and uh, they had read all the handbills about comin' to California and pickin' fruit. And these people, naturally, said, well, if this dust keeps on blowin' the way it is, we're gonna have to go somewhere and most of them, I dare say 75 percent of them, was in favor of going to California because they had heard about the climate there. You could sleep outdoors at night, and any type of seed that you put down in the ground, why, it would grow back out again and all such things as that made all these people want to go to California. Here's a part of a little song that I remember. I didn't make this one up, but this here one here is one that attracted several hundred thousand families, it helped I would say, to go from the Dust Bowl to California. And the name of this one is "The California Blues." This here's an old Jimmie Rodgers piece.

Disc 4: **TRACK 4 – “CALIFORNIA BLUES”**

I'm going to California where they sleep out every night
 I'm going to California where they sleep out every night
 'Cause the women in Oklahoma
 just naturally ain't treatin' me right.

I'd rather drink muddy water
 Sleep in a hollow log
 I'd rather drink muddy water
 and sleep in a hollow log
 Than to be in Texas, treated like a doggone dog

(Spoken: Notice how this song hits all of those southern states and welcomes them all to come to California.)

California waters
 Taste like cherry wine
 California waters
 Taste like cherry wine
 But the Georgia waters
 taste like turpentine.

Disc 4: **TRACK 5 – JIMMIE RODGERS [AFS 3421 A]**

Well, that was an old song that Jimmie Rodgers sung and he put it on a...some kind of a phonograph record and that phonograph record went all down through Oklahoma and it went all over Texas and it went over Georgia and Alabama and Tennessee and Mississippi and Kansas. I have stood around in lots and lots of towns and I've seen, uh, in them days, the electric phonograph was quite an attraction. It was somethin' new and somethin' different and I've seen hundreds and hundreds of people gang up around an electric phonograph and listen to Jimmie Rodgers sing that song about goin' to California where they sleep out every night, 'cause the Oklahoma women just naturally ain't treatin' me right, and I'd rather drink muddy water and sleep in a hollow log than to be down in Texas treated like a dirty dog. And California waters taste like cherry wine, and the Georgia waters taste just like turpentine, and it seemed awfully funny to me that all of these verses and all these things that were said in this song that went over possibly the biggest this recordin' company ever done because Jimmie Rodgers was the most popular thing that they've had since they've been a recording company. And all these things had a big effect on all these people around over that country because I've stood around in different towns and heard big crowds of people gang around all of these electric phonographs and listen to that "California Blues" and they'd punch each other in the ribs with their elbows and they'd say, "Boy, there's a place to go. That ole boy's singin' the truth. Listen to him sing, I'm tellin' you, that makes me want to just pick up right now and leave out. California waters taste like turpentine, uh, cherry wine (laughter) and sleep out every night" and so forth and so on. Anyway, there was thousands and thousands and thousands more of 'em, in fact, there's about three or four hundred thousand of 'em had got up out of these states and started off down that 66 highway and they didn't know where they was goin' or when they was comin' back. All they knew was that they was goin' somewhere where they could maybe get a job and be of some use to somebody.

Disc 4: **TRACK 6 – MIGRANTS ARRIVING IN CALIFORNIA [AFS 3421 B]**

EL: Well, Woody, did these people really pack up their duds and leave or were they just joking around?

WG: Well, they... they wasn't jokin', 'cause there was several hundred thousand of 'em, not just several hundred thousand people, but there was that many families that right about that same time they just woke up one bright, clear mornin' and they find their selves walking down the road: wives, kids, fathers, mothers, and everybody else that you could think of, and they heard that there was some kind of work out west in California and so these people had been workers all their lives. That's all they ever knowed how to do was just to work. That is what they liked to do, they just got as much of a kick out of a hard day's work as a lot of people would out of a hard day's drunk. And anyway, they traveled fifteen hundred or

two thousand miles in these old broke-down jalopies and they went to California and I was one of the first bunches to go to California, 'cause when people start goin' somewhere, I'm always kind of a dadgum feller that jumps up and takes off right while they're talkin' about it. Anyway, when I got to California, I seen things out there that I wouldn't believe if people that, uh, if people had sat and tell me that there was hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and thousands of families of people livin' around under railroad bridges, down along the river bottoms, and the old cardboard houses and old rusty beat-up houses that they had made out of tote sacks and old dirty rags and corrugated iron that they got out of the dumps and old tin cans flattened out and old orange crates that they'd been able to tear up and get boards out of, I wouldn't believe it. 'Cause all these people didn't go out there to loaf around, they didn't go out there to have a good time. They went out there for one reason and absolutely for one reason, and that was because they thought that they could get some work there. I got a little old song here that I made up about that, that seems pretty much to hit the nail on the head. The name of this is "If You Ain't Got the Do-Re-Mi"

Disc 4: **TRACK 7 – "DO RE MI"**

Thousands of folks back East they say
is leavin' home ever' day
and a-beatin' a hot old dusty way
to the California line

Tryin' to get out of the old Dust Bowl
Think they're goin' to a sugar bowl
Boy, boy, and here's what they find

Well, the police at the port of entry say
You're number fourteen thousand for today

If you ain't got the do-re-mi, friend,
If you ain't got the do-re-mi
You better go back to beautiful Texas,
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee

California is a garden of Eden
A paradise to live in or see
But believe it or not
You won't find it so hot
if you ain't got the do-re-mi

'Course, if you've got a little money in your pocket – three or four or five hundred dollars or maybe a couple of thousand, everything sounds just a little bit different, in fact people smile at ya a little bit different and they treat ya a hell of a lot different.

If you want to buy you a home or farm
That can't do nobody harm
Or take your vacation by the mountains or sea
Don't trade your old cow for a car
You better stay right where you are
You better take this little tip from me

Cause the governor on the radio one day
He jumped up to the microphone and he did say
Oh, if you ain't got the do-re-mi, friend,
If you ain't got the do-re-mi
You better go back to beautiful Texas,
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee



DUST BOWL FARMER RAISING FENCE TO KEEP IT FROM BEING BURIED UNDER DRIFTING SAND. CIMARRON COUNTY, OKLAHOMA, APRIL 1936. U. S. FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPH BY ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN.

California's a garden of Eden
 A paradise to live in or see
 But believe it or not
 You won't find it so hot
 If you ain't got the do-re-mi.

Disc 4: **TRACK 8 – REFUGEES POURING INTO CALIFORNIA**

And there was thousands and thousands of people a-pourin' into California out of this dust bowl country and a lot of them didn't have that old do-re-mi. A lot of them didn't have that do-re-mi. When they got out there they found themselves sittin' alongside the road or up in the hobo jungles, campin' around – three or four hundred families on one hillside and three or four hundred families on another hillside. They had a little old spring of water runnin' around there somewhere and they'd use this little spring water, a little hole of water to do their washing in, to shave in, to get a drink of water out of, to wash their teeth in, used that spring of water as sewage disposal, they used it for everything in the world and a lot of times I have seen three or four hundred families of people a-tryin' to get along on a stream of water that wasn't any bigger than the stream of water that comes from your faucet when you go into the kitchen and turn the faucet on. These mountain springs wasn't any stronger than that one faucet and yet three or four hundred families of people found themselves tryin' to keep sanitary on that amount of water.

[AFS 3422 A]

EL: Well, Woody, with all these people pouring into California and living around there like that, in that condition, and so poor and everything, what did the Californians think about this? How did they react? What did they call these people? What did they say to them?

Have you got any little song that you made up about that?

WG: Well, I've got one here that tells about a brand new name that these people made up for us. It's somethin' that we'd never been called before in our whole lives. They called us dust bowl refugees. All the newspaper headlines was full of stuff about dust bowl refugees. Refugees here, refugees yonder, refugees, refugees everywhere that you looked. They called us dust bowl refugees. But then there's more than one kind of a refugee. There's refugees that take refuge under railroad bridges, and there is refugees that take refuge and (laughs)...take refuge in public office. But when we was out in California, all that the native sons and daughters called us was just dust bowl refugees. So I've got a little song here that I made up about dust bowl refugees.

Disc 4: **TRACK 9 – “DUST BOWL REFUGEES”**

I'm a dust bowl refugee
 I'm a dust bowl refugee
 From the dust bowl to the peach bowl
 but the dust bowl refugee

Just a dust bowl refugee
 And that peach fuzz is a-killin' me

Crossed the mountains
 and the sea
 Come the wife and kids and me
 Down that hot ol' dusty highway
 Just a dust bowl refugee

Once that dust bowl was our home
 Days you're hot and nights you're cold
 In the jungle by the railroad
 Just a dust bowl refugee

In your orchard, in your trees
 Nights you're hot and days you freeze
 Pickin' at oranges and avocados
 just a dust bowl refugee

Cross the desert and the plains
 Through the dust and wind and rain
 In the snow that caps your mountains
 Just a dust bowl refugee

Hard, it's always been that way
 Gettin' harder every day
 And tomorrow we will still be
 just the dust bowl refugees

We are ramblers, so they say
 Yesterday there and here today
 Like a whirlwind on the desert
 Just a dust bowl refugee

Yes, we ramble and we roam
 Since the landlord got our home
 Little whirlwinds, gonna make a big cyclone
 Just the dust bowl refugees
 Just the dust bowl refugees

Disc 4: **TRACK 10 – CALIFORNIA AS ONE OF THE 48 STATES**

Well, when we got to that country, and they got to callin' us dust bowl refugees, why, a lot of people from Oklahoma that had worked hard all their lives and split white oak stays and made walnut timber and split up walnut timber, a lot of them had made moonshine liquor and a lot of them had drilled oil wells and a lot of them picked that cotton and a lot of them had had little farms 'round over the country that they had raised different crops on. And when they got out to California, several hundred thousand of them, and heard everybody callin' them just a dust bowl refugee, why, they didn't know exactly what to think about it, didn't know quite exactly how to take it. They didn't know exactly what people meant when they called somebody else a refugee. But, anyway, they travelled fifteen hundred or two thousand miles, afoot, they walked down the highways with blistered feet, carried their shoes in their hands and walked across the desert with blisters all over their feet, fifteen hundred or two thousand miles trying to find a job of work. They had already gone past, they'd already outgrown any little old kind of a word like a dust bowl refugee that fellers had called them.

[AFS 3422 B1, 2]

EL: Woody, these Californians sort of looked down on you all and maybe they had a right to, but how did you feel about all of this? What did you do? What did you have to fall back on to kinda keep your pride up all this time?

WG: Well, we'd always been taught to believe that these forty-eight states that is called the United States was absolutely free country and that anytime anybody took a notion to get up and go anywhere in these 48 states, then nobody else in these forty-eight states would proceed to ask him a whole bunch of questions or to try keep him from going where he started out to go. Well, the native California sons and daughters, I'll admit, had a lot to be proud of. They had their ancestors there that

come in on the old covered wagons a long time ago, and they discovered oil, they discovered gold, they discovered silver, they discovered all kinds of mines in California and they had built up in California quite a wonderful empire. Then they hadn't built up quite a wonderful enough empire. What they needed in California was more and more people to pick their fruit, to gather in their peaches, to pick their extra-select and their select apricots and their prunes and to gather in their grapes and they admitted themselves, these people that was born and raised in California, that they needed people to do that but at the same time, they looked down, for some reason or other, on the people that come in there from other states to do that kind of work. And I don't know why it was, uh, a big long story behind it, somethin about the Japs, the Chinese, the Filipinos, and the Mexicans that they had had in there before. But, all of these Japs they formed them an organization, they unionized. The Japs and the Chinese. The Chinese done the same thing. They kinda unionized and the Filipinos they finally got to where that they had a little better jobs than getting out in the fruit and in the crops and doin' all this hard work. They finally got to where that they was takin' care of most of the apartment and rooming houses and the buildings of that kind around over California. And so, there was just one bunch left and that was what's called the Okies that fell into that country and they had a lot of things to be proud of out there in California. I admit that. I admit California is one of the most wonderful states that I ever seen in my life but Oklahoma didn't just draw a blank. We've got in Oklahoma a lot of things to be proud of. Some of the biggest oil fields in the world, we developed. We drilled 'em, we tool dressed 'em, we roustabouted, we done everything in the world in Oklahoma. And a lot of things we've got down there to be proud about, first place, we've got some of the greatest movie stars in the world, come from the state of Oklahoma. One of them is, uh, one of them is Kay Francis, one of the best-known movie stars in the world today is Kay Francis. She come from Oklahoma City. And another one that we got to proud of is one of the most, I guess one of the best-known and well-liked fellers in the whole movie star business that ever was was Lon Chaney. Lon Chaney come from Oklahoma. And we've got Lon Chaney to be proud off. Hollywood thinks, for some strange reason, that all of these people didn't come from anywhere, but they did, they had to come from somewhere, and just to go a little bit further, I think that Oklahoma claims the greatest and the best-known and best-loved and best-liked movie star that ever lived on this earth. I think that Oklahoma can claim that we have got the second most famous man that ever lived on the face of the earth. I was lookin' at a book here awhile back and it was givin' all of the famous men of the world. The first most famous man on the face of the earth that ever lived was Jesus Christ. The second most famous man that ever lived on the face of this earth was Will Rogers. Will Rogers come from Oklahoma and that 66 highway that runs from New York City down through Oklahoma and out to Los Angeles, California is named the Will Rogers Highway.

EL: Can you tell a little bit more about this?

WG: Well, this Will Rogers Highway, everybody in Oklahoma knew Will. Everybody in Oklahoma liked him, because Will had quite the reputation. He was one of the funniest, wittiest, quickest-minded, quickest-thinkin' men that ever was in the show business. He got his start in South America, he finally come to Broadway in New York and he made quite a hit there and no matter how much money that Will Rogers ever made, he always had a five-dollar bill or a ten-dollar bill to hand out to all the old cowboys and all the old broke-down cowpokes that he met with while he was up in the big money. The reason why everybody likes Will Rogers and the reason why Oklahoma, I think, has got something to be proud of, is because Will Rogers never did get to be proud or selfish about all the money that he was making. All that he wanted to do was just to sorta help somebody out and there was lots and lots of times when he'd be going down the road, talking to some big guy that was worth a million dollars and he would meet an old boy on the street that wasn't worth a nickel. He'd take a five-dollar bill out of his hand and fold up it up in his hand to where you could hardly tell what it was and a keep on a-talkin' to this big rich feller while he was walkin' down the street. At the same time, he would find some way to hand this five-dollar bill to the poor old boy that, uh, was walkin' up the street. Will Rogers had a reputation of that kind and Oklahoma as a whole state has got a reputation of that kind and I think that you will find more of that same spirit down in that country than anywhere back in the fast and nervous overworked and overrun and overindulgent East or North or New York or anywhere else. Down in Oklahoma we take it just a little bit easier, go at things a little bit slower, maybe we might not get as many dates covered every day or as many telephone calls put in or as many bus rides but then we'll do just as much on one bus ride and on one phone call and on one meetin' as a lot of people do on a dozen.

[AFS 3423 AI, 2]

EL: Well, let's have that song about ol' Highway 66, the Will Rogers Highway, Woody.

Disc 4: **TRACK 11 – “WILL ROGERS HIGHWAY”**

There's a highway that goes from the coast to coast
 New York town down to Los Angeles
 It's named Will Rogers, I've traveled that road
 from New York town down to Los Angeles

That 66 Highway, the Will Rogers road
 It's lined with jalopies as far as you can see
 There's a mighty hot motor and a heavy old load
 From New York town down to Los Angeles

Ten thousand people you see every day
 Camped under the bridges and under the trees
 with rattle-trap cars that have come apart
 From old Oklahoma to Los Angeles

We loved Will Rogers
 We loved his smile
 We went to the movies Will Rogers to see
 We followed him now for a many a mile
 From old Oklahoma to Los Angeles

That 66 Highway it's mighty hard
 All day you're hot, all night you freeze
 But we gotta have work so we're takin' a chance
 From old Oklahoma to Los Angeles

Will Rogers was born in Oologah
 In the nation of the Cherokee
 and the hundred thousand that followed him now
 From old Oklahoma to Los Angeles

That wind it blowed and the dust got black
 And now we're known as refugees
 We're stranded now on the 66 highway
 From old Oklahoma to Los Angeles

Disc 4: **TRACK 12 – THE FLOOD THAT TOOK OVER 100 LIVES**

EL: Well, that's fine, Woody. I guess you must have some kind of disaster song somewhere amongst all these songs. Something that happened to these people who were living down by the river, all these Okies stranded out there.

WG: Well, huh, I got one here that I wrote up. When all of these Okies got to California, it was a sort of natural thing for 'em to drift down to all the river bottoms, along all the mountain streams and all the creeks. A lot of people wondered why it was that they camped in those places but one of the main reasons was that they had plenty of water and they also couldn't make any money so they had to depend a whole lot on the fish that they could catch. I know that I have been in a lot of Okie camps in California where they didn't make a dollar every two weeks. A hard-workin' man didn't make a dollar every two weeks and all he depended on was maybe the fish that he could catch along some of the rivers or some of the creeks. So, along these rivers and creeks that all these Okies was camped around, why, there was a lot of things happened that sort of go down as a black mark somewhere or another in history because, uh, these mountain streams and all these rivers had a habit of having a cloudburst, big rains and cloudbursts and they would hit up on the mountains and they would flood all them rivers and they'd flood all them creeks and in fifteen minutes times a lot of times,

it would wash away five or six hundred families of people and keep and totally take everything they had in this world. In 1934, on New Year's night was one of the worst that ever hit and uh, this was while everybody in Los Angeles was celebratin' New Year's night in 1934 and in about fifteen minutes there was one of the worst floods hit that ever hit anywhere, at any time, and it killed over a hundred people and that many was reported, I guess there was a hundred more that never was reported, but then they had all the morgues and all the funeral homes and all the church houses full of people that was drowned in this storm and it rolled great big boulders down all the streets of Montrose, California, Tujunga, California, and all down the streets of Glendale, California, Northern Burbank, California, and Los Angeles, California the same thing and I've got a song here that I made up about that. The name of this is "The New Year's Flood."

Disc 4: TRACK 13 – "LOS ANGELES NEW YEAR'S FLOOD"

Kind friend, do you remember on that fatal New Year's night
 The lights of Old Los Angeles was a flickerin' oh so bright
 A cloud burst hit the mountains, it swept away our homes
 And a hundred souls was taken in that fatal New Year's flood

'Twas in the early springtime of 1934
 The waters filled the canyons, through the city poured
 Our little tots was sleeping and the town was bright and gay
 We could not see the sorrow of that dawning New Years Day

The little towns of Montrose, Glendale, and Burbank, too
 From Flint Ridge to Tujunga along that mountain blue
 They all were struck like lightnin'. Down that mountain rolled
 The wild Los Angeles river in that fatal New Year's flood

The news that rocked the nation as of that story told
 A million hearts was grievin' for the dear ones that they loved
 This world will long remember the dear ones that we loved
 That crossed that golden river in that fatal New Year's flood.

[1941 SESSIONS – AFS 4491 A1, 2]

[Although not noted in spoken word on the actual recording, the remainder of the Library of Congress recordings were made on January 4, 1941 at the Library's Phonoduplication Service studio on January 4, 1941 by Alan Lomax and John Langenegger, all cut on one 16-inch disc.]

Disc 4: TRACK 14 – A GOOD HORSE

WG: Ya know, back where I come from, if a feller don't like a good horse and a pretty gal, about the first two best things on his list, why, everybody figures he is sort of mixed up in his head. This old song here is one that's got a lot of different names, Stew Ball and Ski Ball and Skew Ball and ever other kind of ball. I remember the feller that first taught me the first verse of this lived in a little ole boxcar shack down in an oil boom town in Oklahoma and he was an oil well driller and he just sung me one verse of it and that one verse kinda stuck in my head some way or another and since that time I've heard verses here and verses yonder and every different kind of verse you could think of, several different ways. But, uh, Ski Ball is one of the most famous racehorses that ever lived, I reckon.

Disc 4: TRACK 15 – “STEWBALL”

Ski Ball was a good horse
And he held a high head
And the mane on his foretop
Is fine as silk thread
Well, I rode him in Texas
And I rode him in Maine
And I never lost a dollar
I always did gain

Come all of you gamblers,
From far and near
Don't bet your gold dollars
On the little gray mare

She's likely to stumble
She's likely to fall
But you'll never lose a dollar
On my noble Stew Ball

As they went riding
About half way 'round
Well, the gray mare she stumbled
and fell to the ground

And away out yonder
Ahead of them all
Come a dancin' and prancin'
My noble Stew Ball

As they went riding
Over yonder's hill
Well, I looked down his foreleg
And I spied old Wild Bill

Set tight in your saddle
Don't fear nor fall
And you'll never lose a dollar
On the noble Ski Ball

Set tight in your saddle
Let slack on your reins
And you never will lose, boy
You always will gain

California's fast ponies
They're good horses, too
But I rode my Stew Ball-ly
And around them we flew

Kentucky's green meadows
 Raise good horses, too
 But I rode my Stew Ball-ly
 And around them we flew

Sit tight in your saddle
 Don't fear nor fall
 And you'll never lose a dollar
 On the noble Stew Ball

I ramble and I gamble
 Wherever I go
 And I like my fast women
 and fast horses, too

I'm friendly to strangers
 I love a good gal
 And I love my Stew Ball-ly
 The best in the world

Come all you hustlers from far and near
 Don't lay your gold dollars on the little gray mare
 She's likely to stumble
 And likely to fall
 And you'll never lose a dollar
 On my noble Stew Ball

Disc 4: **TRACK 16 – INTERLUDE**

AL: That was about the best make-up of a song ya didn't know the words off I've heard yet, Woody. See if you can do the same thing on "Stagger Lee." Tell us who Stagger Lee was.

WG: Stagger Lee, he's got about as good a reputation as Jesse James worked up. Maybe down South, in his country, uh, more, and I think his name traces back plumb over to England somewhere. I don't know where it first broke loose, but some feller says it was boat and some fellers said he worked on a boat and some people said he owned a whole string of boats, but, anyhow, he was a bad man and his name was Stagger Lee.

Disc 4: **TRACK 17 – "STAGGER LEE"**

Stagger Lee was a bad man
 Everybody knows
 He caused a lot of trouble
 About everywhere he goes
 And he's a bad man and his name is Stagger Lee.

Stagger Lee, Stagger Lee, what're ya gonna do about that
 Stagger Lee killed Billy DeLyons about a five-dollar Stetson hat
 Poor boy, well his name was Stagger Lee

Stagger Lee took his pistol
 And he shot poor Billy dead
 Shot him down on the gamblin' hall

And he shot him full of lead
 And he was a bad man
 And his name was Stagger Lee

A judge said Mr. Stagger Lee
 Mr. Stagger Lee
 Well, I'm a gonna hang your body up and
 set your spirit free
 You're a bad man
 And your name is Stagger Lee

Billy DeLyon said Stagger Lee
 Please don't take my life
 I've got two little babes
 And a darlin' lovin' wife
 You're a bad man
 Oh, Mr. Stagger Lee

What, I care about your two little babes
 Your darlin' lovin' wife
 You done stole my Stetson hat
 And I'm bound to take your life
 I'm a bad man
 and my name is Stagger Lee

Hangin' on his gallows
 With his head way up high
 Midnight when they killed him
 And they was all glad to see him die
 He's a bad man
 And his name is Stagger Lee

Disc 4: **TRACK 18 – INTERLUDE**

WG: I guess that is about all of that... 'course it goes on and on all night.

Here's a piece now called the "One Dime Blues." This is one that a lot of people's going to be singing it, somebody don't get a job pretty quick. Blind Lemon Jefferson was the feller that first started this one and uh, naturally the colored people's got several verses that they added on themselves and everywhere you go ya find people that's got something to add to the "One Dime Blues."

Disc 4: **TRACK 19 – "ONE DIME BLUES"**

I was standin' on Broadway Street one day
 Standin' on old Broadway Street one day
 Standin' down on Broadway Street one day
 One dime was all that I had

One dime was all that I had
 One dime was all that I had
 One dime was all that I had
 That wasn't enough to ride no taxi cab

The sky was cloudy, Lord, and it looked like rain
 The sky was cloudy and it looked like rain
 I said the sky was cloudy and it looked like rain
 So I stepped downstairs and I caught me a subway train

I'm a-leaving old New York town behind
 I'm a-leavin' old New York town behind
 Leavin' old New York town behind
 I've got my troubles on my mind

Every good man gets a little hard luck sometime
 I guess every good man gets a little hard luck sometime
 I guess every good man gets a little hard luck sometime
 Gets broke and ain't got a dime

Mama, don't treat your daughter mean
 Mama, don't treat your daughter mean
 Mama, don't treat your daughter mean
 That's the meanest damn thing that a man most ever seen

And do you want your friends to be buried like Jesse James
 Do you want your friends to be buried like Jesse James
 Do you want your friends to be buried like Jesse James
 Grab a six shooter and stick up some passenger train

I'm broke. I ain't got a dime
 I'm broke and I ain't got a dime
 I'm broke and ain't got a dime
 I guess every good politician gets a little hard luck sometimes

Disc 4: TRACK 20 – INTERLUDE

[There is some background conversation at this point.]

[AFS 4491 B1, 2, 3, 4]

WG: Here is one of the best ole cowboy songs I guess there is in the whole world. Several different ways of singin' it, here is about the most cheerful way I know of. The name of this is "Whoop-ee-ti-yi-yo, Get Along Little Dogies"

Disc 4: TRACK 21 – "GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES"

As I walked out one morning for pleasure
 I spied a poor cowboy ridin' along
 And his hat was knocked back and his spurs was a-jinglin'
 As he rode toward me was a-singin' this song

Whoop-ee-ti-yi-yo, get along, you little dogies
 It's your misfortune, t'ain't none of my own
 Whoop-ee-ti-yi-yo, get along, you little dogies
 You know that Wyoming's gonna be your new home

It's early in the mornin' we round up the dogies
 We dehorn and brand 'em and bob off their tails
 Throw all the biscuits back in the chuck wagon
 Roll the little dogies out on the long trail

Whoop-ee-ki-yi-yo, get along, you little dogies
 It's your misfortune, t'ain't none of my own
 Whoop-ee-ki-yi-yo, get along, you little dogies
 You know that Wyoming will be your new home

Well, I first took to drinkin' and then to card playin'
 And I went down on Reno Street, most ever' night,
 Well, I went down to the gamblin' hall, got into trouble,
 and I had to leave town before it got light
 Singing, get along, get along, get along, you little dogies
 It is your misfortune, t'ain't none of my own
 Whoop-ee-ti-yi-yo, get along, little dogies
 You know Wyoming gonna be your new home

Whoop-ee-ti-yi-yo, get along you little dogies
 Well it is your misfortune, t'ain't none of my own
 Whoop-ee-ti-yi-yo, get along, you little dogies
 You know that the slaughter house will be your new home

Disc 4: **TRACK 22 – INTERLUDE**

WG: Here is another one of the old songs, I guess, that is amongst the best-known ones, of all the cowboy songs that there is. Uh, the boys all like to hear "The Trail to Mexico." This is good for about a two-bit tip in any saloon up and down the road long towards midnight. If ya get there earlier, of course, why, ya can't expect much, cause they ain't started, uh, ain't ready to listen.

Disc 4: **TRACK 23 – "THE TRAIL TO MEXICO"**

'Twas in the year of eighty three
 When A. J. Simpson, well, he hired me
 And he said, "Young feller, well, I want you to go
 And follow my cattle into Mexico."

I got a letter from the girl I loved
 She said she'd found her a bullet, quit your love
 She said you can go where the dogies go
 You can follow your cattle into Mexico

Well, the trail was long and the herd rolled slow
 While the dogies rolled on into Mexico
 From old Fort Worth to Albuquerque
 Down that trail to Mexico

I forgot that song... (laughs)

Disc 4: TRACK 24 – “GYPSY DAVY”

It was late last night when my lord come home
 Inquiring 'bout his lady
 The only answer he received
 She's gone with the gypsy Davy
 gone with the gypsy Dave

Go saddle for me my buckskin hoss and a hundred dollar saddle
 Point out to me their wagon tracks
 and after them I'll travel
 after them I'll ride

Well, I had not rode 'til the midnight moon
 'Til he saw the campfire gleamin'
 And he heard the gypsy's big guitar
 and the voice of the lady singin'
 The song of the gypsy Dave

Well, have you forsaken your house and home
 Have you forsaken your baby
 Have you forsaken your husband, dear,
 to go with the gypsy Davy,
 And sing with the gypsy Dave

Yes, I've forsaken my house and home
 To go with the gypsy Davy
 And I'll forsake my husband dear,
 but not my blue-eyed baby
 Not my blue-eyed babe

She'll have to leave her husband dear
 and her butlers and her ladies
 But the tears come a-tricklin' down her cheeks
 When she thought about her blue-eyed baby
 and thought of her blue-eyed babe

Take off, take off your buckskin boots
 made of Spanish leather
 And give to me your lily-white hand
 and we will go back home together
 Go back home again

Take off, take off your buckskin gloves
 made of Spanish leather
 And give to me your lily-white hand
 and go back home together
 Go back home again

(speaks: hey Sue, hello Sue)

No, I won't take off my buckskin gloves
 made of Spanish leather
 I'll go my way from day to day
 and sing with the gypsy Davy
 Sing with the gypsy Dave

Disc 4: **TRACK 25 – INTRODUCING AN OLD SONG**

WG: Here is an old song, I don't know how old it is, but, a mighty interestin' thing, the boy that taught me this song was an ol' cowboy out about sixty miles this side of Amarillo, Texas. Times got so hard down in their farm that about the only thing they had left on their place that looked anything like a piece of wood was an old, uh, an old, uh, rotten white oak wagon there. And he took the wagon tongue and made him a guitar neck an' whittled it down. And he took the wagon sideboards and he split 'em and thinned 'em down with sandpaper n stuff, 'til he finally had him a white oak guitar made out of it. And we got stranded out there one time in one of the durndest blizzards ya ever seen. The snow was so deep the cows was standin' round on top of the barns, ya know, to get out of the drifts. And he taught me this song while the weather was clearing up: "Hard, Ain't It Hard."

Disc 4: **TRACK 26 – "HARD, AIN'T IT HARD"**

There is a house in this old town
 Where my true love lays around
 Takes other women right down on his knee
 And he sings them a little song he won't sing me

Well, it's a hard and it's hard, ain't it hard
 Just to love one that never did love you
 Well, it's hard and it's hard, ain't it hard, great God,
 To love one that never will be true

First time that I saw my true love
 He was passin' by my door
 Last time I saw his false-hearted smile
 He was dead on his coolin' board

Hard and it's hard, ain't it hard
 Just to love one that never did love you
 Well, it's a-hard and it's hard, ain't it hard, great God,
 To love one that never will be true

It was late one night when my true love come in
 Rapping, rapping on my door
 I jumped out in a fit of jealousy
 Said true love, don't knock here anymore

'Cause it's hard, it's hard, ain't it hard
 Just to love one that never did love you
 Well, it's hard and it's hard, ain't it hard, great God,
 To love one that never will be true

Don't go to drinking and gambling
 Don't go there your sorrows to drown
 'Cause that old liquor place is a low-down disgrace
 It's the meanest damn place in this town

And it's hard, it's hard, ain't it hard
To love one that never will love you
It's a-hard and it's hard, ain't it hard, great God,
To love one that never will be true

Hard, it's hard, ain't it hard
To love one that never will be true
It's hard and it's hard, ain't it hard, great God,
To love one that never did love you.



T H E L Y R I C S F O R T H E

C O L U M B I A

R I V E R

C O L L E C T I O N

The lyrics of most of these songs differ somewhat from those available on various websites, including the Woody Guthrie Archives site. We have tried here to faithfully transcribe the words Woody sang on the actual recordings. In many instances, the versions Woody sang here differ from those he sang, or which were written, elsewhere – even in the manuscripts as provided by the BPA. As a creative songwriter and singer, it's only natural that he sometimes changed the words to songs, consciously or unconsciously, at times adding to the lyrics we hear here and at other times dropping stanzas, singing different words, and the like. As he himself once declared, "A folk singer never sings a song the same way twice."

When Nelson C. Hazeltine of the BPA sent copies of the songs Guthrie had written to Woody himself on January 19, 1945, we can't know for sure what those lyric sheets represented. There were 24 lyrics in the package. Were they Woody's original work, without any changes made to them by Stephen Kahn in service to the film, or by anybody else? Had they perhaps been edited or adapted in some way?

We do know that some of the lyrics as currently presented on the Woody Guthrie Archives website *cannot* match the actual words he wrote while with the BPA. His tenure at the BPA ended on June 11, 1941. Hitler had not yet launched his surprise attack on Germany's erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union. That came on June 22, 1941 and up until that date, Woody was hewing to the anti-intervention line. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was still six months in the future. To be aggressively anti-Hitler before Third Reich armed forces launched their offensive against Stalin's USSR did not fit with anti-interventionism. And yet the recording here contains the stanza:

There was a man across the ocean, boys, I guess you know him well.
His name was Adolf Hitler; we'll blow his soul to Hell.
We'll kick him in the panzers and put him on the run,
That'll be the biggest thing that man has ever done.

– from "The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done"

These words had to have been written after the Nazi invasion of Poland and then Russia. There is no way they were written while Woody was based in Portland during the month of his engagement by the BPA. And yet they appear on the acetates which had been preserved by BPA employees. Woody's lyrics for the song as presented on the Guthrie Archives website and in the Columbia River songbook include up to a dozen stanzas which were not recorded. One of them is the stanza presented above. There is another line (in the present tense) which reads "This Nazi job's a tough 'un, it'll take us everyone" and another line: "We'll stop the Axis rattlesnakes and thieves of old Nippon." The version of the manuscript clearly postdates the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

In listening to the recorded version of the song presented on this set, one can detect a pause or break in the action just prior to Woody singing the lines about Hitler and his panzers. The audio suggests that perhaps this segment was grafted on to the rest of the song or edited into a shortened version of the overall song. It's a fair guess that it had been recorded – perhaps the whole song, with this edited in – during the sessions in New York at Reeves Sound Studios in May 1942 when the war was on in earnest. Kahn was there, asking Woody to re-record certain selections for the intended film on a synchronization disc which could be used to pair up with the film. The "panzers stanza" was indeed used in the film, and only a shortened version of the song would really work in the film – six stanzas was better than 17 or 18. We can speculate that Woody recorded the complete version at the New York session, but that Kahn pulled this stanza, which in the full lyrics would have



ACETATE RECORDINGS OF BPA SONGS PRESERVED BY GORDON MACNAB.

been stanza 13 and edited into sixth place, lopping off the rest of the song but ended on a note that suited the times.

There were really two locations at which Woody recorded acetate discs: the basement studio in the BPA's Portland headquarters and at Reeves Sound Studios in New York. They were cut on a Rek-o-kut acetate disc cutter machine. Bill Murlin offers an educated guess that it's likely Woody recorded a more or less equal number at each location, adding, "The acetate discs I recovered were copies made from the originals recorded in Portland. The originals have not been found. There were about a dozen songs recorded. Other than what is recorded in the movie soundtrack, I have not found those better quality recordings in any form. The songs in the movie sound track were chopped and edited."

What happened to the original synchronization disc cut in New York? "That disc has never been found since. I tried several places. I have papers from Reeves saying when the disc was sent to BPA. I have checked with the studio that made the movie and with a number of former BPA employees. I went through Kahn's papers in his den after his death. No disc. There are some family archives I have not searched, such as Gunther Von Fritsch, who produced the BPA movies and took pictures of Guthrie in Los Angeles in 1941 just before the BPA job began. I have never found copies of any of those pictures except the one Mary gave me of Woody, her and the kids sitting on the stoop of a rundown shack...apparently where they lived in Los Angeles in early 1941. That's a bunch of research just itchin' to get done."¹

The original *Columbia River Collection* album used the Folkways version of "Pastures of Plenty" but there had been a minor-key version of the song which Woody had originally recorded for the BPA, segments of which appeared in the sound track for the movie, *The Columbia*. The original lyrics overlap considerably, but contain additional lyrics not recorded for Asch. While the movie soundtrack version is good quality, it is incomplete, having been chopped and edited to fit movie scenes. A vinyl-disc version of the song was of terrible quality and as Murlin has explained, the decision to use commercial recordings for six of the tracks on the original *Columbia River Collection* album was made because they were the best quality recordings to represent those songs even if they did not come from acetates but from recordings made well after the BPA years. The audio from the sole remaining master of "Pastures of Plenty" was so disappointing that Murlin elected to go with the Folkways recording, but the memory of it always remained. The engineers at the National Archives and Paul Blakemore of the Concord Music Group were able to restore the sound and we are pleased to be able to present Woody's original version of the song here for the first time.

"Hard Travelin'" also comes courtesy of Folkways Records. The original lyrics in the BPA manuscript differ greatly from the recorded version, which contains six stanzas and not just the original four. A seventh stanza appears on the Guthrie Archives website.

We also note that not all of the lyrics Woody wrote during his month in Portland were exclusively written during that time. As he notes in his remarks, even though he dates the song as written on May 12, 1941, he acknowledges that it is a version of a song he'd begun earlier, in New York: "I wrote my first Jackhammer Blues when I was a livin' in a little old hotel up in New York Town, and the boys was a takin' up the pavement just below my window." But in the version he wrote for the BPA, six of the verses have clear reference to the Pacific Northwest, the building of dams, and the salmon in the rivers.



BILL MURLIN, AT THE TIME OF HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE BPA



THE BONNEVILLE DAM, 1940.



Disc 5: **TRACK 1 – INTRODUCTION**

These are songs by Woody Guthrie. They are made from the original recording that he made in the office of the Bonneville Power Administration in May 1941.

Disc 5: **TRACK 2 – “PASTURES OF PLENTY”**

Pastures of Plenty

It's a mighty hard row that our poor hand has hoed
 And our poor feet have traveled a hot dusty road
 Out of this Dust Bowl and westward we rolled
 And your deserts are hot and your mountains are cold

I picked up a rich clod of dirt in my hand
 I crumble it back into strong, fertile land
 The greatest desire in this world that I know
 Is to work on my land where there's green things that grow.

I think of the dust and the days that are gone
 And the day that's to come on a farm of our own
 One turn of the wheel and the waters will flow
 'Cross the green growing fields down the hot thirsty road

Go down in the canyon and there you will see
 Grand Coulee showers her blessings on me
 Lights for the cities, for factories and mills
 Green pastures of plenty from dry barren hills

It's always we've rambled, that river and I
 It's here on her banks I will work till I die
 My land I'll defend with my life if it be
 'Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free

It's always we've rambled, that river and I
 It's here on her banks I will work till I die
 My land I'll defend with my life if need be
 'Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free.

Oregon Trail

“This song, the words and music, were composed by W. W. (Woody) Guthrie, not at my home but on the high banks of the Columbia River, for the Department of Interior, Bonneville Power Administration, 811 Northeast Oregon Street, Portland, Oregon, on the fourteenth day of May, in the year of Nineteen hundred and Forty One.”

I been a-grubbin’ on a little farm on the flat and windy
plains
I been a-listenin’ to the hungry cattle bawl.
I’m gonna pack my wife and kids,
I’m gonna hit that western road.
I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this comin’ fall.

I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this comin’ fall,
Hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall,
Where the good rain falls a-plenty
And the crops and orchards grow
I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall.

Well, my land is dry and cracklin’
and my chickens they’re a-cacklin’
‘Cause the dirt and dust is a-gettin’ in their craw
They’ve been a-layin’ flint rock eggs
I had to bust ‘em with a sledge
And I’m gonna hit that Oregon trail this comin’ fall.

I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this comin’ fall,
Hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall,
Where the good rain falls a-plenty
And the crops and orchards grow
I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall.

Well, my hogs and pigs are squealin’
They’re a-rockin’ and a-reelin’
‘Cause there ain’t no water to waller in the draw
I’m gonna grab one by his tail
I’m gonna take him down a western trail
And we’ll hit that Oregon trail this comin’ fall.

Now my good old horse is bony
Yes, he’s dry and hungry, too
You can see his ribs three-quarters of a mile
Throw the kids upon his back
And the bay horse and the black
And we’ll hit that Oregon trail this comin’ fall.

I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this comin’ fall,
Hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall,
Where the good rain falls a-plenty
Where the crops and orchards grow
I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall.

Well, my wife gets sort of ailin’
When that mean old dust is sailin’
And she wishes for the days beyond recall
If the work there’s in the future
In that north Pacific land
So we’ll hit that Oregon trail this comin’ fall.

I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this comin’ fall,
Hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall,
Where the good rain falls a-plenty
And the crops and orchards grow
I’m gonna hit that Oregon Trail this coming fall.

Disc 5: TRACK 4 – “ROLL ON COLUMBIA”

Roll On Columbia

“Note: The chorus of this song can be sung after every verse, or after every two or three verses, as you like. This song was wrote up by an Oakie passing through your country, and I’m pretty certain that everybody just first a coming into this country has got some such similar song in his or her head, but times is such that they just can’t sing it out loud so you might not hear it.”—Woody Guthrie, outskirts of Portland, Oregon, 5-12-1941.

Woody wrote the above note. Bill Murlin adds, “To my knowledge, Woody never commercially recorded this song. This recording on a BPA acetate disc, as far as I know, is the only recording of this song sung and played by Woody. The song certainly has been recorded by others many times and has become a school-kid anthem, especially in the Northwest.”

“Roll On Columbia” is designated as the official folk song of the State of Washington.

Green Douglas fir where the waters cut through.
Down her wild mountains and canyons she flew.
Canadian Northwest to the ocean so blue,
It’s roll on, Columbia, roll on!

Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Your power is turning our darkness to dawn,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Other great rivers add power to you,
Yakima, Snake, and the Klickitat, too,
Sandy, Willamette, and Hood River, too;
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

It’s there on your banks that we fought many a fight,
Sheridan’s boys in the blockhouse that night,
They saw us in death but never in flight,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Your power is turning our darkness to dawn,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Our loved ones we lost there at Coe’s little store
By fireball and rifle, a dozen or more
We won by the Mary and soldiers she bore
Roll on, Columbia, roll on

Remember the trial when the battle was won
The wild Indian warriors to the tall timber run
We hung every Indian with smoke in his gun
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Year after year, we had tedious trials
Fighting the rapids at Cascades and Dalles
The Injuns rest peaceful on Memaloose Isle
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Your power is turning our darkness to dawn,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

At Bonneville now there is ships in the locks,
Waters have risen and drowned the rocks,
Shiploads of plenty will steam in the docks,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

On up the river at Grand Coulee Dam,
Mightiest thing ever built by a man,
To run the great factories for old Uncle Sam
It’s roll on, Columbia, roll on.

Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.
Your power is turning our darkness to dawn,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on.

New Found Land

Well, I just got up to my new-found land,
My new-found land, my new-found land.
I just got up to my new-found land,
I'm a-livin' in the light of the morning.

I built me a house of a new-cut tree,
A new-cut tree, a new-cut tree.
I built me a house of a new-cut tree,
I'm a-livin' in the light of the morning.

Well, I built my house on a new-cut stone,
A new-cut stone, a new-cut stone.
I built my house on a new-cut stone,
I'm a-livin' in the light of the morning,
Livin' in the light of the morning.

I lit my lamp with a new-found light,
A new-found light, a new-found light,
I lit my lamp with a new-found light
And I'm livin' in the light of the morning.

Plant my seeds in new-dug ground,
The new-dug ground, the new-dug ground.
I'm plantin' my seed in the new-dug ground
I'm livin' in the light of the morning,
Livin' in the light of the morning.

I brought my child for my new-found wife,
My new-found wife, my new-found wife.
I brought the child for my new-found wife
A-livin' in the light of the morning,
Livin' in the light of the morning.

Well, I just got up to my new-found land,
My new-found land, my new-found land.
I just got up to my new-found land,
I'm a-livin' in the light of the morning,
Livin' in the light of the morning.



LOOKING SOUTHWEST AT GRAND COULEE DAM. MARCH 31, 1941.

DRUM GATE IN BAY #7 AT GRAND COULEE DAM. MAY 6, 1941. THIS WAS TAKEN ONE WEEK BEFORE WOODY SIGNED ON WITH THE BPA.



Talking Columbia

Down along the river, just a-settin' on a rock,
Watching the boats in the Bonneville Lock.
Gate swings open, the barge sails in,
Toots 'r whistle, she's gone again.
Gasoline goin' up, wheat comin' down.

Well, I filled up my hat brim, drunk a little taste,
I thought about a river just a-goin' to waste,
I thought about the dust, I thought about the sand,
I thought about the people, I thought about the land.
Folks runnin' all around over creation,
Lookin' for a little place, something to do.

Water come a-splashin' through the dam
Tricklin' down across the land
Powerhouse sings and a generator whines
And down the hill comes this big power line.
Electricity runnin' all around.
Cheaper than rainwater.

Lots of folks around the country
Politicians and such
Said the old Columbia would never amount to much
Fellers back East done a lot of squawkin',
And some of 'em a-talking and some of them a-bawkin'
But with all their figures and all their books,
Them boys didn't know their royal Chinooks.
It's a good river.
It just needs a couple more dozen big power dams scattered up and down it.
Keeping folks busy.

Well, I pulled out my pencil. I scribbled this song,
Figured all them salmon just couldn't be wrong.
Them salmon fish is pretty shrewd,
You know, they got senators and politicians, too!
Just about like a president, they run ever' four years.

You just watch this river, though, pretty soon
Everybody's goin' to be changin' their tune.
The big Grand Coulee and the Bonneville Dam
There's gonna need a lot more of them scattered all over the land.
Just a drop in the bucket.

Need dams at Umatilla Rapids, The Dalles, Foster Creek, and Rocky Reach, and Arlington, and Chelan and a thousand other sites
Turn out everything from fertilizer to atomic bedrooms and plastic trimmings
And everything oughta be plastic.

Well, the folks need houses and stuff to eat
And the folks need the metals and the folks need wheat
Folks need water and power dams, and, uh...
Folks need people and the people need the land.

The whole big Pacific Northwest up in here ought to be run – the way I see it – by elec-a-tric-i-ty.
This here same electricity ought to jump and crackle and sparkle
And jump, I think, around the whole world.

BPA DISC OF “TALKING COLUMBIA BLUES”



Disc 5: TRACK 7 – “ROLL, COLUMBIA, ROLL”

Roll, Columbia, Roll

There's a great and peaceful river in a land that's fair to see
 Where the Douglas fir tree whispers to the snow-capped mountain breeze
 The cliffs are solid granite and the valley's always green
 This is just as close to heaven as my traveling feet have been

CHORUS:

Roll, Columbia, won't you roll, roll, roll
 Roll, Columbia, won't you roll, roll, roll

Stand upon her timbered mountain, look across her silver strand
 See the crops and orchards springing to the touch of nature's hand
 And it's further up the river where your eye will meet the skies
 Where you'll see the steel and concrete of the big Grand Coulee rise

CHORUS

There at Priest and Cascade Rapids men have labored day and night
 Matched their strength against the river in its wild and reckless flight
 Boats and rafts were beat to splinters but it left men dreams to dream
 Of the day that they would conquer that wild and wasted stream

CHORUS

Uncle Sam took the challenge in the year of '33
 For the farmers and the workers and for all of humanity
 Now, river, you can ramble where the sun sets in the sea
 But while you're rambling, river, you can do some work for me

CHORUS

Now there's full three million horses charged with Coulee's 'lectric power
 Day and night they'll run the factory and they never will get tired
 Well, a coal mine gets dug out and an oil well it runs dry
 But Uncle Sam will find his power where the river meets the sky

CHORUS

The fourth stanza is almost the same as one which appears in Woody's song "Grand Coulee Dam." It's not uncommon in folk music to have verses which move from one song to another, and it helps illustrate Woody's own point about never singing the same song the same way twice.

Columbia’s Waters

“Good Morning, Mister Captain!”

“Good morning, Man!”

I’m just a stranger travelin’ through your land;
Do you need a right good worker
On your big Grand Coulee Dam?

I’d like to settle down but I ramble all the time,
I’d like to settle down with this woman and kids of
mine;
But a place to settle down, Captain,
Is a pretty hard place to find!

I like to work, and I work every time I can.
I got a callus in the palm of both o’ my hands.
Ramblin’ around from place to place
Is hard on a family man.

Well, I like to work, ain’t a-gonna beg and steal.
The more I’m workin’ the better it makes me feel.
But my wife and kid get juberous
Every time they miss a meal.

I’m a hardrock man, and I come from a hardrock town
Back in my home town I was a man of some renown
When I’d take a jackhammer down in a hole
There gonna be some rock come down.

That Columbia River
Rolls right down the line;
Columbia waters tastes like sparklin’ wine;
But the waters in the Dust Bowl taste like picklin’
brine.

The money I draw from a-workin’ on the Coulee Dam;
My wife will meet me at the kitchen door stretchin’
out her hand;
She’ll make a little down payment
On a forty-acre tract of land.

Well, we’ll farm along the river, work it from sun to
sun;
Walk along the river and listen to the factories hum;
I think to myself, great goodness alive, look what we’ve
done done.

Take some water from the mountain, mix it up with
rain.

Take some metal from a mountain, and melt it up
again;

Stir it up with power from the Grand Coulee Dam,
And you’ve got a big factory.

Take some water from the valley, mix it up with snow;
Take a ramblin’ family travelin’ down this road;
Mix it up with a little bit of sunshine,
Man, and you ought to see the green things grow!

Standing on the mountain, looking out across the sea
Columbia River’s a mighty pretty sight to see
Gonna settle down and live the rest of my life
By the C-O-U-L-double E.

BPA DISC OF “COLUMBIA’S WATERS”



Disc 5: TRACK 9 – “RAMBLIN’ BLUES”

Ramblin’ Blues

Standing down in Portland town one day
 I was standing down in Portland town one day
 I was standing down in Portland town one day
 Hey, hey, hey, hey.

I come from Louisiana where the redfish in the bay;
 I come from Louisiana where the redfish in the bay;
 Lord, I come from Louisiana where the redfish in the bay;
 Hey, hey, hey, hey!

And which-a-way does the Columbia River run?
 Said, which-a-way does Columbia River run?
 Which-a-way does the Columbia River run?
 From the Canadian Rockies to the ocean of the settin’ sun.

Well, how many rivers has they got in-a Portland town?
 I said, How many rivers has they got in Portland town?
 Lord, how many rivers have you got in-a Portland town?
 Hey, the Columbia River is the river that they all run down.

I walk down the road and I seen your Bonneville Dam;
 Walk down the road and I see your Bonneville Dam;
 Walk the rocky road and I see your Bonneville Dam;
 Electricity run the factories making airplanes for Uncle Sam.

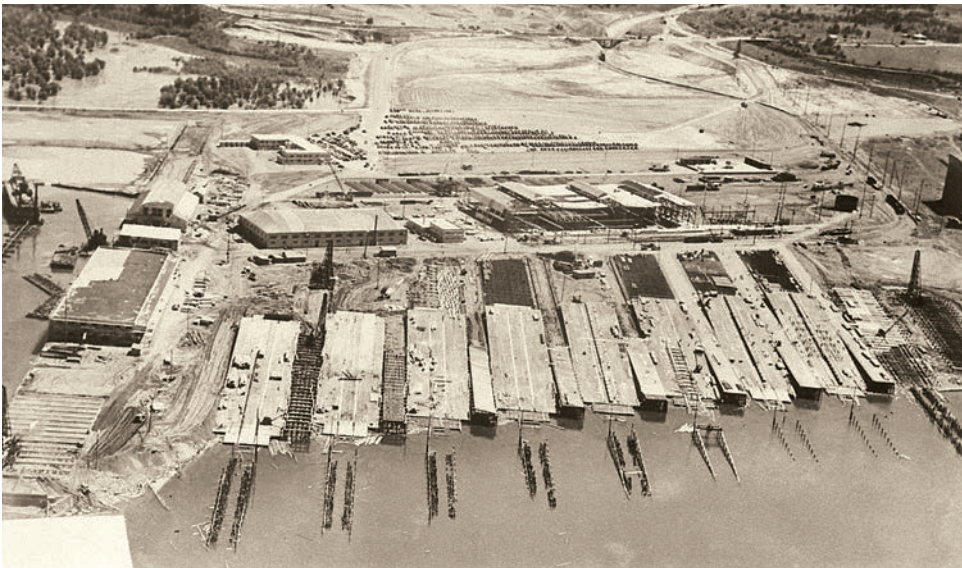
THE FAMOUS “B” STREET OF GRAND COULEE, AUGUST 1941.





DRUM GATE IN LOWERED POSITION AT GRAND COULEE DAM. MAY 20, 1941. GIVEN THE DATE, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT WOODY WAS THERE THIS VERY DAY.

OREGON SHIPBUILDING COMPANY, PORTLAND. 1941.



Disc 5: TRACK 10 – “IT TAKES A MARRIED MAN”

It Takes A Married Man

Well, you single boys can ramble, you single boys can roam,
But it takes a married man, boys, to sing a worried song.
A married man, and a worried song.

Once I used to ramble, I sung a single song,
Now I am married, boys, I had to change my tune.
And a married man, he sings a worried song.

I was rough and I was rowdy when I led a single life
But I got to take it easy and I got myself a wife.
I'm a married man and I'm singin' a worried song.

Got six kids to feed and educate
It's really got me thinking, not a nickel on this place.
A married man and I'm singin' a worried song.

I am very happy married and I got to save my dough
We've got six children, expecting several more.
It's a married man and a worried song.

Yes, we got six little children, expecting several more
Kids run out like cattle when you open up the door.
I'm a married man, I'm singing a worried song.

Yes, you single boys can ramble and can lead a rowdy life
You'll have to take it easy when you get yourself a wife
You'll be singing a worried song.

You will have a flock of children and others coming on
It takes a married man, boys, to sing a worried song.
I'm a married man, I know some worried song.

Hard Travelin’

I’ve been havin’ some hard travelin’, I thought you knowed
 I’ve been havin’ some hard travelin’, way down the road
 I’ve been havin’ some hard travelin’, hard ramblin’, hard gamblin’
 I’ve been havin’ some hard travelin’, Lord

I’ve been ridin’ them fast rattlers, I thought you knowed
 I’ve been ridin’ them flat wheelers, way down the road
 I’ve been ridin’ them blind passengers, dead-enders, kickin’ up cinders
 I’ve been havin’ some hard travelin’, Lord

I’ve been hittin’ some hard-rock minin’, I thought you knowed
 I’ve been a-leanin’ on a pressure drill, way down the road
 Hammer flyin’, air-hose suckin’, six foot of mud, and I sure been a muckin’
 And I’ve been hittin’ some hard travelin’, Lord

I’ve been hittin’ some hard harvestin’, I thought you knowed
 North Dakota to Kansas City, way down the road
 Cuttin’ that wheat, stackin’ that hay, and I’m tryin’ make about a dollar a day
 And I’ve been havin’ some hard travelin’, Lord

I’ve been working that Pittsburgh steel, I thought you knowed
 I’ve been a dumpin’ that red-hot slag, way down the road
 I’ve been a-blasting, I’ve been a-firin’, I’ve been a-pourin’ red-hot iron
 I’ve been hittin’ some hard travelin’, Lord

I’ve been layin’ in a hard-rock jail, I thought you knowed
 I’ve been a-laying out 90 days, way down the road
 Damned old judge, he said to me, “It’s 90 days for vagrancy.”
 And I’ve been hittin’ some hard travelin’, Lord



LINE CONSTRUCTION AT THE DALLES, 1941.

Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done (also known as The Great Historical Bum)

I'm just a lonesome traveler, The Great Historical Bum.
Highly educated from history I have come.
I built the Rock of Ages, 'twas in the Year of One
And that was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I was straw boss on the Pyramids, and Tower of Babel, too;
Opened up the ocean, let the migrant children through,
I fought a million battles and I never lost a one,
That was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I clumb the rocky canyon where the Columbia River rolls,
Seen the salmon leaping, the rapids and the falls.
The big Grand Coulee Dam in the state of Washington
Is just about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

Three times the size of Boulder or the highest pyramid
Makes the Tower of Babel a plaything for a kid
From the rising of the river to the setting of the sun
The Coulee is the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I'd better quit my talking, 'cause I told you all I know,
But please remember, pardner, wherever you may go,
I've been from here to yonder, I've been from sun to sun.
Coulee Dam's the biggest thing that man has ever done.

[break]

There's a man across the ocean, boys, I guess you know him well,
His name is Adolf Hitler; we'll blow his soul to Hell.
We'll kick him in the panzers and put him on the run,
That'll be the biggest thing that man has ever done.

Disc 5: TRACK 13 – “JACKHAMMER BLUES”

Jackhammer Blues

“I wrote my first Jackhammer Blues when I was a livin’ in a little old hotel up in New York Town, and the boys was a takin’ up the pavement just below my window; but here it is set to a little faster time, and cut in one of the farthest, youngest, hardest working countries you ever seen, in the rough and tumble valley of the big Columbia River, out here in the good old Pacific Northwest, Oregon.” —Woody Guthrie
This song written May 12, 1941

Jackhammer John was a jackhammer man,
Born with a jackhammer in his hand.
Lord, Lord, and he had them jackhammer blues.

I built your roads and your buildings, too,
And I’m a-gonna build a dam or two.
Lord, Lord, well, I got them jackhammer blues.

I was born in Portland town,
I built every port from Alaska down;
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

Built your bridges, dug your mines,
Been in jail a thousand times.
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

Jackhammer, jackhammer, where ya been?
I been out chasin’ them gals again;
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

Jackhammer man from a jackhammer town
I can hammer on the hammer till the sun goes down,
Lord, Lord, well I got them jackhammer blues.

I hammered on the Boulder, hammered on the Butte,
Columbia River on a five-mile chute;
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.2

Workin’ on the Bonneville, hammered all night
Tryin’ to bring the people some electric light,
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

Hammered on the Bonneville, Coulee too,
And always broke when my job was through,
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

I hammered on the river from sun to sun,
And fifteen million salmon run;
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

Hammered in the rain, I hammered in the dust,
I hammered in the best and I hammered in the worst;
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

I got a jackhammer gal just as sweet as pie,
And I’m a-gonna hammer till the day I die,
Lord, Lord, I got them jackhammer blues.

BPA DISC OF “JACKHAMMER BLUES”



Song of the Coulee Dam

Way up in that Northwest land of the skies
Columbia River's headwaters rise.

Mountains and mountains covered with snows,
I'll follow that river wherever she goes.

It's ninety-two miles northwest of Spokane,
There you will see our Grand Coulee Dam.

Grand Coulee Dam, boys, Grand Coulee Dam,
The biggest thing built by the hand of a man.

Winter and summer, springtime and fall,
She makes her way down her high canyon wall.

Bright rippling waters, sparkling so bright,
It's seldom you see such a beautiful sight.

Power that sings, boys, and turbines that whine,
Waters back up to the Canadian line.

Four hundred miles of waters will stand
Rich farms will come from this hot desert sand.

Flood waters lift up the canyons so steep,
Making a lake a hundred foot deep.

Waters will roll to the north and the south,
Never again be afraid of the drought.

Waters will flow with the greatest of ease
A hundred miles west, boys, and a hundred miles east.

Factories that work for all of this land
Run on that power from the Grand Coulee Dam.

Ships on the ocean, ships in the skies,
Inch after inch, her waters will rise.

High lines will top your mountains and hills,
Driving your shops, your factories and mills.

Niagara Falls sends a mist to the sky,
But the Grand Coulee Dam, boys, is just twice as high,

She's forty-three hundred feet across her top,
Five hundred and fifty down to her rock.

I'll settle this land, boys, and I'll work like a man,
And I'll water my crops from that Grand Coulee Dam.

Grand Coulee Dam, boys, Grand Coulee Dam.
I wish we had a lot more Grand Coulee Dams.

Disc 5: TRACK 15 – “GRAND COULEE DAM”

Grand Coulee Dam

Well, the world has seven wonders, the travelers always tell,
Some gardens and some flowers, I guess you know them well,
But now the greatest wonder in Uncle Sam’s fair land,
It’s the king Columbia River and the big Grand Coulee Dam.

She heads up the Canadian mountains where the rippling
waters glide,
Come a-rumbling down the canyon just to meet the salty tide,
Of the wild Pacific Ocean where the sun sets in the West
And the big Grand Coulee country is the land I love the best.

At the Umatilla rapids, The Dalles, and at Cascades
Men have carved a mighty history on the sacrifices made
In the thundering, foaming waters of the big Celilo Falls
And the big Grand Coulee country I love the best of all.

She winds down the granite canyon and bends across the lea
Like a prancin’, dancin’ stallion down her seaway to the sea.
Cast your eyes upon the biggest thing yet built by human
hands
On the king Columbia River, it’s the big Grand Coulee Dam.

In the misty crystal glitter of that wild and windward spray,
Men have fought the pounding waters and have met a watery
grave,
Yes, it tore their boats to splinters but it gave men dreams to
dream
Of the day that Coulee Dam would cross that wild and wasted
stream.

There at Bonneville on the river is a green and beautiful sight
See the Bonneville Dam arising in the sun so clear and white.
The leaping salmon playing along the ladders and the locks
There’s a steamboat load of gasoline a-whistlin’ in the docks.

Uncle Sam took the challenge in the year of ‘thirty-three,
For the farmer and the factory and for all of you and me,
He said, “Roll along, Columbia, you can ramble to the sea,
But river, while you ramble, you can do some work for me.”

Now in Washington and Oregon you hear the factories hum,
Making chrome and making manganese and light
aluminum,
And the roaring Flying Fortress wings her way for Uncle
Sam,
Spawned upon the king Columbia by the great Grand Coulee
Dam.

Now in Washington and Oregon you hear the factories hum,
Making chrome and making manganese and light
aluminum,
And the roaring Flying Fortress wings her way for Uncle
Sam,
Spawned upon the king Columbia by the big Grand Coulee
Dam.

[The references to Boeing’s B-17 Flying Fortress bomber could well have been written in 1941, since the plane had been developed in the middle 1930s. The power generated by the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams enabled the United States to more quickly respond to the needs of war after Pearl Harbor. The great aluminum and aircraft factories in the Northwest contributed greatly to the war effort in the Pacific Theater of Operations. Bill Murlin notes that it also made possible arc welding in the Kaiser shipyards, leading to setting records for making liberty ships in ever shorter time periods.]



AMOS "TEX" WOOD, STANDING, HELPS POSITION ONE OF THE 120-POUND BOLTS WHICH HOLD THE ROTOR SHAFTS TOGETHER. GRAND COULEE DAM, FEBRUARY 11, 1941.

Disc 5: TRACK 16 – “WASHINGTON TALKIN’ BLUES”

Washington Talkin’ Blues

Long about Nineteen twenty-nine.
 I owned a little farm, was doin’ just fine.
 Raised a little row crop, raised some wheat
 Sold it over at the county seat,
 Drawed the money. Raised a family.

The dust come along, and the price went down,
 And I didn’t have the money when the bank come around;
 The tumble weeds and the black dust blowed,
 So we hit the trail to where the waters flowed,
 Way out across yonder somewhere.

Hot old rocks and the desert sand
 Made my mind run back to the dust bowl land,
 But my hopes was high as we rolled along
 To the Columbia River up in Washington.
 Lots of good rain, little piece of land. Feller might grow
 something.

We settled down on some cut-over land
 And I pulled up the brush and the stumps by hand.
 The sun burnt up my first crop of wheat
 And the river down the canyon just five hundred feet.
 Might as well been fifty miles. Couldn’t get no water.

We loaded our belongings and a-lit out for town
 Seen the old vacant houses and the farms all around,
 Folks a-leaving out, and if you’re asking me
 That’s just as lonesome as sight as a feller can see.
 Good land. You can grow anything you plant, if you can get
 the moisture.

I struck a lumber town and heard the big saw sing,
 And when business is good, why lumber’s the king;
 I went to lookin’ for a job but the man said no,
 So we hit the skids on the old skid row.
 Traipsing up and down. Chasing a bite to eat. Kids hungry.

Heard about a job, so we hit the wheat
 And made about enough for the kids to eat,
 Picked in the berries, and gathered in the fruit,
 And the hops, and the peaches, and the apples, too.
 Slept in just about everything, except a good warm bed.

Been to Arizona, been to California, too,
 Found the people was plenty but the jobs was few;
 Well, maybe it’s like the feller said,
 When they ain’t enough work, well, business is dead,
 Sorta ailin’. Ain’t no money changin’ hands, just people
 changing places.

Folks wastin’ gasoline chasin’ around.
 Now what we need is a great big dam
 To throw a lot of water out across that land,
 People could work and the stuff would grow
 And you could wave goodbye to the old skid row
 Find you a job. Work hard. Raise all kinds of stuff. Kids,
 too. Take it easy.

Ramblin’ Round

Ramblin’ around your city,
Ramblin’ around your town,
I never see a friend I know
As I go ramblin’ around, boys,
As I go ramblin’ around.

My sweetheart and my parents
I left in my old hometown
I’m out to do the best I can
As I go ramblin’ around, boys,
As I go ramblin’ around.

The peach trees they are loaded,
And the limbs are a-bending down,
I pick ‘em all day for a dollar, boys,
As I go ramblin’ around,
As I go ramblin’ around.

Sometimes the fruit gets rotten
Falls down on the ground,
There’s a hungry mouth for every peach
As I go ramblin’ around, boys,
As I go ramblin’ around.

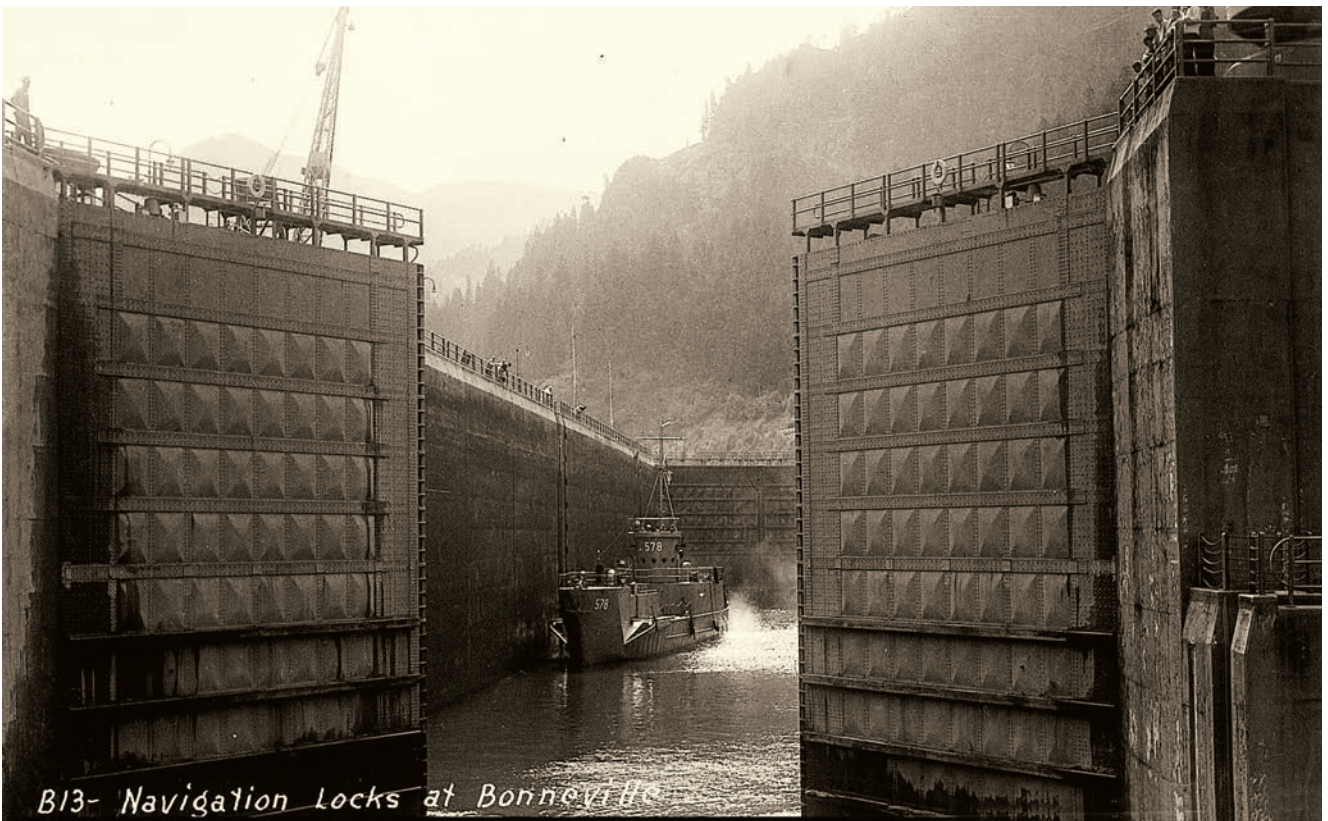
I wish that I could marry,
I wish’t I could settle down,
But I can’t save a penny, boys,
As I go ramblin’ around,
As I go ramblin’ around.

My mother prayed that I would be
A man of some renown,
But I’m just a refugee
As I go ramblin’ around, boys,
As I go ramblin’ around.



MOVING A PENSTOCK SECTION AT GRAND COULEE DAM, CIRCA 1941.

NAVIGATION LOCKS AT BONNEVILLE DAM, CIRCA 1941.



Pastures of Plenty

“From the collection of Woody Guthrie, Professional Oakie, just a passin’ through”

It’s a mighty hard row that our poor hand has hoed
And our poor feet have traveled a hot dusty road
Out of this Dust Bowl and westward we rolled
And your deserts are hot and your mountains are cold

I picked up a rich clod of dirt in my hand
I crumble it back into strong, fertile land
The greatest desire in this world that I know
Is to work on my land where there’s green things that grow.

I think of the dust and the days that are gone
And the day that’s to come on a farm of our own
One turn of the wheel and the waters will flow
‘Cross the green growing fields down the hot thirsty road

Go down in the canyon and there you will see
Grand Coulee showers her blessings on me
Lights for the cities, for factories and mills
Green pastures of plenty from dry barren hills

It’s always we’ve rambled, that river and I
It’s here on her banks I will work till I die
My land I’ll defend with my life if it be
‘Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free

It’s always we’ve rambled, that river and I
It’s here on her banks I will work till I die
My land I’ll defend with my life if need be
‘Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free.

Disc 5: TRACK 19 – “END OF MY LINE”

End of My Line

Back in Nineteen thirty-three,
Livin' in the dust was a-killin' me.

Back in Nineteen thirty-four,
The dust did rose and blow some more.

'Long come Nineteen thirty-five,
Blowed my crop about nine mile high.

'Long about Nineteen thirty-six,
Me and my woman in a devil of a fix.
Me and my woman in a devil of a fix.
Me and my woman in a devil of a fix.

'Long about Nineteen thirty-nine
We fanned our tail to the Oregon line.
Fanned our tail to the Oregon line.
Fanned our tail to the Oregon line.

We got ahold of a piece of land,
Fifteen miles from the Coulee Dam.
Fifteen miles from the Coulee Dam.
Fifteen miles from the Coulee Dam.

Now, the Coulee Dam is nice to see,
Makes this e-lec-a-tric-i-tee
Makes this e-lec-a-tric-i-tee
Make that e-lec-a-tric-i-tee

Well, Oregon state is mighty fine
If you're hooked on to the power line
But there ain't no country extra fine.
If you're just a mile from the end of the line.

Now I'll milk my cows and turn my stone,
Till the big Grand Coulee comes along.
My eyes is crossed, my back is a-cramped,
Tryin' to read the Bible by the coal-oil lamp.

Tryin' to read the Bible by the coal-oil lamp.
Tryin' to read the Bible by the coal-oil lamp.

I guess I come to the end of the line
I guess I come to the end of the line
I guess I come to the end of the line
I guess I come to the end of the line

Ain't no country extra-fine
If you're a mile from the end o' the line.
Ain't no country extra-fine
If you ain't on to the power line.

Well, I guess I come to the end of the line
I guess I come to the end of the line
I guess I come to the end of the line
I guess I come to the end of the line

The five tracks which come from commercial recordings were all provided courtesy of Folkways Records and Service Corp., for the 1987 Rounder release, and are now provided courtesy of Smithsonian Folkways Records of Washington DC. They are: *End Of My Line*, *Hard Travelin'*, *New Found Land*, *Oregon Trail*, and *Ramblin' Round*.

endnotes

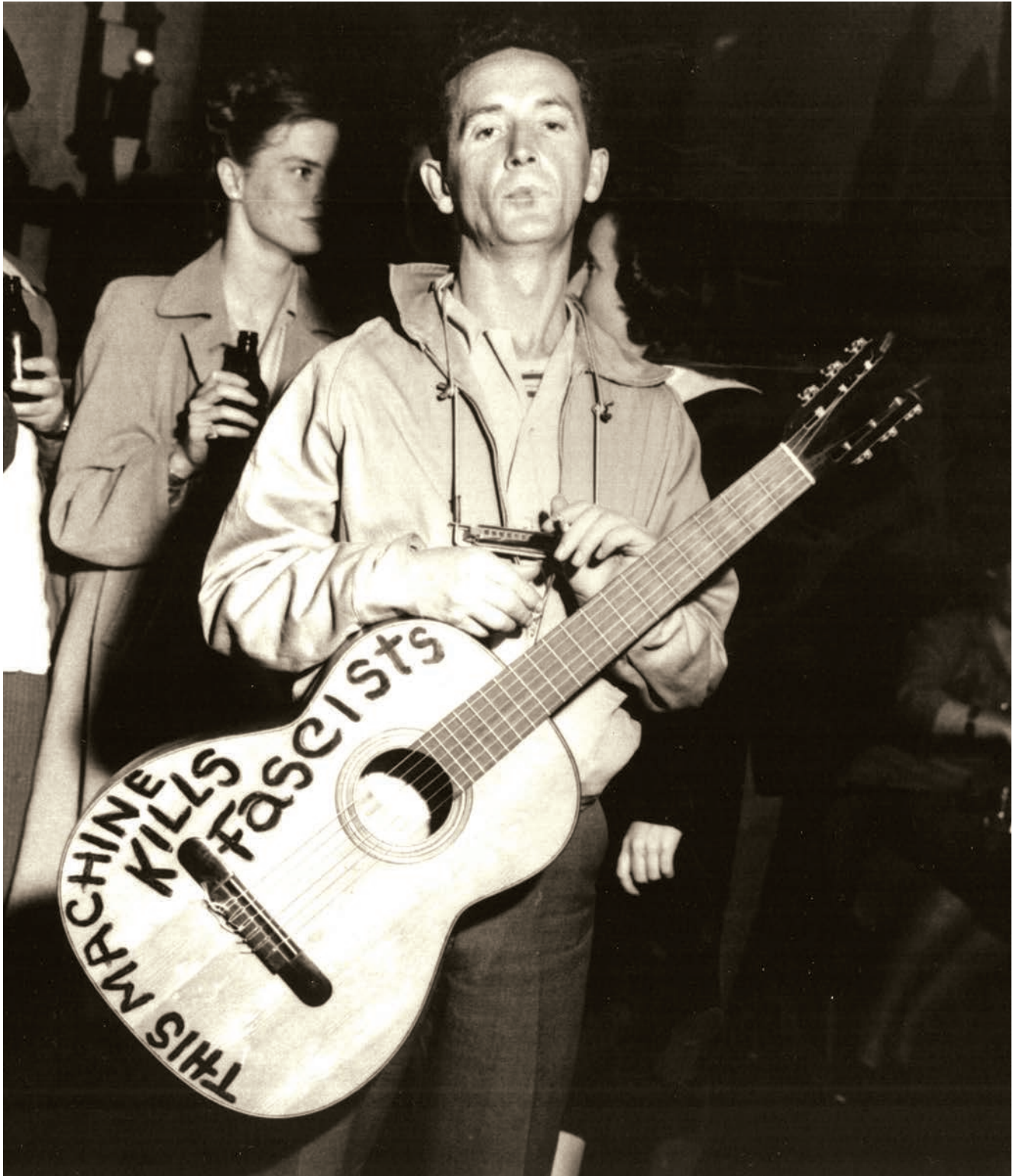
¹ E-mail from Bill Murlin, February 12, 2012

² Published versions of the song usually render the final word of the second line as “chute.” Lewis and Clark wrote about the “Grande Schute” when they encountered the four or five miles of nearly continuous rapids in the Cascades of the Columbia located just upstream from the site of Bonneville Dam and generally at the site of the town of Cascade Locks. See Jim E. O’Connor, “The Evolving Landscape of the Columbia River Gorge: Lewis and Clark and Cataclysms on the Columbia,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 105:3 [2004]: 390–421.)

S O N G S A N D
R A D I O D R A M A S

I N S U P P O R T O F T H E W A R E F F O R T

WOODY GUTHRIE CIRCA 1943.



The Almanac Singers performed five selections for the CBS radio show *Here's News from Home*, OWI E14039, recorded May 14, 1942:

1. **“Round & Round Hitler’s Grave”** – sung by the Almanac Singers, featuring Pete Seeger (lead vocals, banjo); Woody Guthrie (guitar); Sis Cunningham (accordion); and an unidentified female voice (possibly Bess Lomax).
2. **“The Sinking of the Reuben James”** – sung by the Almanac Singers, featuring Woody Guthrie (lead vocals, guitar); Pete Seeger (banjo); an unidentified bass voice (possibly Lee Hays); and an unidentified female voice (possibly Bess Lomax).
3. **“Takin’ it Easy”** – sung by the Almanac Singers, featuring Woody Guthrie (lead vocals, guitar); Pete Seeger (banjo); an unidentified bass voice (possibly Lee Hays); and an unidentified female voice (possibly Bess Lomax).
4. **“The Martins and the Coys”** – featuring Pete Seeger (lead vocals, banjo); an unidentified bass voice (possibly Lee Hays); an unidentified female voice (possibly Bess Lomax); and two other unidentified male voices.
5. **“Reckless Talk” (“Careless Talk”)** – featuring Woody Guthrie (guitar, vocals) switching off with two other unidentified male voices; and Pete Seeger (banjo).

The three tracks on which Woody leads are the ones presented in this package.

Disc 5: **TRACK 20 – “THE SINKING OF THE REUBEN JAMES”**

The Sinking of the Reuben James

Have you heard of a ship called the good Reuben James
 Manned by hard-fighting men both of honor and fame?
 She flew the Stars and Stripes of the land of the free
 But tonight she’s in her grave on the bottom of the sea.

Tell me what were their names, tell me what were their names,
 Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?
 What were their names, tell me, what were their names?
 Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?

It was there in the dark of that uncertain night
 That we watched for the U-boats and waited for the fight.
 Then a whine and a rock and a great explosion roared
 And they laid the Reuben James on that cold ocean floor.

Tell me what were their names, tell me what were their names,
 Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?
 What were their names, tell me, what were their names?
 Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?

Now tonight there are lights in our country so bright
 In the farms and the cities they’re telling of this fight.
 Now our mighty battleships will steam the bounding main
 And remember the name of that good Reuben James.

Tell me what were their names, tell me what were their names,
 Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?
 What were their names, tell me, what were their names?
 Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?'

Disc 5: TRACK 21 – “TAKIN’ IT EASY”

Takin’ it Easy

Well, I bought me a paper ‘cause I wanted to know
 Just what to do when the sirens blow
 ‘Cause the mayor said we hadn’t ought to run
 Just take it easy if an air raid comes.

Just a-takin’ it easy, just a-takin’ it slow
 ‘Cause I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow
 Just a-takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow.

There’s a pretty little gal a-living down the street
 For years and years I’ve been wanting to meet
 Sirens blowed and what did I find
 That she had the same thing on her mind

Just a-takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow
 Just a-takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow.

The boats blowed the whistle down at the dock
 I walked to the subway down the block
 I looked around and what did I see
 But that pretty little gal by the side of me

Says takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow
 Just takin’ it easy, just a-takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t gonna worry when the sirens blow.

I wanted her to know I was a natural man
 So I took the situation well in hand
 When the all-clear signal begin to whine
 That pretty little gal said that she’d be mine

Just a-takin’ it easy, just a-takin’ it slow
 But I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow
 Just a-takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow.

I got two more things that I want to do
 Beat Japan and Hitler, too
 Gonna get married just as quick as I can
 And speed up production for Uncle Sam

Just a-takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 But I ain’t a-gonna worry when the sirens blow
 Just a-takin’ it easy, just takin’ it slow
 And I ain’t gonna worry when the sirens blow.

Disc 5: TRACK 22 – “RECKLESS TALK (CARELESS TALK)”

Reckless Talk (Careless Talk)

Don’t you see what your careless talk can do?
 Don’t you see what your careless talk can do?
 Don’t you see what your careless talk can do?
 Uncle Sam don’t want no careless talk from you.

When those submarines come ‘round
 Well, it’s when those submarines come ‘round
 When those submarines come around
 Just a careless word and one of our ships goes down.

Every careless word that you might say
 Every careless word that you might say
 Every careless word that you might say
 Might cost the lives of the ship from the U.S.A.

So you see just what your reckless love can do
 And you see just what your reckless talk can do
 Well, you see what your reckless talk can do
 Uncle Sam don’t want no reckless talk from you.

There was a ship sailed on that ocean blue
 There was a ship sailed on that ocean blue
 There was a ship sailed on that ocean blue
 But she went down (which shows what) careless talk can do

You go spreading that talk throughout the land
 You go spreading that talk throughout the land
 You go spreading that talk throughout the land
 Uncle Sam’s going to lose a sailin’ man

Now you see what reckless talk can do (take ‘er out, boys)
 Don’t you see what reckless talk can do
 Well, you see what reckless talk can do
 Uncle Sam don’t want no reckless talk from you.

[This song is an adaptation of the song “Careless Love,”
 Woody at one point inadvertently sings “reckless love”
 rather than “reckless talk.”]



REMEMBRANCE CARD SENT TO MARJORIE MAZIA BY WOODY GUTHRIE DURING HIS TIME IN THE ARMY.

Radio Dramas

There are two Office of War Information radio dramas which we have been able to locate, and which the Library of Congress has made available to us with the permission of NBC, working from the original 16-inch acetate discs. Transcriptions of both programs are presented here as well.

Disc 6: **TRACK 1 – “LABOR FOR VICTORY”**

Labor for Victory – a radio drama recorded for the Office of War Information on July 18, 1942. (OWI disc Er24433)

There's a great and bloody fight 'round the whole wide world tonight
 In the battle the bombs and shrapnel rains
 Hitler told the world around he would tear trade unions down
 But our union's gonna break them slavery chains, great God,
 Our union's gonna break them slavery chains.

NARRATOR: Once again the CIO in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company presents the Saturday night series *Labor for Victory*. Twelve million organized men and women united in the high resolve to rid the world of fascism in 1942.

Well, I think of the men and the ships going down
 The Russians beat back across the Don
 There's London in ruins, and Paris in chains
 Good people, what are we waiting on? (“Second front”)
 Good people, what are we waiting on?

NARRATOR: And here's Len De Caux of the CIO.

DE CAUX: The CIO presents tonight a ballad of production especially written for this program by Woody Guthrie and Peter Lyon. It deals with Paul Bunyan, Driller Drake, John Henry, and Jackhammer John, legendary heroes of American labor. Many tall stories have been told about these giant figures, stories which reflect pride in the gigantic production achievements of American working people. Today we bring these legendary heroes alive to reflect the gigantic efforts and the invincible will of American labor to win this war. We call this ballad, “The Girl in the Red, White, and Blue.”²

Well, I walked up on a hill just to see that rising sun
 Could see every farm and every town
 I could see there must be the forty-eight states
 That's the union that'll tear old Hitler down (“down down”)
 That's the union that'll tear old Hitler down

So I walked up to the top of this mountain on high
 Who do you reckon that I saw?
 I saw Mr. Paul Bunyan dealing cards to Driller Drake
 John Henry and Jackhammer John (“all unions”)
 John Henry and Jackhammer John

PAUL BUNYAN: Everybody in? All bets in. I raised it. John Henry, are you covering?

JOHN HENRY: I'm in there.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: I've got a good notion to call for a new deck. No aces in this deck. Where's that waiter?

PAUL BUNYAN: Yeah, I could use another barrel of beer myself.

DRILLER DRAKE: Hey, get up another round.

PAUL BUNYAN: Cards, everybody. A pair of kings bid.

DRILLER DRAKE: Chip two. The service on this mountain gets worse every day.

JOHN HENRY: Don't get so impatient, boys. Here the owner comes now.

OWNER: The waiter'll be right here, boys. Another barrel all around!

And the prettiest little gal in this whole wide world
 With a red, white, and a blue bonnet on
 Send a barrel for Mr. Bunyan and a barrel for Driller Drake
 And John Henry and Jackhammer John ("union workers")
 John Henry and Jackhammer John

WAITER: Here you are, boys. Did I hear some complaints about the service?

PAUL BUNYAN: Well, you got to admit that in the last couple of years...

WAITER: You great big eight-foot hulks get awful thirsty for fellers that just sit around playing cards.

PAUL BUNYAN: Don't get to sassin' us, young lady.

DRILLER DRAKE: Yeah! Don't forget, we're important guys.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: We're the workin' stiffs that built that country of yours yonder.

WAITER: Hmmm, that's the reputation you've got.

JOHN HENRY: Anybody say it ain't the truth?

PAUL BUNYAN: I'm Paul Bunyan! They remember me and what I did in every lumber camp from Maine to Oregon. When the snows covered this country, I hitched my ox to the temperate zone and brought back the weather that'd make the land rich and strong. I'm eight foot tall and there's no man can say I didn't help build America.

DRILLER DRAKE: I'm Driller Drake. In the oil fields, they still hush their voices when they mention my name. I drilled six hundred oil wells with my right hand while I ate two hundred head of beef steer with my left. From what I did, this country grew rich. I'm eight foot tall and there's no man can say I didn't help build America.

JOHN HENRY: I'm John Henry, the natural man. And when I laughs, my laughter goes clear 'round the world, and the little waves of the sea roll up on the shore to listen. There wasn't no train could roll down the tracks faster than I could lay them down. In the cotton fields and the steel mills, I was king. It took a thousand horsepower engine to break my heart. I'm eight foot tall and no man can't say I didn't help build America.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Well, of course, I'm new up on this mountain. I'm only a few inches over seven feet tall. But I'm Jackhammer John, and I worked on every tunnel and dam from the Grand Coulee to the Holland Tunnel, and where men build ships and tanks and trains, there I am, leading them all! Yes, sir, I'm a jackhammer man. And just because I'm only seven foot and some inches tall, there's no man can say I didn't help build America.

WAITER: You boys are trading on your reputation. Fifty-eight years, you've been sitting up here on this mountain top, playing the same game of poker. Any of you ever think of taking a walk over to the edge there? Have a look down at your country? See what's going on? Do something about it?

PAUL BUNYAN: About what?

WAITER: You say you built that country. I say you boys haven't finished the job yet. Call me when you want some more beer.

DRILLER DRAKE: Hey, what was she talking about?

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Hey, come over here, Driller. Have a look!

JOHN HENRY: Hmmm, looks like there's a lot of smoke down there in Pittsburgh, all right.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Pittsburgh? Look at Detroit!

DRILLER DRAKE: Looks like there's a lot of activity out in my Pacific Coast shipyards.

JOHN HENRY: Say, you fellers, you know what?

PAUL BUNYAN: What?

JOHN HENRY: I bet there's a war. I bet they're fighting a war down there.

DRILLER DRAKE: And we're sitting up here.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Well, if it's a war, then they'll be needing me.

ALL: You?

JACKHAMMER JOHN: You fellers can stay up here. Just deal me out of the next few hands, till I go down and fix it up. I'll be back inside the year.

DRILLER DRAKE: Would ya listen to the baby talk!

PAUL BUNYAN: He's a little touched. It's obvious I'm the guy they need.

JOHN HENRY: When folks is fighting wars, they need steel. I'm the man they need down there. You boys just relax.

PAUL BUNYAN: Well, I reckon I'm going to have to teach you boys a lesson about who's the big man on this mountain top. If it's a fight you want to have, I guess I'll just have to give it to you. Where's my ax?

(Commotion, several speaking at once)

Paul Bunyan grabbed his ax. Driller Drake grabbed a wrench
 John Henry grabbed the jackhammer man
 When a hard-working woman walked in at the door
 She was John Henry's Polly Ann ("strong woman")
 And she was John Henry's Polly Ann

POLLY ANN: John Henry?

JOHN HENRY: Oh, oh.

POLLY ANN: John Henry, you get along here with me. What d'you mean by squabbling with these folks when there's a war to be fought and won down yonder in America? Come along with me now. No more backtalk! There's trains to be sent on their way. There's steel mills crying out for more production. Come along with you. Lying around here drinking beer and playing cards with this Hitler trying to run the world. Ain't you got the sense God give you? (Polly Ann departs)

PAUL BUNYAN: Sounded like she meant business.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Well, she just didn't understand that me and my jackhammer, we can take care of this war!

DRILLER DRAKE: Son, I'm losing my patience with you. Where do you think you and your jackhammer would be without my oil?

PAUL BUNYAN: Where do you think either of you'd be without the timber to build the boats to get the men and the munitions to that second front?

DRILLER DRAKE: Well, I'll tell you...

JACKHAMMER JOHN: It's perfectly obvious that I'm the...

PAUL BUNYAN: I'll knock the ears off the both of you if you don't....

WAITER: Quiet, the lot of you! I've never heard such a pack of kids in my life. Jelly beans, all of you. Talking about doing big things, and not doing them.

PAUL BUNYAN: Why, we were just gonna...

WAITER: I saw what you were doing. You were just going to start a fight over who could do the most work fastest and best, right?

(commotion) That's right. I guess so.

WAITER: Now, I'll tell you what. You three go down to America off this mountain top. You all put in a full working day, OK?

ALL: OK.

HOSTESS: And the one that's done the most after a full day is over, I'll go out on a date with him. You've all been trying to take me up for the last fifty-eight years. Is it a bargain?

ALL: (enthusiastic assent)

Then the prettiest little girl in this whole wide world
 She stood looking down from on that mountain top
 Well, she watched her boys a-workin' while the sun was rising high
 And she watched them when it started in to drop ("in the west")
 And she watched them when it started in to drop

Well, they broke all the records in America
 Broke all the records on the line
 John Henry, the driller, and the jackhammer John,
 Paul Bunyan in the shop and milling line, lord lord,
 Broke the records in the shop and millin' line.

(Whistle)

There's the five o'clock whistle. All the work heroes are stopping work for the day. Going home to the mountain top.

DRILLER DRAKE: Where's John Henry?

PAUL BUNYAN: He stayed with his Polly Ann. She wanted to make sure he'd show up for work tomorrow.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Well, I guess there's no argument, hey, boys? I've growed a couple of inches since I was down there in America. Reckon I'm a full-fledged work hero now, me and my jackhammer. Well, I reckon I get the date with the little lady in the red, white, and blue for tonight, huh?

DRILLER DRAKE: Jackhammer John, you talk too much.

PAUL BUNYAN: Let him rave, Driller, I'll just stop over and knock at the door and let her know I'll be ready at eight o'clock.

DRILLER DRAKE: You mean, I'll be ready. Didn't you see those oil wells gushing?

PAUL BUNYAN: Hey, what's that? On the door?

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Why, it's a note pinned to her door.

DRILLER DRAKE: She stood us up.

PAUL BUNYAN: No, not exactly stood us up, boys. Listen to what it says: "Dear Paul Bunyan, Driller Drake, and Jackhammer John. I was watching you boys pitch in and work hard down there today in America. Sure looked good, boys."

DRILLER DRAKE: She liked what we did.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: Guess we did OK.

PAUL BUNYAN: Quiet. Quiet. Here's some more. Listen. "But, boys, I got to thinking. Maybe I better learn how to do the things you're doing. We need all the people we can get for production. So I'm afraid I can't keep my date with you tonight. You see, I'm working on the late swing shift."

DRILLER DRAKE: Well, what do you know?

PAUL BUNYAN: It sort of makes me feel ashamed.

DRILLER DRAKE: Well, once I worked sixty-two hours straight. Course, I'm getting a little old. But still, I might go down there again.

JACKHAMMER JOHN: We can't let a girl show us up there like that!

PAUL BUNYAN: And John Henry, he's down there working. I can see Polly Ann stand there, just lookin' at him.

DRILLER DRAKE: Let's go back to work, boys. It's gettin' late.

There's a great and bloody fight around the whole wide world tonight
 In the battle the bombs and shrapnel rains
 Hitler told the world around he would tear trade unions down
 But our union's gonna break them slavery chains, great God,
 Our union's gonna break them slavery chains.

We thank the Soviets and the mighty Chinese vets
 Allies the whole wide world around
 To the battling British, thanks. You will need a flock of Yanks
 On a second front to tear old Hitler down ("down, down")
 On a second front to tear old Hitler down.

NARRATOR: Here's Len De Caux, editor of the *CIO News* and a commentator for the CIO. Mr. De Caux...

DE CAUX: One union that's doing its part to break them slavery chains is the CIO United Steelworkers of America. Its policy committee has just voted unanimously to make a substantial sacrifice to win this war by accepting the War Labor Board's decision on Little Steel wages.³ The 44-cent wage increase awarded is less than half what the union asked and the board's own panel considered justified. It falls far short of adjusting steel wages to the steep rise in living costs since the last general change in wage rates.

Nevertheless, the Steelworkers wired President Roosevelt and I quote: "As workers, we embrace the opportunity of being in the forefront and carrying out the national policy which will aid our nation in its war for survival. The national policy referred to is the President's seven-point program to prevent inflation.⁴ The CIO Steelworkers have taken the lead by accepting wage stabilization but they're not going to let the other six points be forgotten. The union declares wages cannot and must not be the sole object of the stabilization effort. The workers now look to the President and Congress," it says, "to carry through the remaining portions of the program, such as an effective tax program and a real effective freezing of prices of goods, rents, and other items of cost to the people. The union hails the Board's decision in favor of union security through maintenance of membership in the check-off as a great forward step. The Board recognizes unions as among the most important free institutions we are fighting this war to preserve. It favors union security so unions may be free to devote their full energies to the war effort instead of having to struggle constantly for their very existence. The Board notes further that maintenance of stable union membership makes for union responsibility and discipline, and provides a stable basis for union/management cooperation for more efficient production."

But let's look now at some of the other points in the seven-point program. While labor's wages are being stabilized, what's happening to war profits and big incomes? A progressive tax program to tap surplus wealth is one of the most important of the seven points, but so far Congress is falling down badly on this job. The tax bill now before the House falls nearly two and a half billion dollars short of providing necessary revenue because it fails to include most of the Treasury's proposals to raise extra money from wealth and high profits. It's been aptly called a "soak the poor and spare the rich" measure.

The House bill increases taxes on incomes below four thousand dollars but decreases those on higher incomes as compared with the Treasury's proposals. It slaps an income tax on people earning only ten dollars a week but completely ignores the President's proposal to limit incomes of the rich to twenty-five thousand dollars a year.

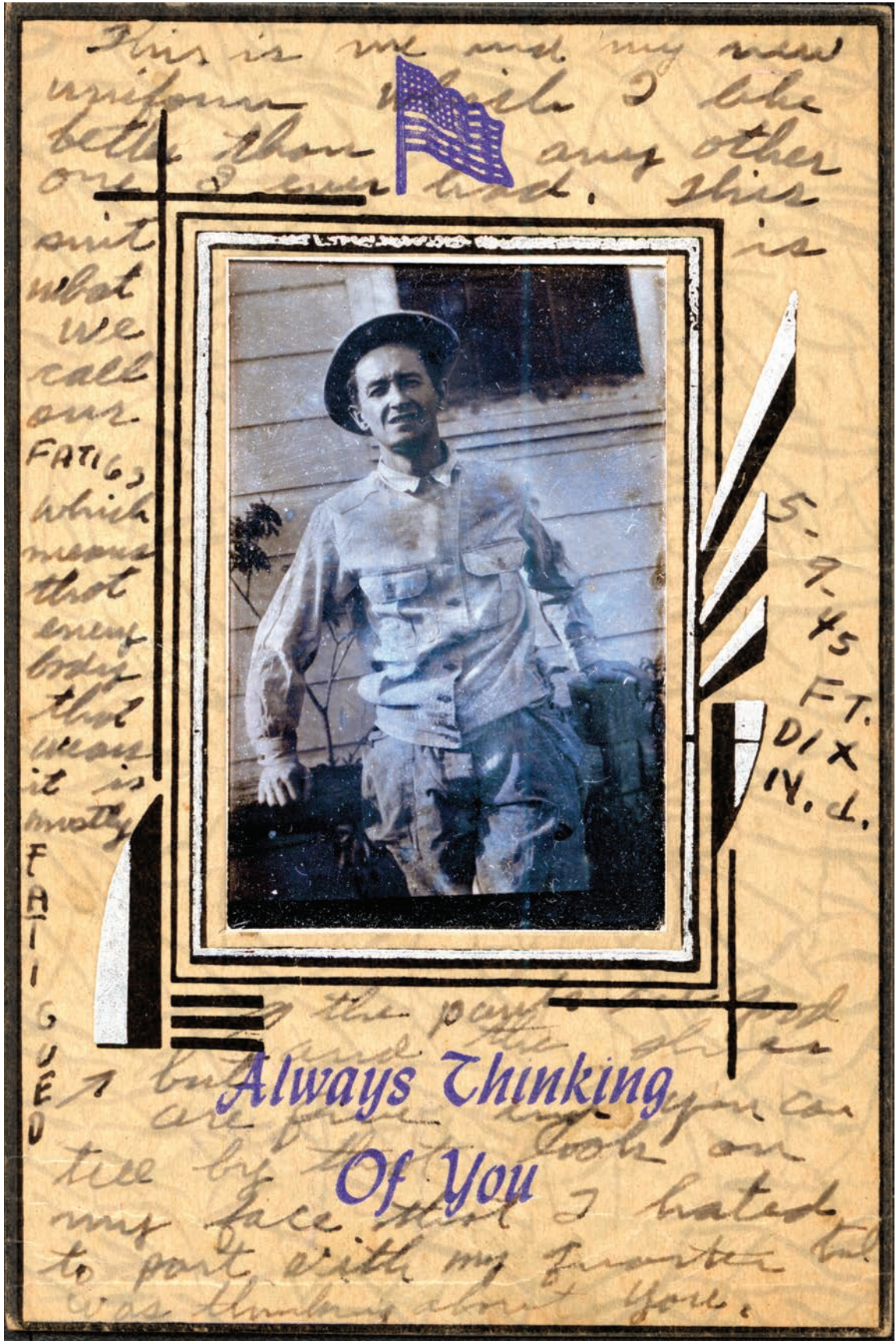
The House bill also favors the wealthy by failing to require joint income tax returns for married couples, by limiting normal and surtaxes on corporations to forty-five percent instead of the fifty-five percent asked by the Treasury, and by failing to tax tax-exempt securities.

When labor is first to do its part as in the matter of wage stabilization, it has the right to demand that all other groups do their share, if labor's sacrifices are not to be in vain. Labor is therefore going to intensify its fight for a real Victory Tax program when the tax bill goes to the Senate so the seven-point program may be applied to wealth and profits as well as to wages, and the same goes for price controls, rationing, and the rest of the seven points.

If we're going to go all out to win this war, all will have to do their share.

NARRATOR: You've been listening to another broadcast in the series of *Labor for Victory*. This program came to you from New York. This is the National Broadcasting Company.

———— (ends with NBC tones) ————



REMEMBRANCE CARD SENT TO MARJORIE MAZIA BY WOODY GUTHRIE DURING HIS TIME IN THE ARMY.

Disc 6: TRACK 2 – “LABOR FOR VICTORY”

Labor for Victory – radio drama recorded for the Office of War Information on August 29, 1942. (OWI disc E12556)

NARRATOR: Once again the CIO in cooperation with NBC presents the Saturday night series *Labor for Victory*. Twelve million organized men and women united in the high resolve to rid the world of fascism in 1942. Tonight’s program is devoted to farmer-labor unity and you’ll hear later from Mr. Donald E. Montgomery of the Consumers Council in the Department of Agriculture as well as from Len De Caux of the CIO.

(Music begins with Woody Guthrie on guitar and singing vocals. A group which may be the Almanac Singers join Woody on the choruses.)

Disc 6: TRACK 3 – “FARMER-LABOR TRAIN”

From the high Canadian Rockies to that land of Mexico,
City and the country, wherever you may go,
Through the wild and windy weather, sun and sleet and rain,
Comes a-whistlin’ onto victory this farmer-labor train.

Chorus: Yes, we’re riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.
Yes, we’re riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.

DE CAUX: This is Len De Caux of the CIO. The CIO is eager to do all it can to further unity between the farmer and the city worker. We remember what Vice President Henry Wallace said when he was still Secretary of Agriculture. It was back on November the 15th, 1938, and here are his words: “If we are to continue along progressive lines, and if we are to prevent the development of a special brand of fascism here, farmers and city workers must learn to work together in mutual confidence and respect.” Today when we’re fighting a desperate battle against the Hitler Axis, it is more important than ever that the farmer and the city worker forge their interests into an unbreakable unity. For the CIO has evidence and it is confirmed by government representatives returning from the field that there are those who knowingly or not are doing the work of the Axis agents by spreading lies to disrupt the unity that’s so necessary for victory.

Climb on the farmer-labor train as it speeds through the South, and listen to a conversation that will show you what I’m talking about.

Skit begins:

Is this seat taken, Buddy?

Nope, sit down. Make yourself homely.

This your part of the country? You talk like it.

Yeah, I’ve been working the land down here since I was old enough to hold onto a plow.

Cotton, eh?

That’s right. Long staple cotton.

Say...say, that’s interesting. We got a lot in common.

Oh yeah?

Yeah, I just got a job over at that new textile factory. That’s where I’m going now. I’ll probably be making stuff out of the cotton you grew.

Huh. The wonder these war workers be, you all got nothing in common with me, Mister.

Why, what’s the matter with you?

I know about you fellers. Don’t you all reckon I read the papers? Come down here to work for high wages, then go out on strike first chance you get.

(laughs) High wages, eh? Brother, if you only knew. And don’t forget, there were years and years of low wages, and it was only by fighting for it that we’ve been able to get a decent wage.

So that you can turn right around and go out of strike.

Well, you never read the stories in the papers about the millions and millions of guys who aren't on strike, do you? Brother, since this war broke out, there have been less strikes than any time since workers found out what a strike meant. Oh sure, there's a few strikes, but don't forget, you've got to have two sides to an argument before there is a strike. And maybe – now that's just maybe – it ain't the workers' fault all the time.

I don't know, Mister. Maybe you all got the right dope...

Now listen, Brother. Now just listen to me. You grow long-staple cotton and here I am going to a textile factory down the road a piece to make things out of your cotton. You know what it is I'm going to make?

What?

Parachutes, that's what.

Parachutes?

Yeah. Parachutes, that maybe our boys will be using to drop down on that second front. You grow it, I make it. We're riding on the same train, Brother, and don't you forget it.

There's lumberjacks and teamsters. Sailors from the sea,
Farming boys from Texas and the hills of Tennessee,
Miners from Kentucky, there's fishermen from Maine;
Riding on to victory on this farmer-labor train.
Yes, we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.

DE CAUX: It's too bad the farmers and the city workers don't see more clearly the identity of their interests. Many farmers tend to forget that the city workers have got to make a fair wage or they won't be able to buy the produce of the farms. And city workers often tend to forget that their employment depends upon the ability of the farmer to buy what they make. Most important, neither the city worker nor the farmer is fully conscious of how necessary their unity is for victory. Let's listen to another conversation between two passengers riding the farmer-labor train.

The train is high-balling along further north now. It's heading west, through Michigan.

Skit resumes:

Excuse me, Buddy.

Hmmm.

See those fields out there? What are they growing in those fields?

Oh, that's soybeans.

Soybeans? Well, what do you know?

What's the matter with that? Nothing wrong with soybeans, is there? I grow 'em myself.

No, there's nothing wrong with them. That's not what I meant. It's just that I was reading in my union newspaper a couple of weeks ago that soybeans is what they use to make paint out of, and that's my job. I spray paint on the tanks that they make in that plant back in Calumet.

Oh, they use soybeans to make more than just paint. Man, they get shellac, plastics, glycerine for explosives, alcohol, cloth. A lot more, too. It's quite a bean.

It seems funny, doesn't it. All those things from a little bean out of the ground.

Oh, there's nothing so funny about it. Stop and think about it and you realize that most everything in this world comes out of that earth. That's what makes the farmer the most important guy there is.

Ah, not the most important. We're all important these days. The farmers and the guys like me, too.

Warehouse boys and truckers and guys that skin the cats,
The men that run the steel mills, and the furnace and the blast,
Through the smoky factory cities, o'er the hot and dusty plain,
We're heading on to victory on this farmer-labor train.
Yes, we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.

DE CAUX: Yes, the farmer and the city worker are inter-dependent. The one depends on the other. This fundamental fact shows up in many ways. For example, the cash income of farmers and the total of factory payrolls rise and fall together, almost dollar for dollar. The farm boys who are going into the armed forces are meeting union members there. They're marching shoulder to shoulder with them and learning their interests, and their aims are the same. Listen to the ideas of one farm boy, now a private in the U.S. Army. He's headed home by train to help his father with the August wheat during his furlough.

Skit continues:

Oh, uh, did you say you work near here?

That's right. At the arsenal, two towns ahead. You know those big 16-inch Navy guns?

Yeah.

We make the shells for those babies.

Oh, OK, man, OK.

Boy, you get a real feeling of satisfaction in work like that.

Say, do you know that it takes an acre and a half of wheat to make the alcohol they use in the smokeless powder for just one of the shells they fire out of those 16-inch guns?

An acre and a half of wheat is a lot of wheat!

Sure. Farmers are doing their share all right.

And so are you guys. Hey, you want to know something? Before I got in this man's army, I used to think that you guys had all the butter on the bread. I used to think that draft boards took more farmers than they took city guys, and, well, that these war plants were just robbing the farms of the men they needed.

Boy, they need those workers in the plants. I guess it was being a soldier that made me realize that. When a guy fires bullets at a target all day, he begins to see how many workers they must need at home to supply him.

Where you going?

Here's my stop. This is where I get off. I'm going to my dad's farm. I've got a lot of work cut out for me there.

You're going to work on your furlough?

Uh, yeah.

How much did you say...how much wheat, rather, does it take to make the powder for one shell? About an acre and a half?

That's right. Farmers of America need a lot of hands to get all that wheat in. I aim to help all I can while I'm home.

There are folks of every color. They're riding side by side
From the swamps of Louisiana and across the Great Divide,
Across the wheat fields and the orchards and the lowing cattle range,
Rolling onto victory on this farmer-labor train.

This train pulls through America on a bright and a happy day,
She steams across the nation; you can hear the people say,
"It's that Farmer-Labor Special just full of union men,
Headin' on to victory on that Farmer-Labor train."

Yes, we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.
Yes, we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.

DE CAUX: Next stop on the farmer-labor train is Washington DC where we're going to hear an expert on something both farmers and city workers have very much in common. He's Consumers Council's Donald E. Montgomery of the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Montgomery will speak from Washington.

DONALD E. MONTGOMERY: Yes, that's the way it is. When a farm worker and a factory worker get to talking together man-to-man, they pretty soon get down to brass tacks, talking about things that really count. The things they produce on the land and make in the factory and what they're good for. That's what counts. If war brings farm and city workingmen together, that's one good thing about a war, isn't it? Best of all, it brings them together on the important thing. We all see in wartime

that what counts is output. More and more all the time. Record output from farm and factory. In a war we know that's the most important thing, don't we? You have to think, too, not only about goods to fight with, but to live with – food, clothes, houses, and other everyday necessities. Nothing fancy during wartime, we know that. But the absolute essentials so that every farm and factory worker can keep going and keep well, and keep the family well, too.

I've been looking over some government reports just put out which show that even yet we haven't got all of our families fixed up to do their share in this war job. Lots of American families have been earning more income. They've been earning more than they've been spending, so their savings have gone up a lot. That's true in cities and it's true out on the farm, too. But this is only the average situation. It is not true of all families. Not by a long sight. The fact is, there are a great many farm and city families – far too many – whose earnings were so small in 1941 they couldn't even break even – that is, they had to spend more than they made. That was true of about one-third of our people. And what they were able to spend, I can tell you, was mighty slim.

People in that fix, you see, aren't geared in right to help us with this big job we've got on our hands, and they include both farm and wage-earning families – or at least families that could be growing farm stuff and could be earning wages. Now that's not something for farmers and wage-earners to fight each other about. And it's not something for either of them forget (sic). It's a fact they had better take a good look at together and decide together what can be done to get these families lined up with the rest of us. The sooner we are all at it, full speed, together, the sooner we'll finish this job. And then, maybe, after the war, if we've learned real farm and labor teamwork during the war, we'll keep right on with that teamwork and produce what we need for good, happy, healthful living. Yes, where every family – city or small town or open country. Maybe, who knows, maybe, I'll say, we'll learn how to wage peace as well as we have got to wage war.

NARRATOR: We return you now to New York.

DE CAUX: This is Len De Caux of the CIO again and I've just heard another whistle from that farmer-labor train, this time from way out in Jamestown, North Dakota. It's a news bulletin from the National Farmers Union whose officers and directors are meeting there. This big farmers organization has just wired President Roosevelt asking speedy adoption of all seven points of his anti-inflation program. It emphasizes the points affecting profits and rationing. The Farmers Union says industrial profits, now at 400% of prewar levels, should be limited to 6%. It also urges a \$25,000 limit on personal incomes, and rationing across the board. As to wages and farm prices, the National Farmers Union says both working farmers and labor agree to stabilization as proposed in the seven-point program. It urges the President to stand by his announced intention not to freeze solid either farm prices or wages but to stabilize both, with recognition that the real incomes of working farmers and wage-earners must be maintained at minimal living levels, and when necessary adjusted so as to sustain productive strength. The Farmers Union declares, and I quote: "The offensive against inflation is not divisible. Let's move on the whole war front."

Now, we are ready. The farmer-labor train goes high-balling on, to victory.

And we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.
Yes, we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train.
Yes, we're riding on to victory
On this farmer-labor train....

NARRATOR: You're listening to another in the regular Saturday night series *Labor for Victory*, presented this week by the CIO. The song "Farmer-Labor Train" was written and sung by Woody Guthrie, and the script written by Peter Lyon. Next week *Labor for Victory* will be presented jointly by the CIO and the AF of L to signalize Labor Day. This program came to you from New York and Washington. This is the National Broadcasting Company.

———— (ends with NBC tones) ————

Note: Len De Caux (1899-1991) was the chief of the Publicity and Information Section of the Congress of Industrial Organizations from 1935 to July 1947, and editor of the *CIO News*. When he announced his resignation, the *New York Times* observed, "For some years Mr. de Caux has been subjected to attack from the CIO's right wing for what they termed pro-Communist policies expressed in CIO publications, but he had denied these assertions." [*New York Times*, June 28, 1947.] He is author of the book *Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to CIO, A Personal History*.

Disc 6: **TRACK 4 – JAZZ IN AMERICA, NO. 93**

“Jazz in America, No. 93” (recorded January 14, 1943, LWO 5833 Group 2 Reel 10B)

Narrator: This is *Jazz in America*, one of a series of programs telling the story of jazz and the lives of the men who create it. Here in a democratic country, the spotlight falls on a people’s music. Many of the Texas cowboys are gasoline cowboys now, riding tanks for their country. Others are bombardiers and airplane pilots, graduates of Randolph Field or another of the many Air Force training schools in the Lone Star State. This modern spirit of Texas is expressed for us by Woody Guthrie in “Whoopy Ti-yi, Get Along, Mr. Hitler.”

Disc 6: **TRACK 5 – “WHOOPI TI-YI, GET ALONG, MR. HITLER.”**

Take it easy, but take it.

As I was out herding the dogies this morning
An Uncle Sam bombing plane sailed through the sky
And as it flew westward, I sung to the dogies,
Get along, little dogies. Mr. Hitler, goodbye.

Whoopy ti-yi-yo, get along, Mr. Hitler.
It’s your misfortune and none of my own.
Whoopy ti-yi-yo, get along, Mr. Hitler.
You know that the graveyard will be your new home.

I jostled along and I rocked in my saddle
Thought of Uncle Sam’s soldiers and here’s what I said
You do the marching and you do the flying.
It’s fellers like me that’s a-keeping you there.

Whoopy ti-yi-yo, get along, Mr. Hitler.
It’s your misfortune and none of my own.
Whoopy ti-yi-yo, get along, Mr. Hitler.
You know that the graveyard will be your new home.

Now the day it was hot and the day it was dusty
The cattle would bawl and the coyotes would cry
It’s beef for the Army and beef for the Navy
That’s where you little dogies will go by and by.

Whoopy ti-yi-yo, get along, Mr. Hitler.
It’s your misfortune and none of my own.
Whoopy ti-yi-yo, get along, Mr. Hitler.
You know the graveyard will be your new home.

Disc 6: TRACK 6 – JAZZ IN AMERICA, NO. 116

“Jazz in America, No. 116” (recorded April 4, 1943, LWO 6087 Group 9 8A2)

This is *Jazz in America*, one of a series of programs telling the story of jazz and the lives of the men who create it. Here in a democratic country, the spotlight falls on a people’s music. “In the United States these days, you hear a lot of talk about songwriting and the war. What about the new songs? Do they contribute to the cause of democracy and the united nations? That’s the way the questions go. On *Jazz in America*, we try to answer that question from time to time by bringing you the new songs of America – folk songs and jazz. Songs that tell a story of today, like this Tin Pan Alley song sung by Ethel Merman, ‘Marching Through Berlin.’”

Americans are fond of homespun, too. The men on Guadalcanal proved that. About half their songs had verses made right there on the spot. We have a talented singer of homespun with us today – Oklahoma’s Woody Guthrie. With the help of a quartet, he’s going to give us a 1943 version of ‘Sally, Don’t You Grieve’.

Disc 6: TRACK 7 – “SALLY, DON’T YOU GRIEVE”

It’s-a when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.

Yes, it’s-a when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.

I just got my army call
I run down to the army hall.
Sally come a-runnin’ like a cannonball
And I told her not to grieve after me.

It’s when I’m gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told her not to grieve after me.

I’m a-gonna cross that ocean wide
Army rifle by my side
When Hitler’s beat, you can be my bride
But I told her not to grieve after me.

So, it’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.

I’m gonna jump in a flyin’ machine
Loaded full of this TNT
Stop them fascists is what I mean
And I told her not to grieve after me.

It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.

A souvenir I’ll send to you
Send Mussolini and to Hitler, too
That’s about all one feller can do
But I told her not to grieve after me.

So, it’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
Oh-a, when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
Oh-a, when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.

Sally, get a job and save your pay
Work your best for the U.S.A.
Buy you a War Bond every day
But I told her not to grieve after me.

So, when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.

So, it’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
It’s-a when I’m a-gone, Sally, don’t you grieve
I told you not to grieve after me.
And I told you not to grieve after me.

Disc 6: **TRACK 8 – NARRATOR**

In his travels up and down the land, Woody Guthrie memorized innumerable tunes, some that went back to England or Scotland. Some that came out of the Negro blues. But all had taken on a new flavor, distinctly American. Now here's an old song with new words, a song about Hitler: "Dig A Hole."

Disc 6: **TRACK 9 – "DIG A HOLE"**

Mr. Hitler, Mr. Hitler,
Tell me what are you going to do?
Declared war on Uncle Sam
You bit off more than you can chew.

Dig a hole, dig a hole in the meadow
Dig a hole in the cold, cold ground
Dig a hole, dig a hole in the meadow
We're gonna lay you fascists down.

Once I seen them fascists
In a little Belgium town.
There was trouble, there was sorrow
And the bombs were raining down.

Dig a hole, dig a hole in the meadow
Dig a hole in the cold, cold ground
Dig a hole, dig a hole in the meadow
We're gonna lay you fascists down.

Mr. Hitler talked to Goehring
And here's what-a he did say
I can't figure out these Russian snows
They're too damn hot for me.

Dig a hole, dig a hole in the meadow
Dig a hole in the cold, cold ground
Dig a hole, dig a hole in the meadow
Gonna lay you fascists down.

Had the efforts not been cut short by early 1943 accusations that the Office of War Information was hiring "Commies" in its programming (this, despite the United States being allied with the Soviet Union at the time), the Almanac Singers would undoubtedly have recorded many more selections, and Woody's talents in targeted songwriting would have been employed much more than it was.

As it was, Woody does appear on several other shows produced during wartime, for instance *This Is War*: a wartime propaganda show starring W. Robert Montgomery and produced by Norman Corwin and featuring the Almanac Singers, including Woody Guthrie, performing "Round and Round Hitler's Grave," this program aired on all four radio networks on February 14, 1942.

endnotes

- 1 What were their names? Woody originally wanted to tell us, and worked on an earlier version of the song which was intended to do so. He was inspired by a listing of 95 of the names which appeared in the *New York Times* on November 5, 1941. One of his fellow Almanac Singers, Pete Seeger, reportedly convinced him that creating such a complex song would be nearly impossible to learn and be less effective in conveying the message. At the end of what the Woody Guthrie Archives reports as the original draft of the song, Woody typed: "This is the poem the Almanacs first wrote about the sinking of the Reuben James. Later, an hour or two at least, we ganged around the poem, and changed it into a good singing song with a chorus that you can join in easy." The poem itself was written by Woody. A photograph of it is presented in the book *My Name is New York*, and reads thus:

Have you heard of the ship called the bold Reuben James,
Manned by hard fighting men both of honor and fame?
I will tell you a tale that will tell you the names
Of the men that went down on that good Reuben James...

There's Harold Hammer Beasley, a first rate man at sea,
From Hinton, West Virginia, he had his first degree.
There's Jim Franklin Benson, a good machinist mate,
Come up from North Carolina, to sail the Reuben James.

There was Carl Cooperider, that shared the Reuben's fate,
Bucyrus was his home town, and Ohio was his state;
And then come Randall Cosgrove, and gunning was his game;
And he went on to glory on the fighting Reuben James.

If you ask who was it handled our hot torpedo box,
A man from West Virginia, his name was Charlie Cox
If you ask who was it that manned the cannon ball,
His name was Walter Sorensen, from the town of Omaha.

Jesse Weaver died a seaman, as true as he could be,
And he come up from West Point, the state called Tennessee.
William Flynn done his best, and his bravery I'll tell,
His home was Philadelphia, where hangs the Liberty bell.

Dennis Howard Daniel, Glen Jones, and Howard Vore
Hartwell Byrd and Raymond Cook, Ed Musselwhite, and more
Remember Leonard Keever, Gene Evans, and Donald Kapp,
Who gave their all to fight about this famous fighting ship.

Jack Campbell was our fireman, he stuck the battle through,
And there was Erastus Carbaugh from Mercer County, too;
Paul Magais stuck to the radio, and W.H. Kloepper, too;
Until the good ship Reuben James went down beneath the blue.

Eighty six men were drowned, I can't give you all their names,
Only forty four were saved from that good Reuben James;
It was the last day of October that we saved the forty four
From the cold Iceland waters 'long that long Iceland shore.

It was there in the dark of that uncertain night
That we watched for a U-boat, and ready for a fight;
Then a whine, and a rock, and a great explosion roared,
And they laid the Reuben James on the cold ocean floor.

Now tonight there are lights in our country so bright;
And friends and relations are telling of this fight;
And now our mighty battleships steam the bounding main
And remember the name of the great Reuben James.

Several of the names in the poem are spelled or rendered slightly differently from the text in the *Times*, for instance Carbaugh, Kloepper, and Magaris, but the spelling above is faithfully reproduced from the Guthrie draft. Woody mentions 86 men being drowned, but the *Times* story lists seven officers and 88 men. We now know that the final toll was larger. Within a few days, it was learned that five of the men the *Times* had listed had not been aboard the ship and were alive and well in America: Anderson, Bishop, Campbell, Howell, and Krystanak. Last-minute changes in the ship's roster had resulted in the error. Campbell is one of the names who made it into Woody's poem. Hirman Morgan and Marvin Wilson were also later found to have been located elsewhere, alive, due to last-minute changes of duty. Kapp's name was actually misreported in the initial list from which Woody worked; his actual name was Donald Knapp Gunn.

The book *My Name is New York: Ramblin' Around Woody Guthrie's Town* is written by Nora Guthrie and the Woody Guthrie Archives and published in Brooklyn, New York by powerHouse Books in 2012.

Perhaps reflecting a sensitivity to the uprooting of populations in the Dust Bowl and the Second World War, Woody Guthrie more than once wished to provide names – to honor the individual persons – of those who would otherwise be anonymous in history. See his refrain from “The Sinking of the Reuben James”

What were their names, tell me, what were their names?
Did you have a friend on that good Reuben James?

and his comment on names in the song “Plane Wreck at Los Gatos”

Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye, Rosalita,
Adios mis amigos, Jesus y Maria;
You won't have your names when you ride the big airplane,
All they will call you will be “deportees”

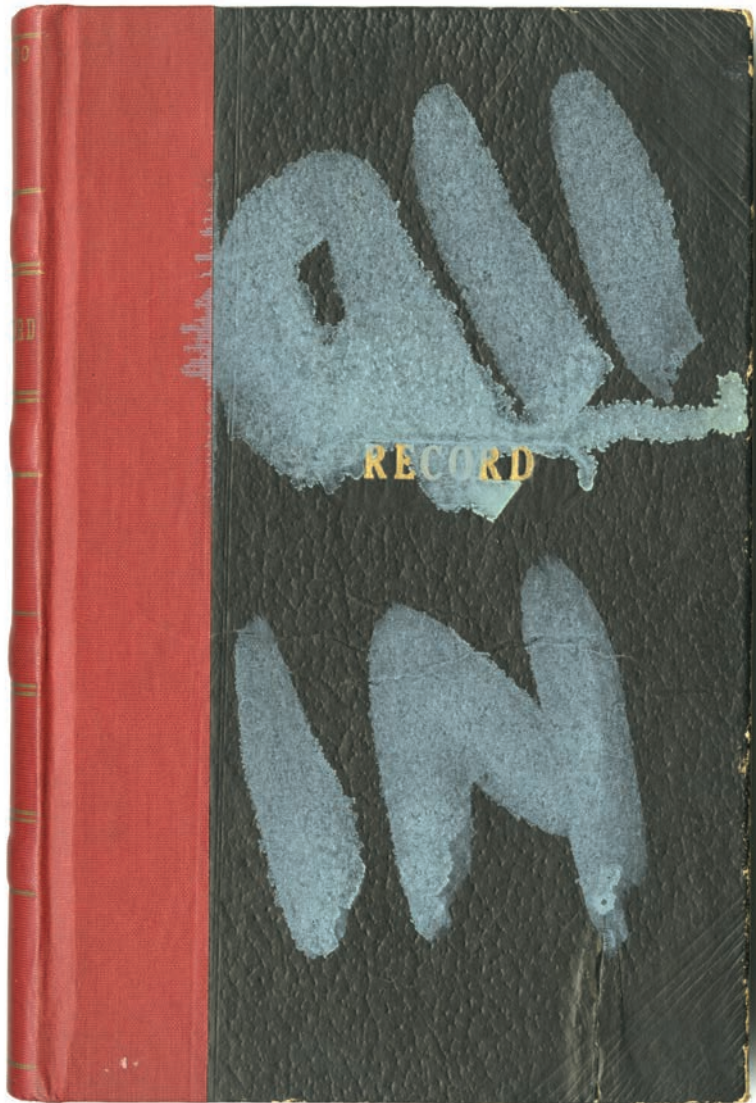
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Is this the best way we can grow our big orchards?
Is this the best way we can grow our good fruit?
To fall like dry leaves to rot on my topsoil
And be called by no name except “deportees”?

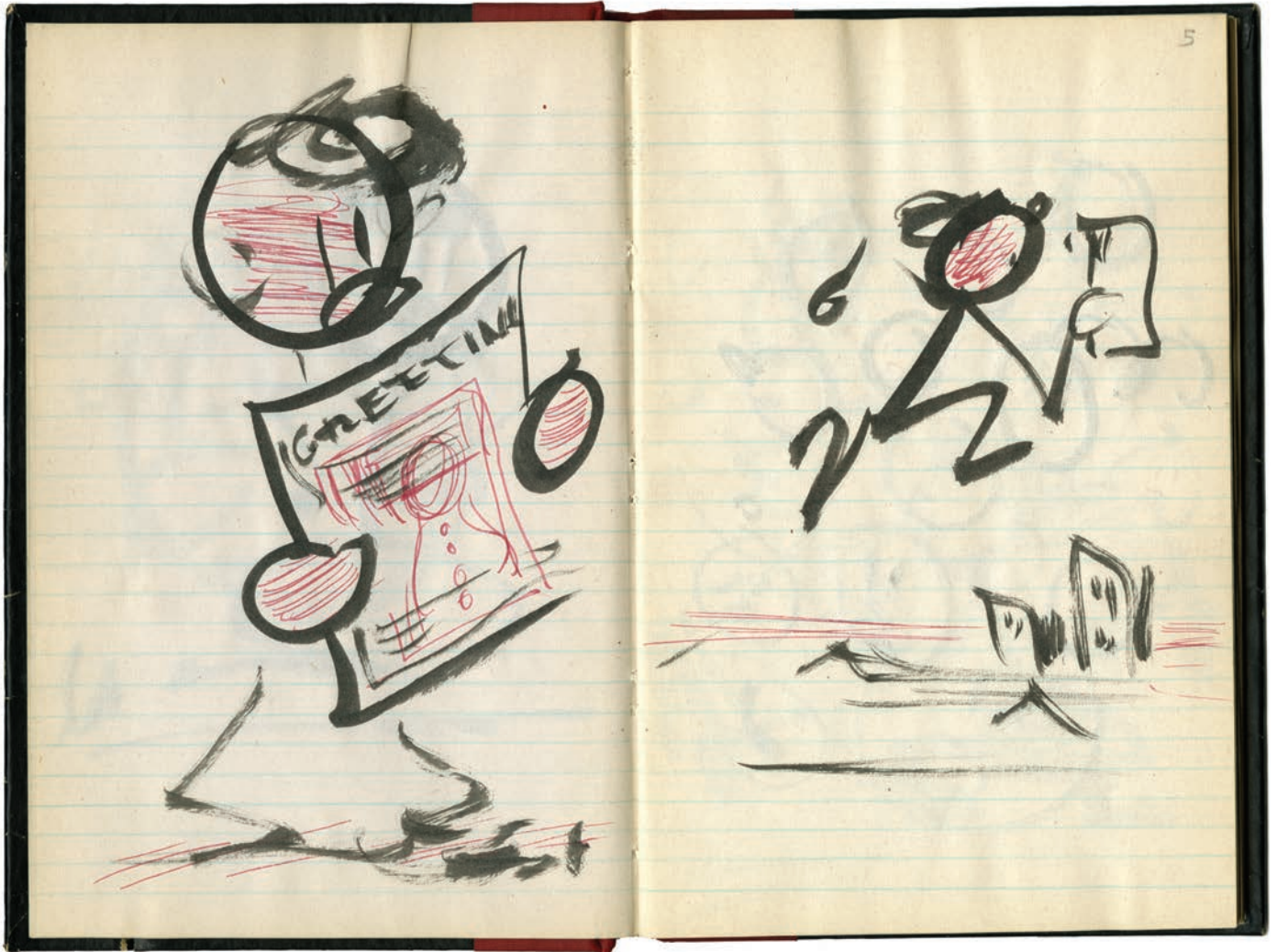
- 2 This song also has three alternate titles, with different variations in the lyrics: “Great and Bloody Fight,” “What Are We Waiting On,” and “Western Front.”
- 3 The National War Labor Board was comprised of 12 members, four each from labor, industry, and the public. The so-called Little Steel decision was made two days before this broadcast, on July 16, 1942. The CIO had pressed for a 12 ½ cent per hour increase – one dollar a day – in wages. The Board settled on a 44-cent per day increase. Though labor was the dissenting party in that decision, the CIO determined to make the best of it and press to have other segments of American society pay their fare share of war costs.
- 4 On April 28, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt presented a seven-point economic plan to fight inflation through economic stabilization. Summarized in his fireside chat to the nation, he said:

“First, we must, through heavier taxes, keep personal and corporate profits at a low reasonable rate.
Second, we must fix ceilings on prices and rents.
Third, we must stabilize wages.
Fourth, we must stabilize farm prices.
Fifth, we must put more billions into War Bonds.
Sixth, we must ration all essential commodities, which are scarce.
Seventh, we must discourage installment buying, and encourage paying off debts and mortgages.”
The President added, “The important thing to remember is that each one of these points is dependent on the others if the whole program is to work.”

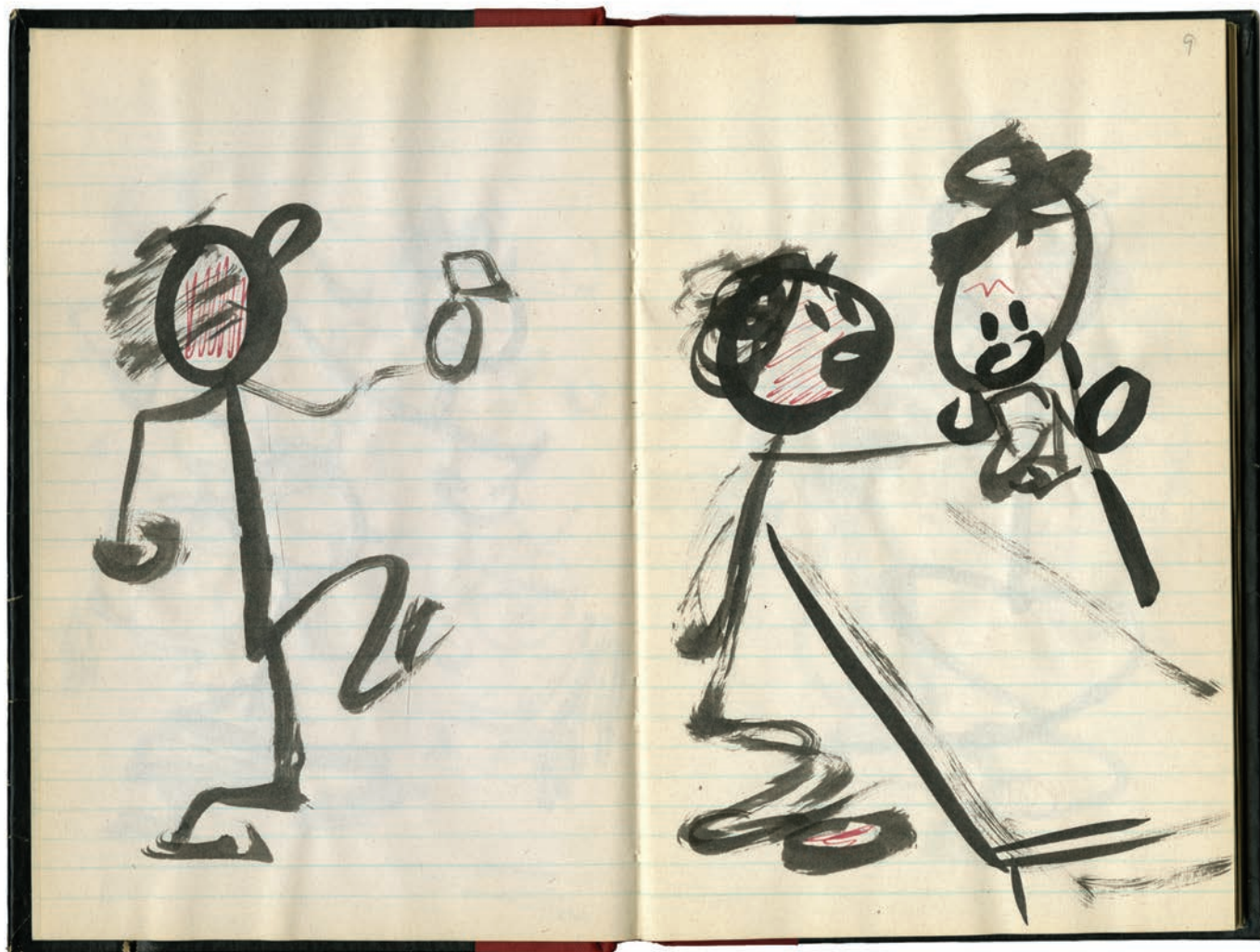
The entire chat is presented at: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-worldwar/5845>

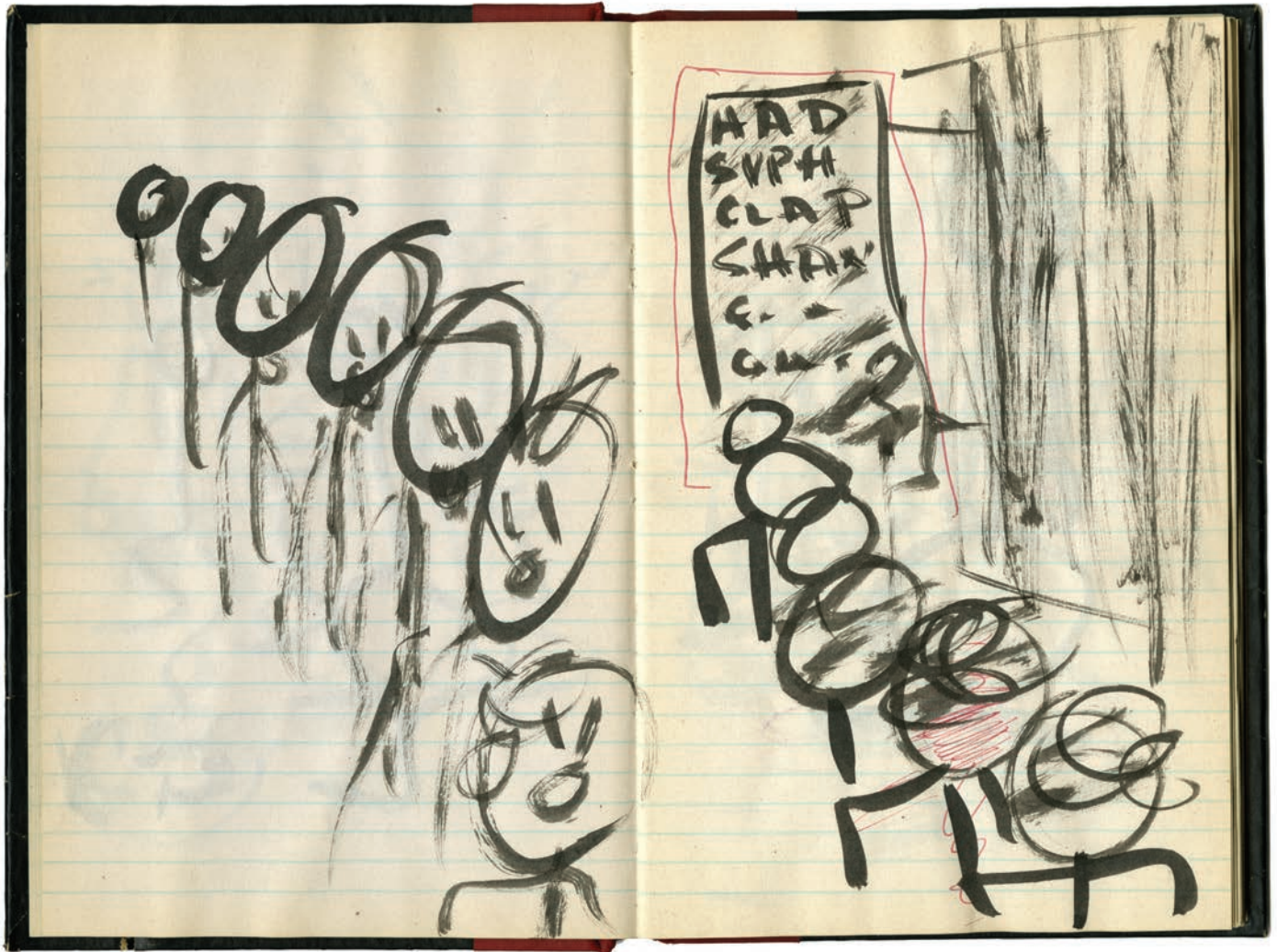


"ALL IN" – WOODY'S GRAPHIC STORY SHOWING THE "INVITATION" TO REPORT TO AN ARMY INDUCTION CENTER, THE PROCESS OF THE PHYSICAL – INCLUDING EYE EXAM, EAR EXAM, WEIGHING IN, AND THE FINAL STAMP ON ONE'S PAPERS SERVING AS INDUCTION INTO THE ARMY

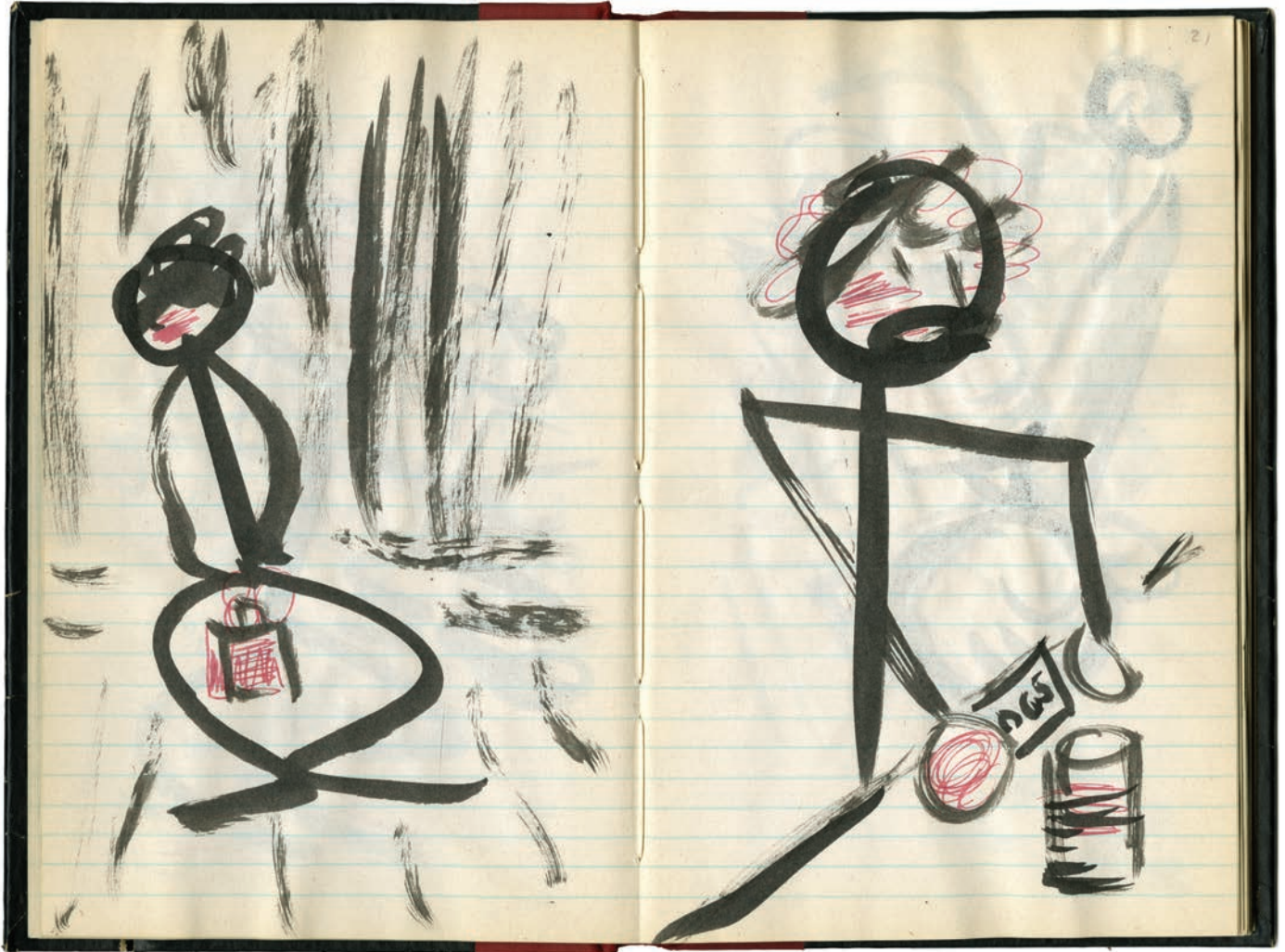


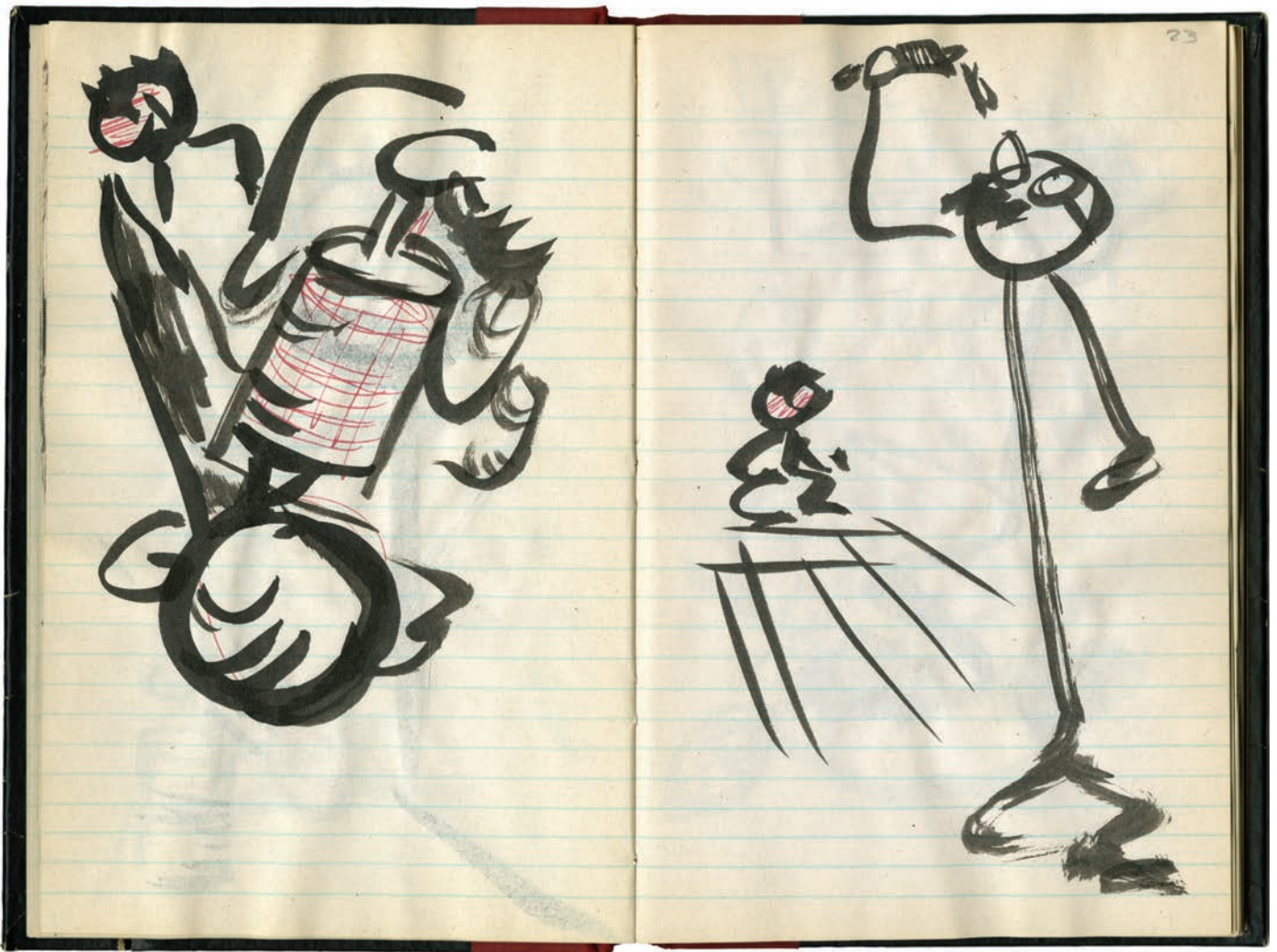


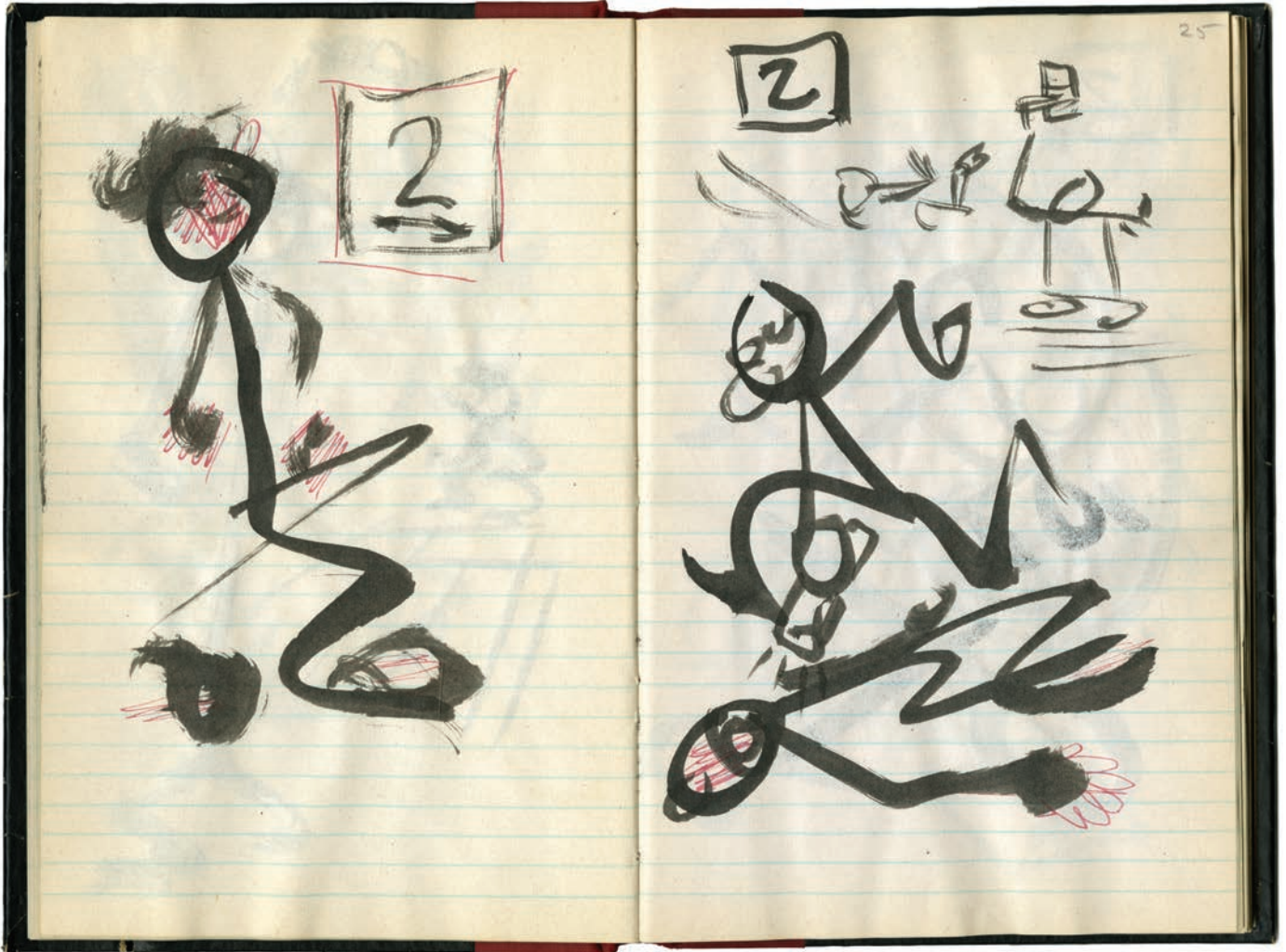


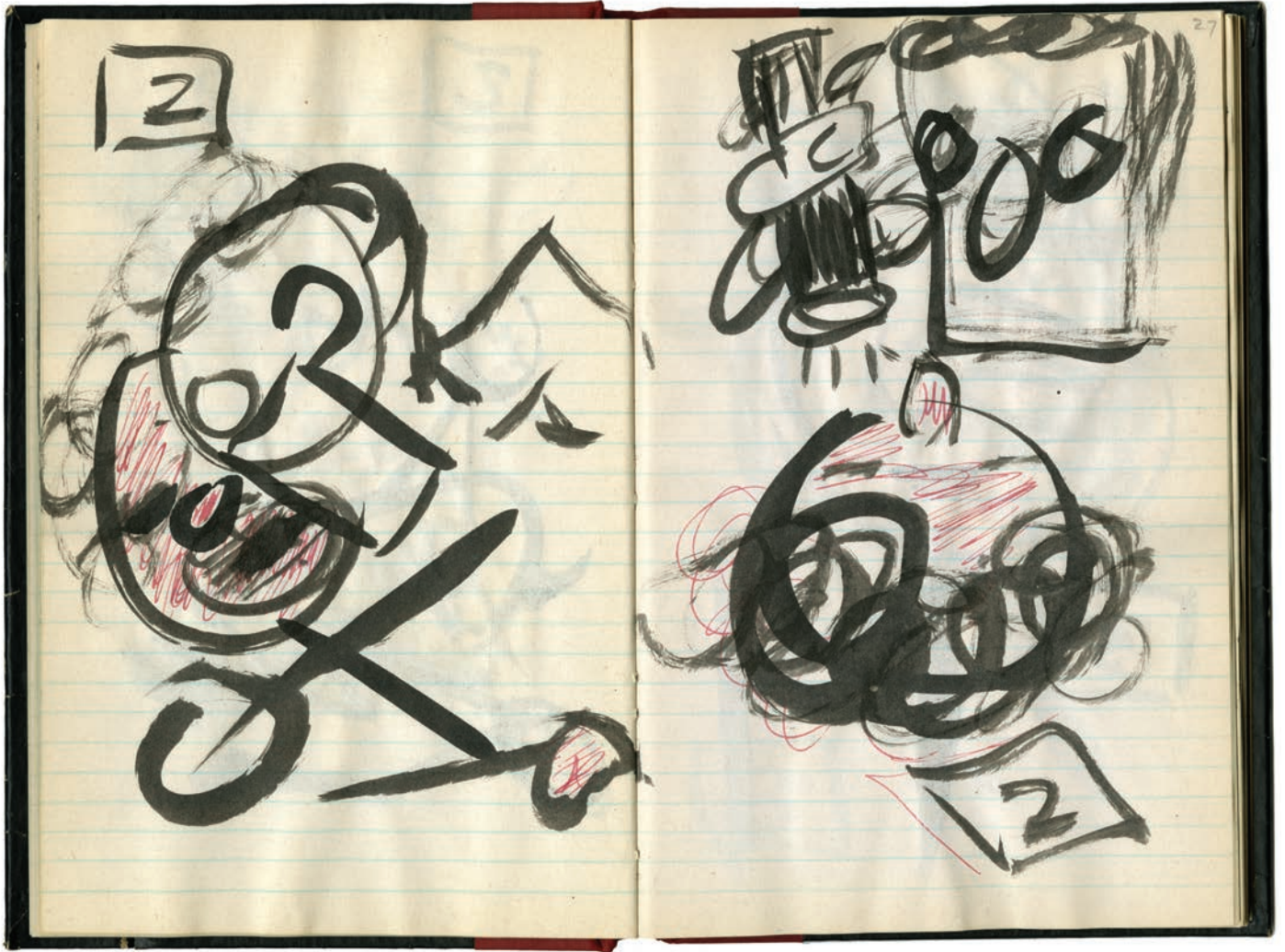


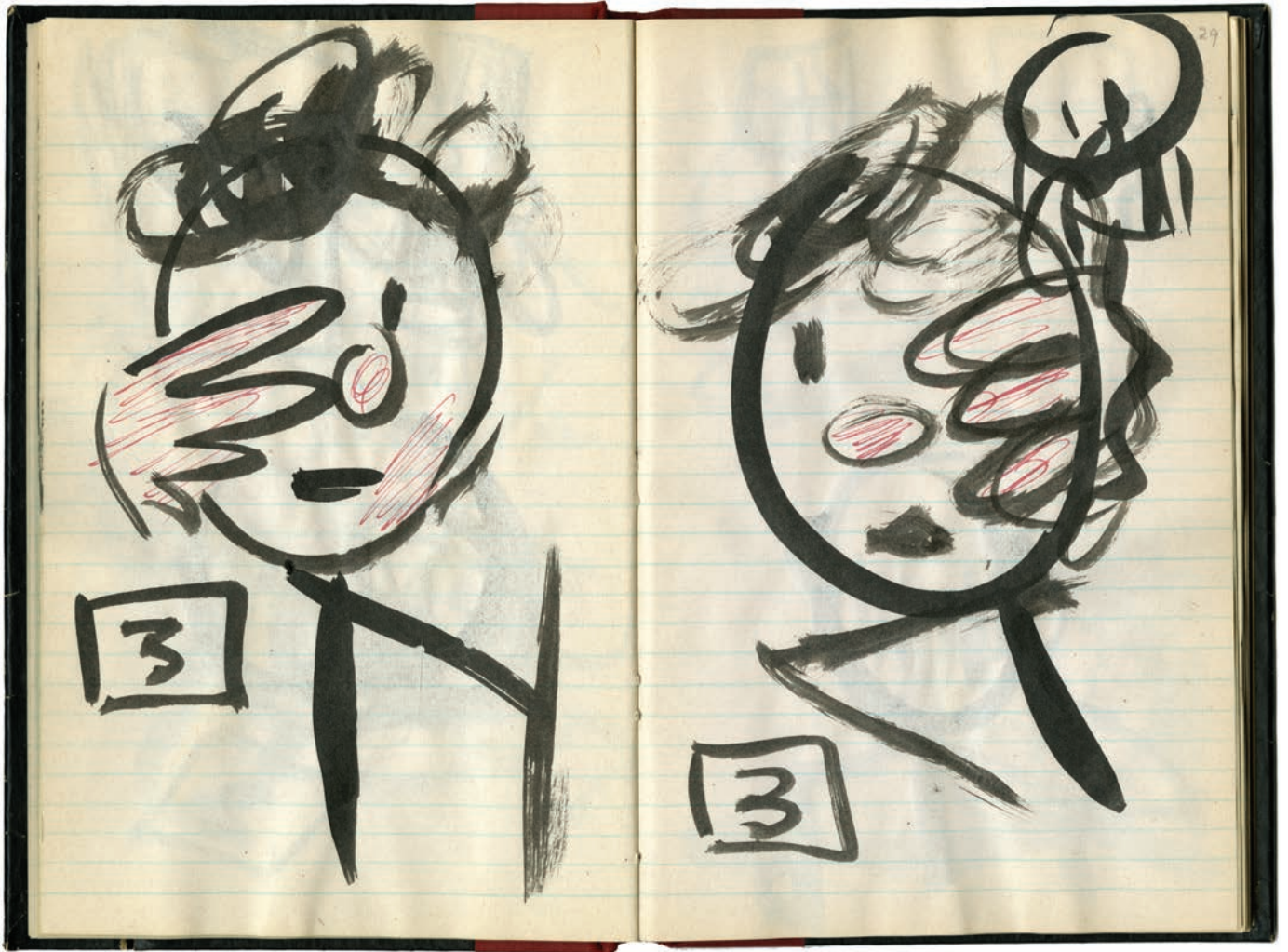






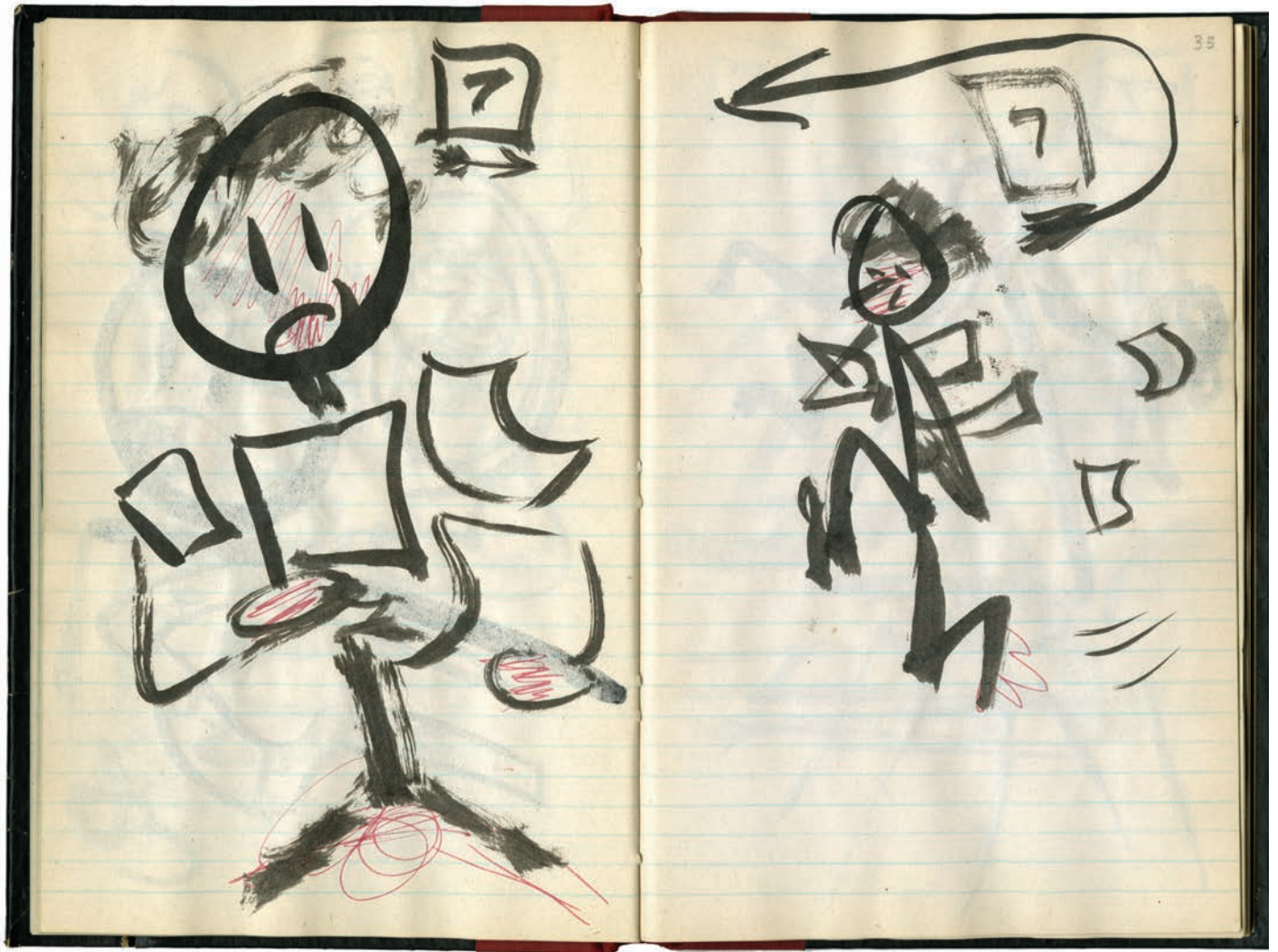


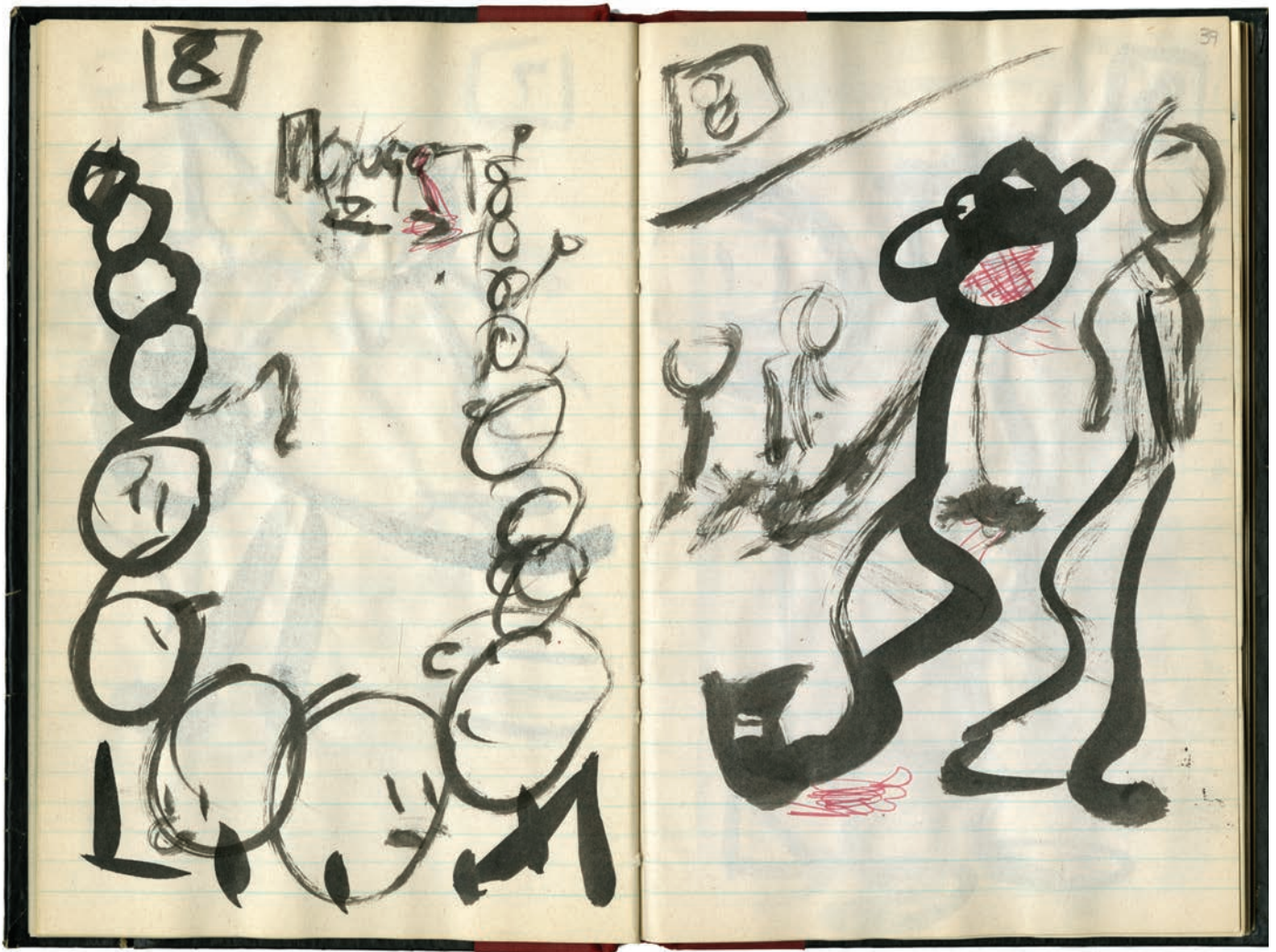


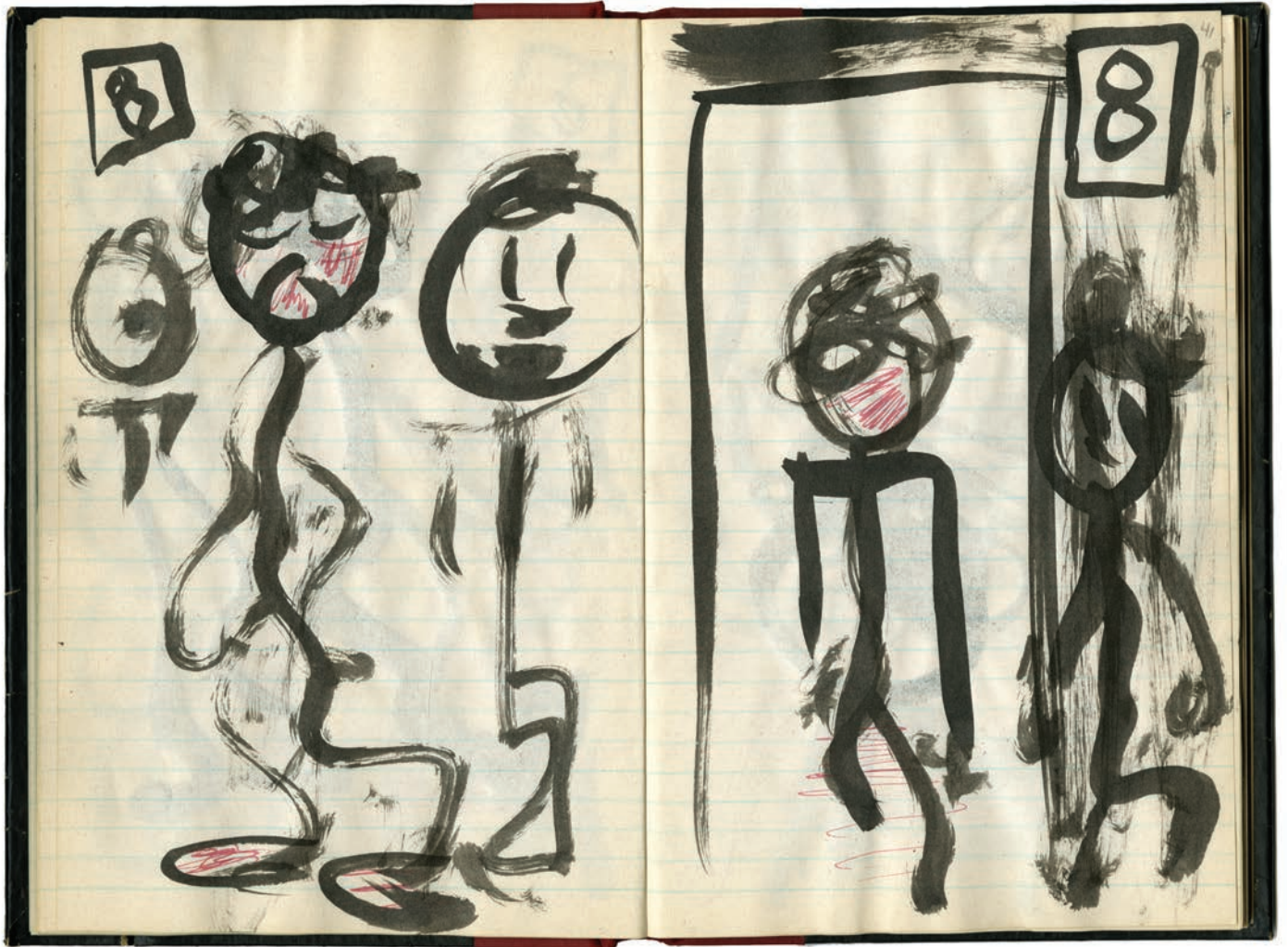


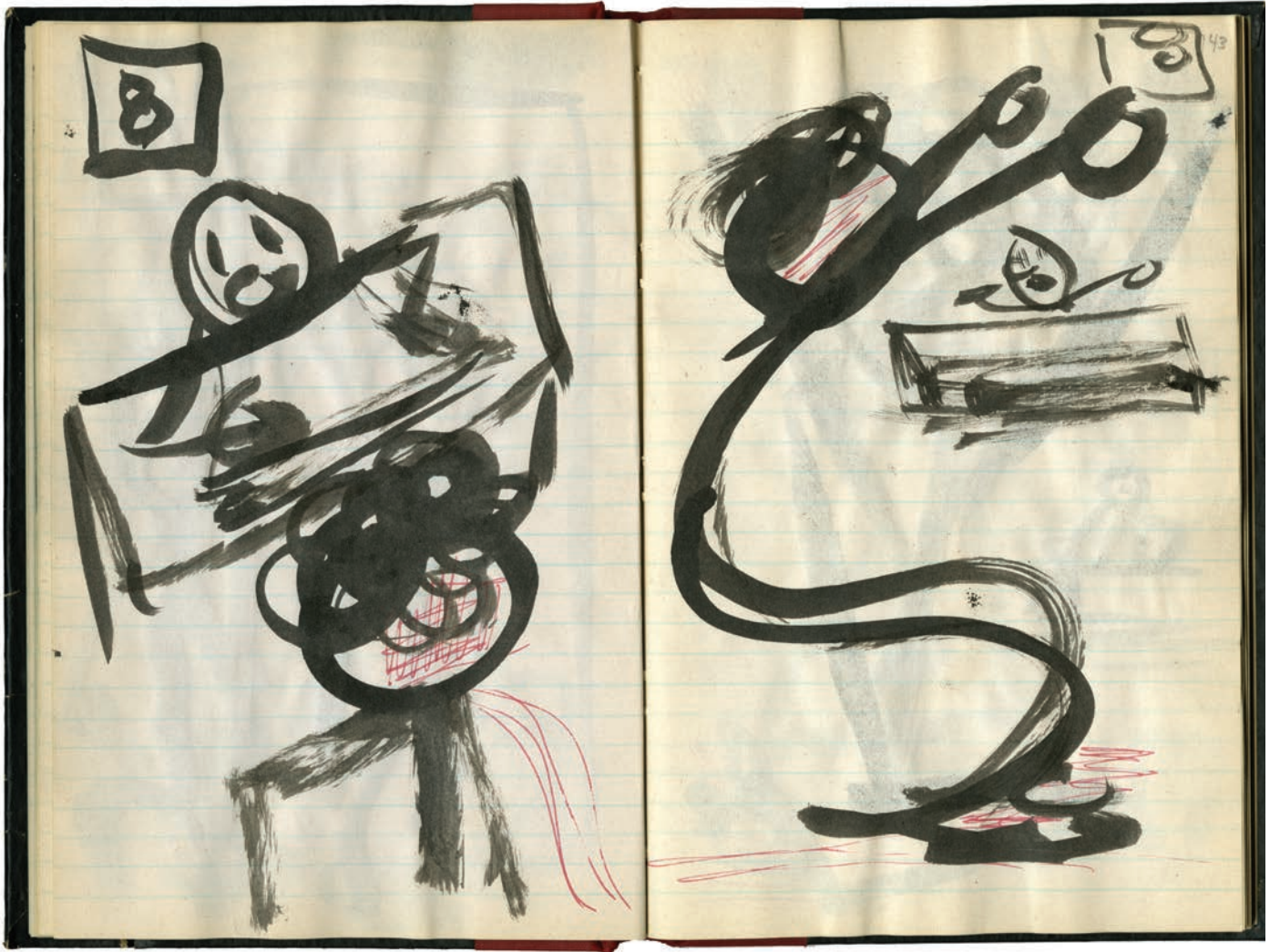


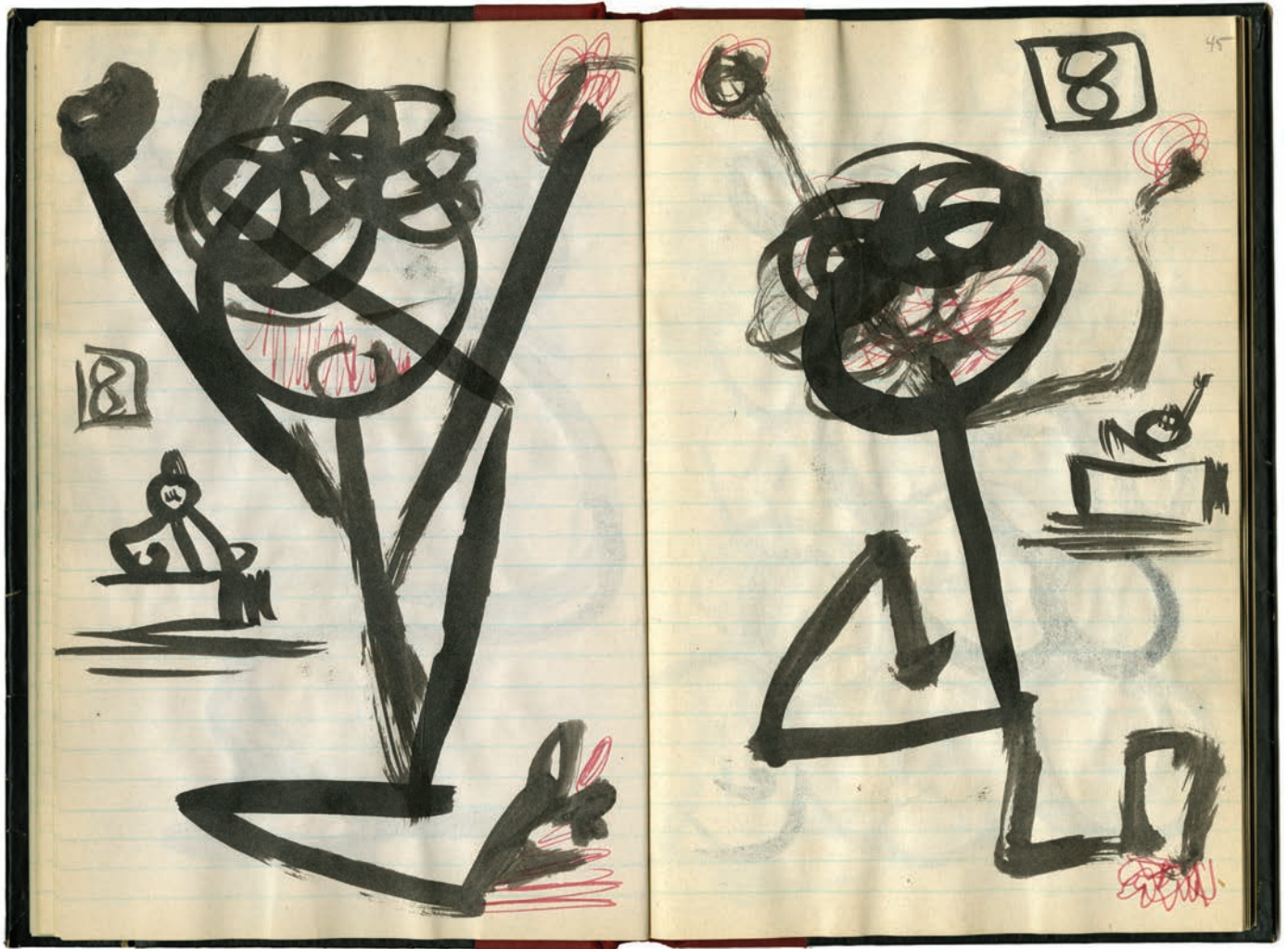


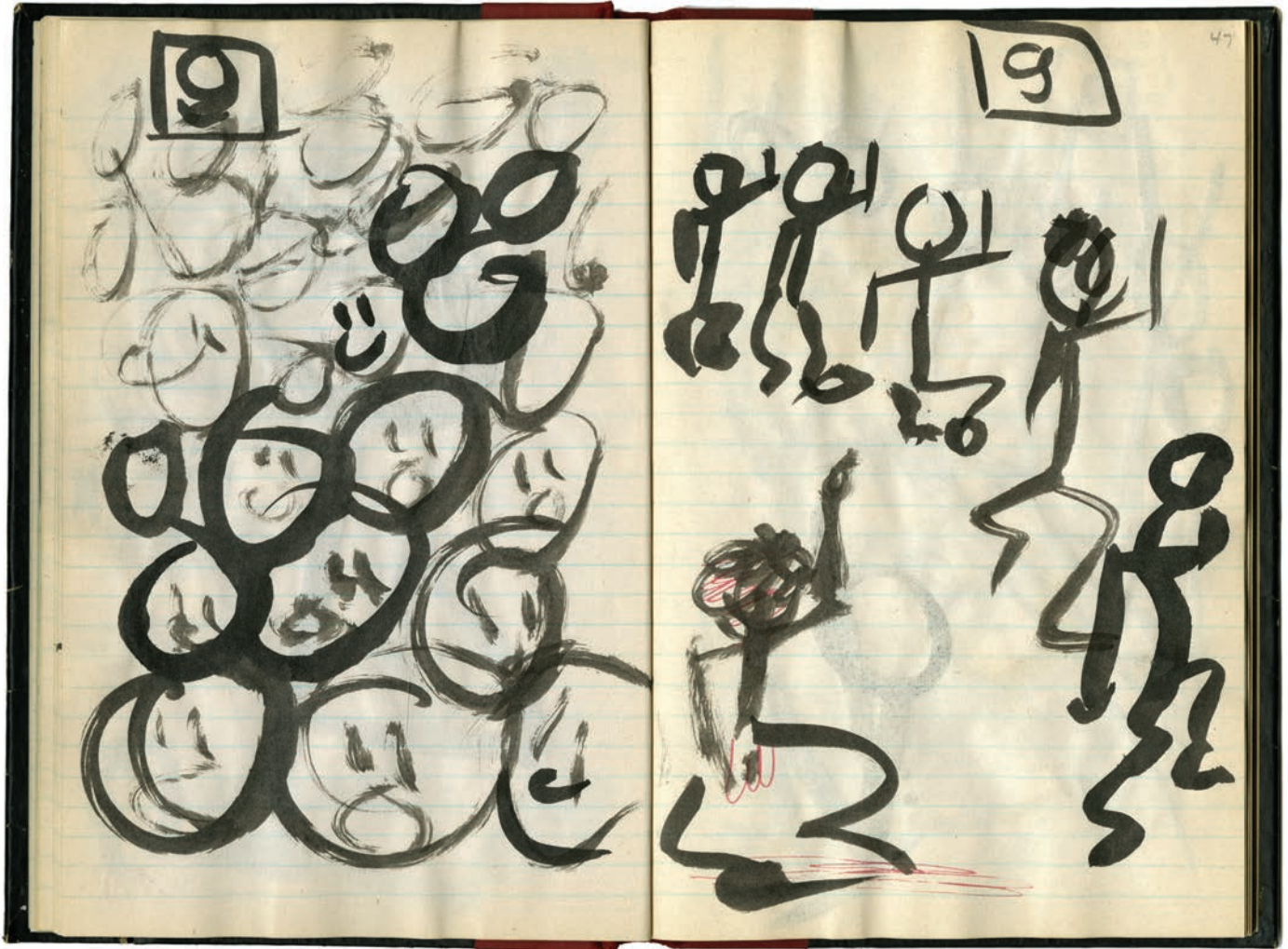








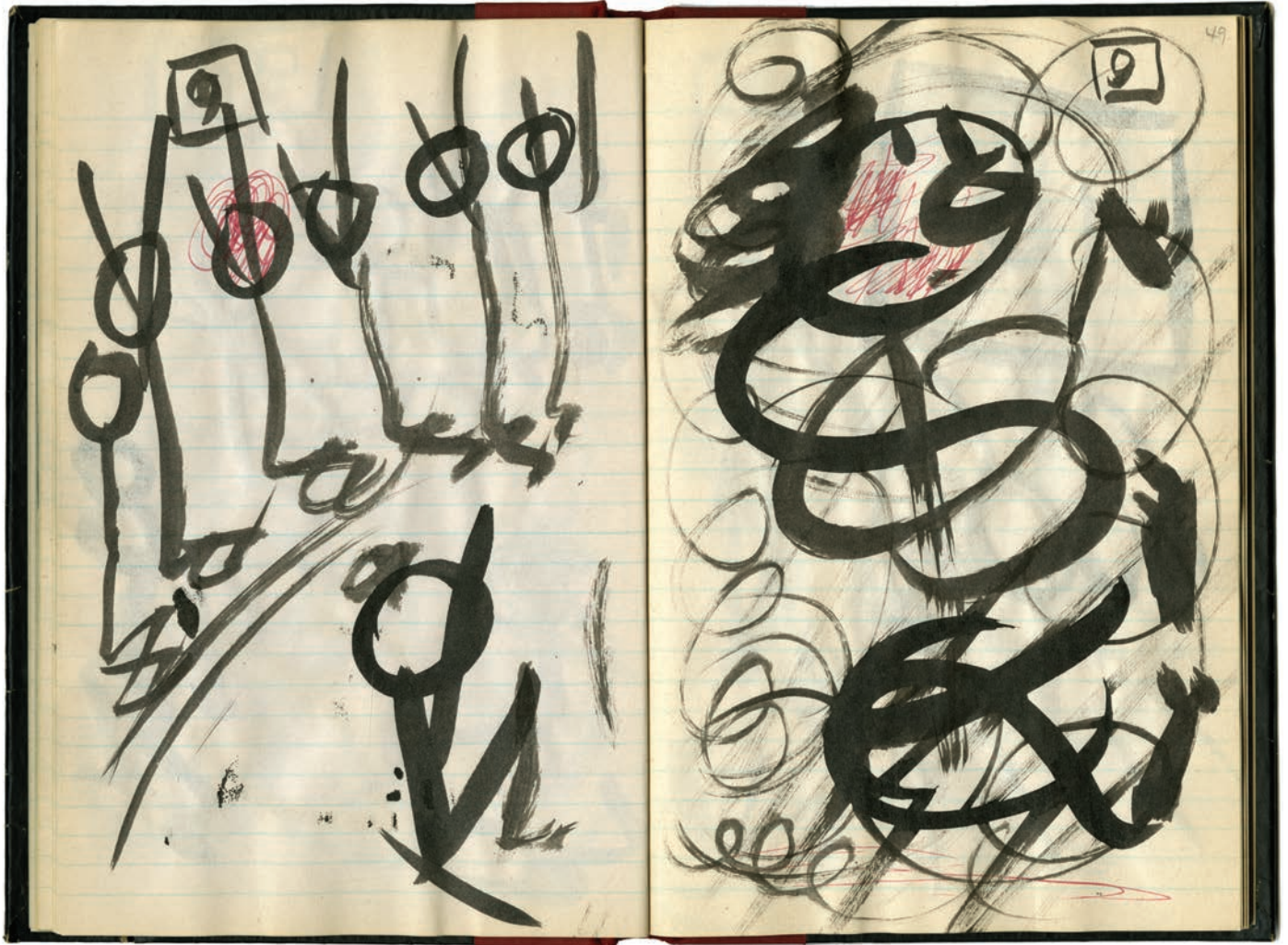


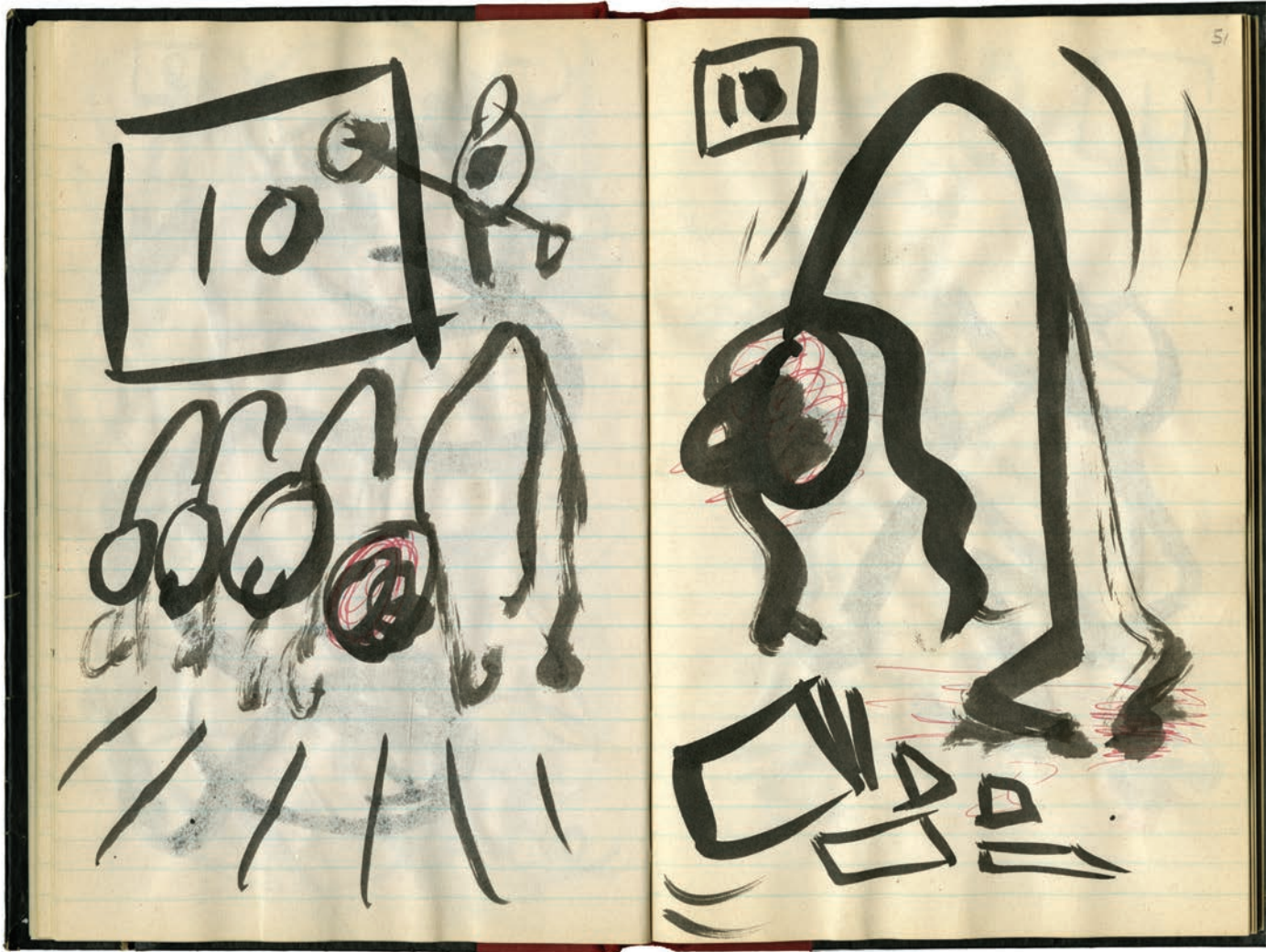


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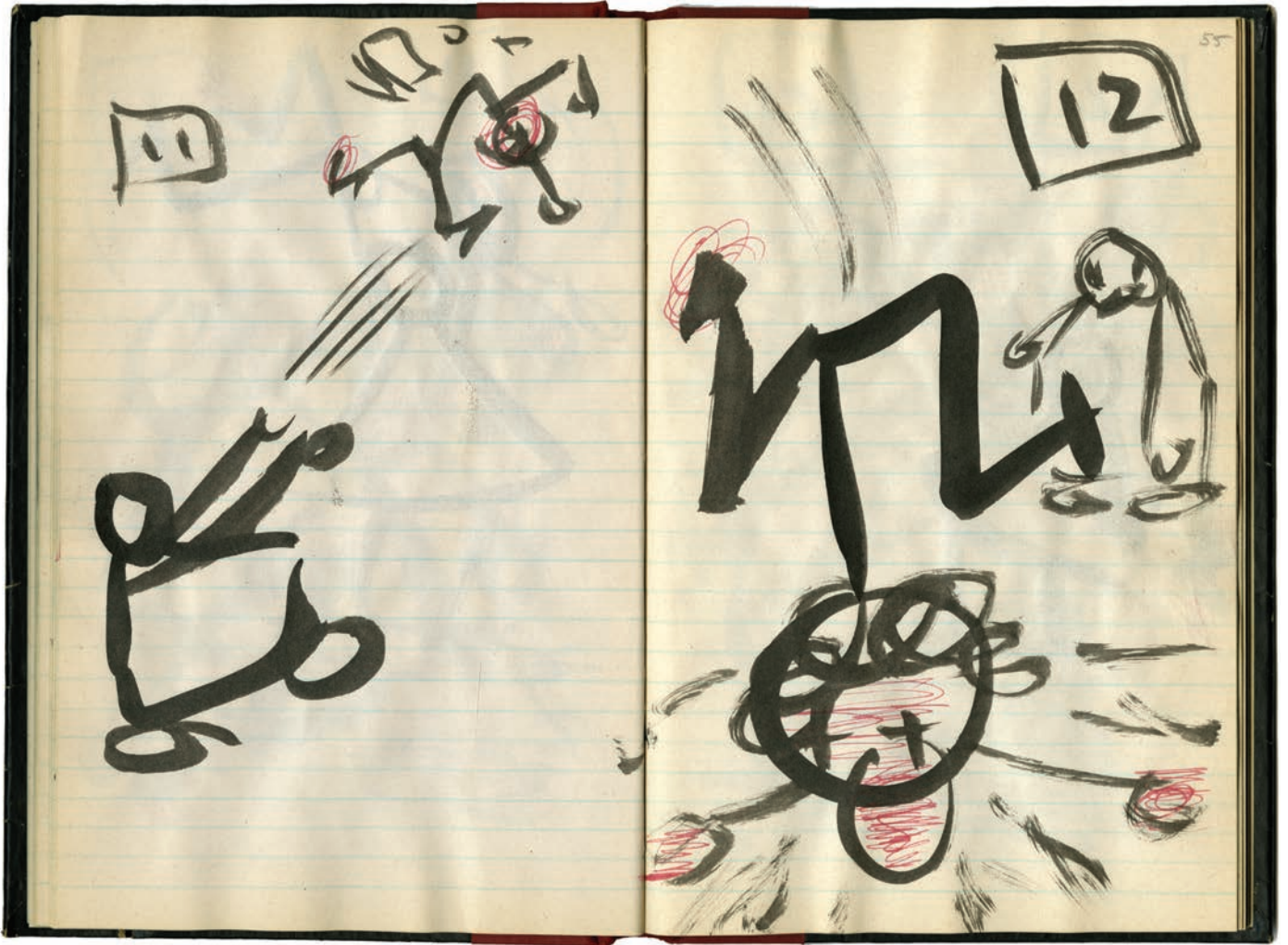
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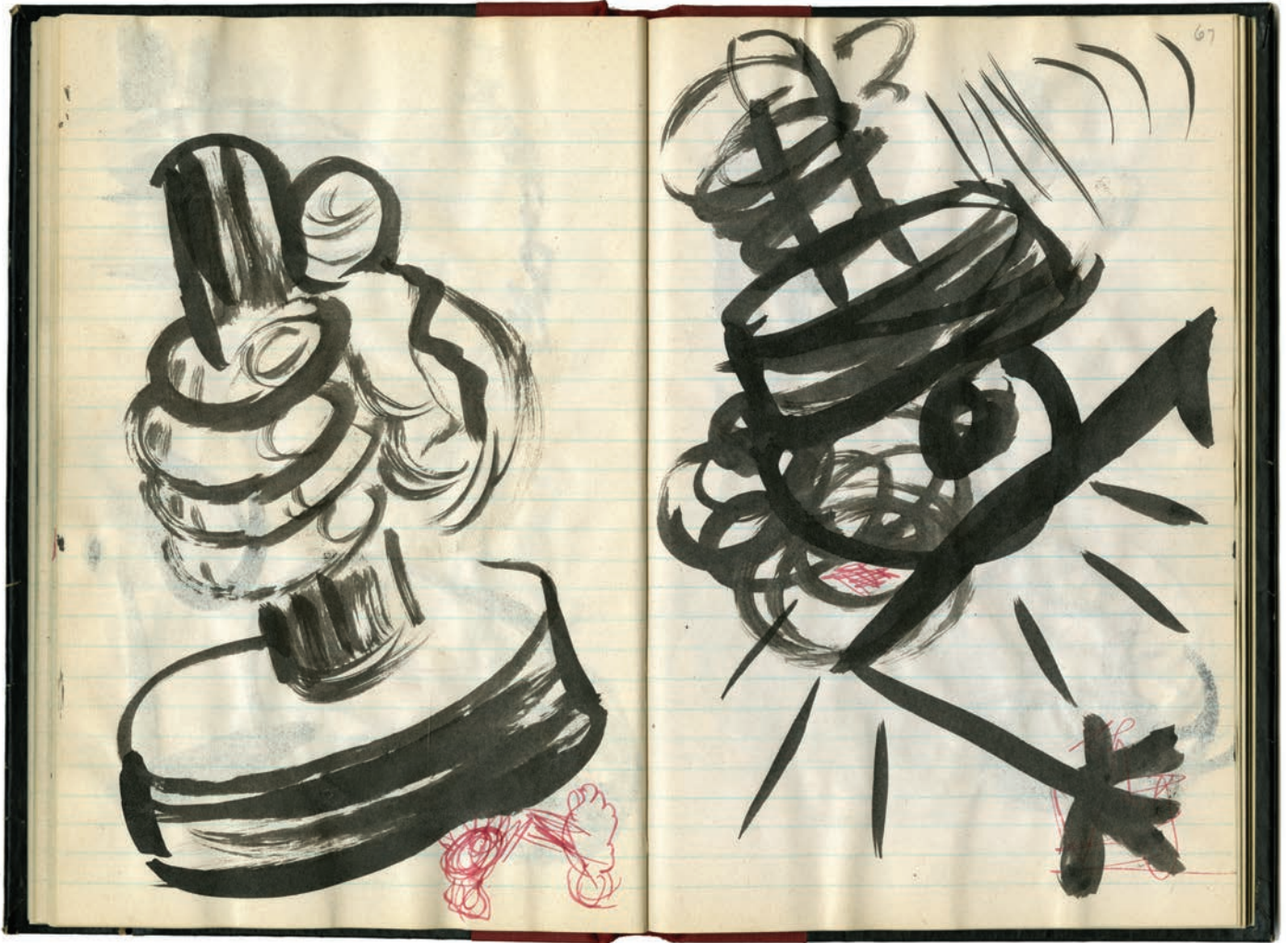


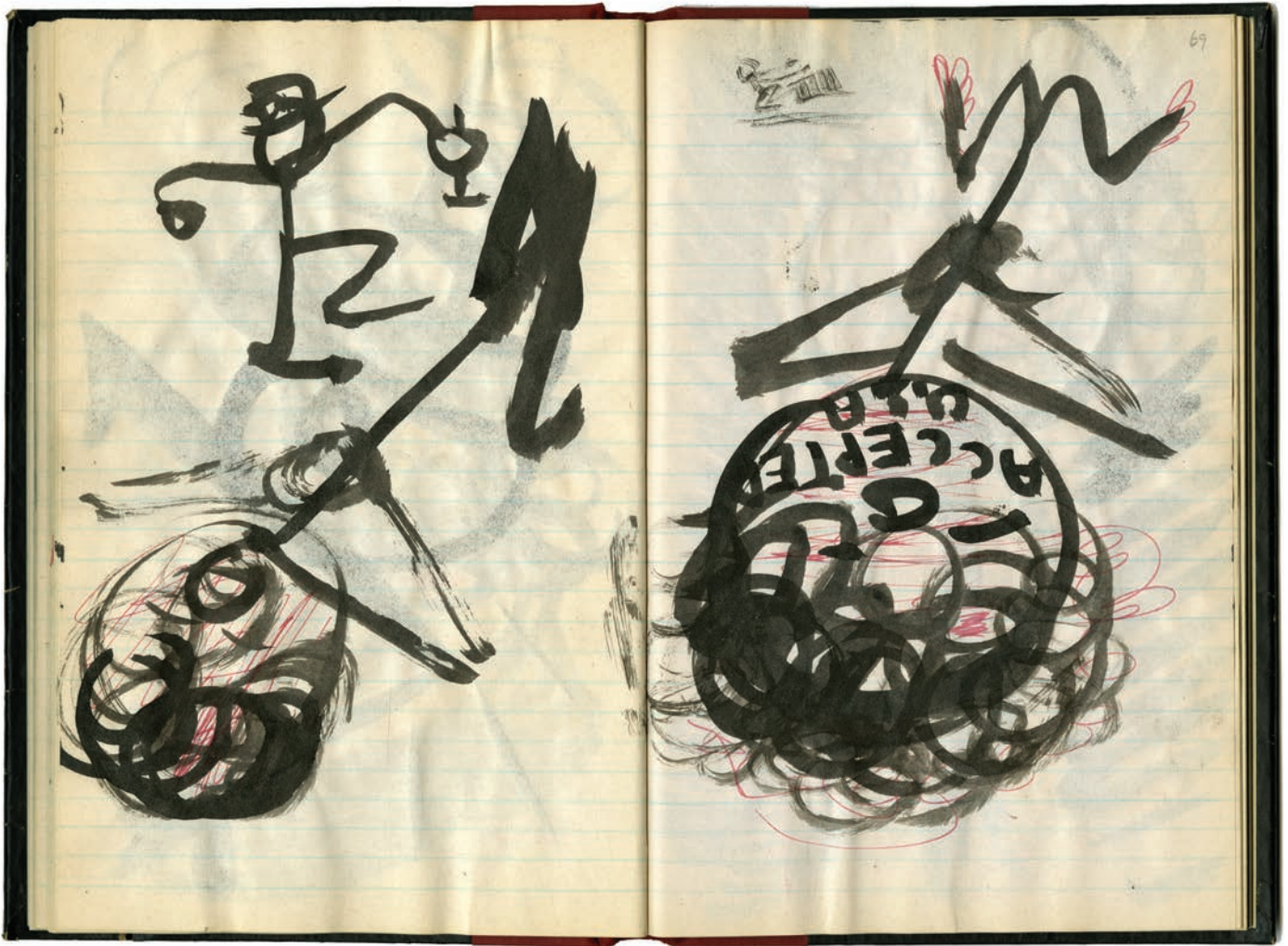


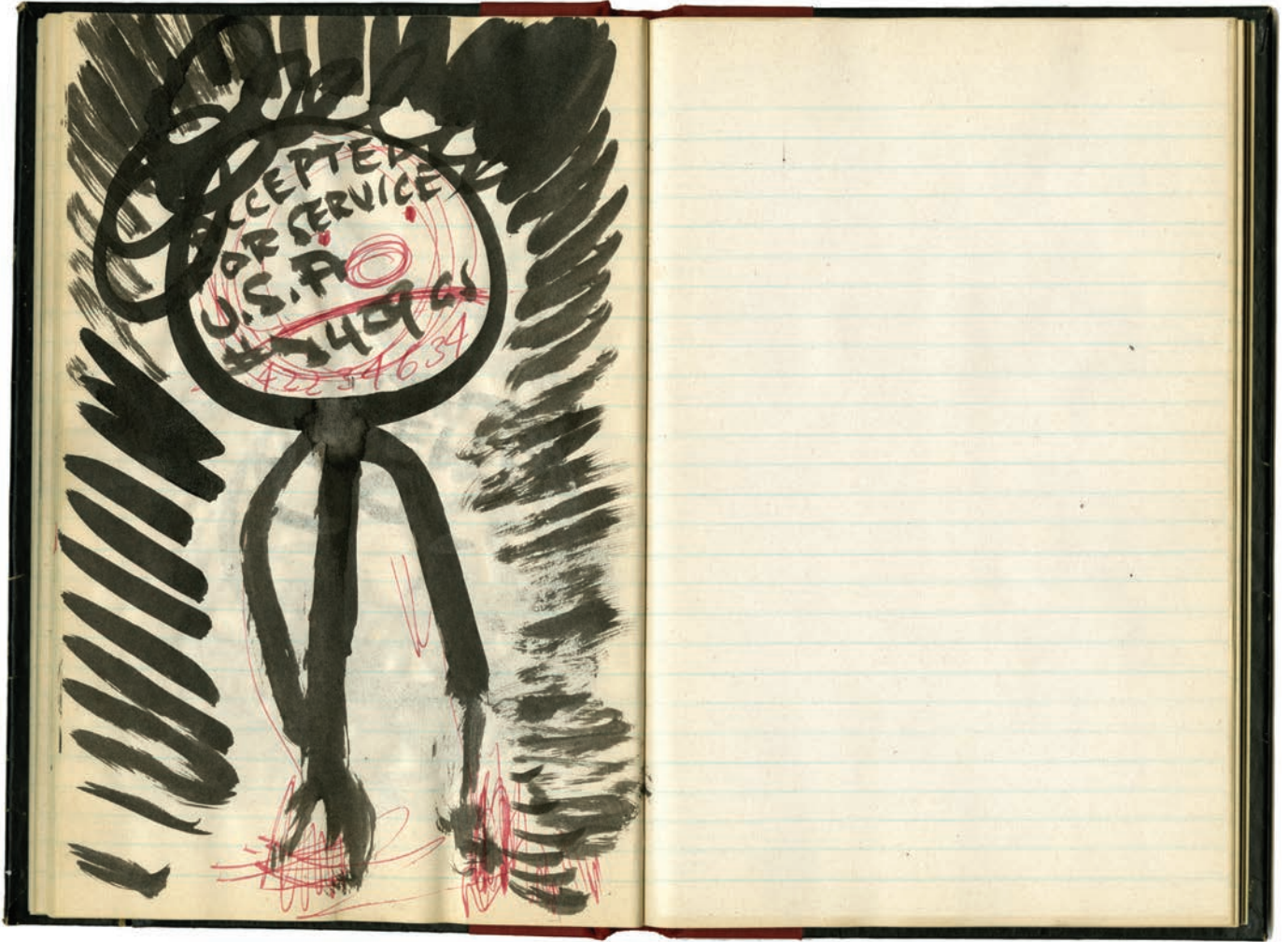












THE
REUBEN JAMES

The *Reuben James* was the first U.S. warship sunk by hostile action in the Second World War, sunk on October 31, 1941. It wasn't the first American boat sunk by German torpedoes, and the United States was not yet at war.

Germany was at war with the United Kingdom, however, and one form this took was what, in February 1941, Winston Churchill called the "Battle of the Atlantic." German submarines had been attacking merchant ships bringing goods to the U.K., as had German aircraft. Over 250 ships bringing supplies to the U.K. had been sunk in 1940 alone. Eleven of the ships sunk had been American vessels.¹ The naval tanker *Salinas* had been damaged by a submarine attack just the night before the *Reuben James* was hit.

Beginning with the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, the United States had been sending materiel across the Atlantic in convoys to the U.K., and as of September began escorting the ships from North America as far as Iceland, where British vessels took over that responsibility. The *Reuben James* was one of those escort ships, beginning that month.

The *Reuben James* (DD-245) was a destroyer which had originally been launched in October 1919, not long after the First World War had ended. After war broke out in Europe in September 1939, the *Reuben James* joined the Neutrality Patrol, guarding the coast of the United States along the Atlantic coast.

Who was Reuben James?

Who was Reuben James, after whom the vessel was named? He was an early American naval hero. Reuben James was a boatswain's mate who had been born in Delaware the year America declared its independence, 1776. Delaware was also the first state to ratify the Constitution. James served aboard the U.S.S. *Constellation* in battles against France in 1799 and five years later aboard the first U.S.S. *Enterprise* in actions on the Barbary Coast. In 1804 he was part of the squadron led by Capt. Stephen Decatur which entered Tripoli's harbor to set fire to the captured American frigate *Philadelphia* rather than see the pirates convert her to use against the American Navy.

During hand-to-hand combat which ensued, Decatur nearly lost his life. As John M. Hightower of the Associated Press explained in 1941, "In the course of the fight, Decatur was knocked down by a Tripolitan warrior and the scimitar of another assailant was quickly raised to deliver the final blow. In apparent disregard of his own safety or even his life, one of Decatur's men interposed his own body and received the blow intended for his commander."² Decatur's defender was Reuben James. The blow was not fatal and he recovered. James fought during the War of 1812, serving under Decatur, and he was captured and held as a prisoner of war until the cessation of hostilities. James remained in the Navy until 1836, and died at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Washington, D.C. on December 3, 1838.

The final voyage of the Reuben James

By the autumn of 1941, the *Reuben James* was based at Hvalfjordur, Iceland. On October 23, 1941, she sailed from Argentia, Newfoundland, with four other destroyers to escort eastbound convoy HX-156, intending to hand over escort duties to Royal Navy warships. The convoy comprised 42 ships, and the five escorting destroyers were the flag ship *Benson* (DD-421), the *Niblack* (DD 424), the *Hilary P. Jones* (DD-427), the *Tarbell* (DD-152), and the *Reuben James*.

Eight days later, about 250 miles south of Iceland and early on the morning of October 31 at about 5:25 AM, a German torpedo fired from U-boat U-552 struck the portside of the *Reuben James*. The Federation of American Scientists explained, "The ship had postured itself between an ammunition ship in the convoy and the known position of a German U-Boat Wolfpack.



THE SINKING OF THE REUBEN JAMES

She was hit forward by a torpedo and her entire front end was blown off when a magazine exploded. She floated for five minutes before going down. ... Within 36 hours of this attack the American Congress authorized transfer of the Coast Guard to the US Navy.”³

Torpedoman 3c Robert J. Howard was one of those who survived. Some years ago, he recalled going off watch about 0400 and going to catch some sleep in the after deckhouse. He was awakened by the explosion, grabbed a life jacket and passed some out to others, as the ship was quickly sinking. The ship was pretty much cut in half, and almost all the men in the forward part of the “Rube” were killed. “By some miracle, two men survived the explosion of the forward part of the ship. The bosun’s mate of the watch had been in the well deck and was about to ascend the ladder to the bridge. The explosion of the torpedo blew him overboard, well clear of the ship. The helmsman was thrown to the deck by the torpedo blast, and when the magazine blew up he was thrown through the pilot house canopy and into the sea. Although neither man had a life jacket, they were able to stay afloat long enough to join their mates on one of the rafts.”⁴

Another survivor, Norman Hingula, was a fireman first class at the time and he, too, had gone off duty at 0400. He scrambled topside and found “the lifeboats blown up, the number three stack toppled forward and just no ship at all forward of that. Midships was now the bow.”⁵ He jumped overboard and into the 37-degree waters, which were already covered with a slick of oil. “The stern kept floating for about five minutes and I thought maybe I’d better stay with her. But just as I grabbed on to reboard her, she started down. The suction was taking me with her and I was struggling against it when underwater I heard this ‘CLINK!’ It was a depth charge from one of the stern racks arming itself. The arming lanyards had pulled loose and it was set to explode at a depth of 50 feet.” He was blown into the air, then came down and submerged only to be blown up into the air again by a second depth charge. “I felt like I’d been hit in the back of the head with a baseball bat,” he said. When he was hauled aboard one of the other destroyers and rescued, “I was covered with oil, but they couldn’t find anything wrong with me.”⁶

The *Reuben James* wasn’t the first American warship hit – just two weeks earlier, the destroyer *U.S.S. Kearny* had been torpedoed on convoy duty and 11 men were killed. But the *Reuben James* was the first Navy ship to be sunk. And more than two-thirds of the men on board lost their lives – 99 to 101 men, while 45 survived. (Remarkably, there seems to exist no definitive listing of fatalities.)

Seeking the last survivor

In July 2012, when I was putting the final touches on these notes, it struck me that my own father had survived a horrific event in World War II when the airplane he was on crashed in Egypt killing all on board except for two soldiers – himself and one other. Although it had been more than 70 years since the *Reuben James* went down, it was possible that a handful of survivors might still be living. A day’s worth of research, including telephoning people around the country who had the name of a survivor left me thinking I may have just missed the opportunity to talk with a survivor. I reached several relatives – every one of whom was familiar with Woody Guthrie’s song. Cynthia Blawski of Victor, New York told me that she believed her father Charles W. Phalen had been the last survivor, and he had died in 2010. However, the final call I made – because he was on the West Coast – was to Earl Jaeggi of La Mesa, California. He affirmed that he had been aboard the *Reuben James* when the German torpedo struck. On July 11, I spoke with him and he offered perhaps the last interview we will ever have with a man who served aboard the good *Reuben James*.

Earl William Jaeggi, Shipfitter 2c, USN, #311-38-17, enlisted on August 17, 1938 in his native city of Detroit, Michigan. His home address was 6510 Vinewood Avenue in Detroit. At the time, his next of kin was his wife, Josephine Jaeggi, who lived at 532 W. 50th Street in New York, New York.

EARL JAEGGI:

I was in the Navy. I was a shipfitter second. We were going to Iceland from Newfoundland. We picked up a convoy there. We would usually drop them off just south of Iceland, where the British would take over.

I think it was our third convoy. I was 22. There was a naval war in the North Atlantic at that time. I had just come off of the after gun mount and I was just getting into my bunk. It was a pretty good jolt. The first half of the ship was just gone. I was in the rear. The front end of the boat went down first.

The after section stayed afloat probably for another 12 or 15 minutes and then it went under.

This was just before sunrise. It was still dark outside. It was pretty dark. As far as I can remember, there was no moonlight. It was just starting to get sunrise. That’s when the submarines attack because they can see you better. They get the sun behind them and you’re in the sun and they can see you better, and you can’t see them.



EARL JAEGGI, 1940 AND 2012.

There were a lot of night stars out so it wasn't completely black. It was clear. You could see something. We only had two life rafts. We just dropped them in the water and those who hadn't died in the first explosion just got into the life raft. And then when the ship sank, the after part sank, the depth charges started going off and that killed the rest of them.

There was a lot of warm fuel oil still on the surface. We didn't really start to get cold for about 10 or 12 minutes, when the oil dispersed and the life rafts drifted out of the oil slick.

The only two ships that came over were another couple of destroyers, the *Niblack* and the *Jones*. The rest of the convoy just kept going, the cargo ships anyway. That's all they're supposed to do.

It was the *Niblack* which rescued Jeaggi. He had no idea how many people were in the life raft with him. "You don't think of that when you're in the water," he said. Another survivor, George Giehl, said the *Niblack* and *Jones* had acted against standing orders not to leave the convoy for rescue missions. The men in the water were so covered with oil that they looked like seals.⁷

BILL NOWLIN: Once you got on the lifeboat, how long was it before you were able to get on the *Niblack*?

EARL JAEGGI: Fifteen minutes, maybe. When the explosions started – the torpedo hit and then the depth charges – they came over to investigate. They had no way of knowing that there was a casualty. They just thought we were attacking a submarine or something.

BN: Were there any flames or smoke from the ship?

EJ: When we hit the water, there was still a huge smoke in the air from the explosion and everything.

BN: Was it just one torpedo?

EJ: I'm sure it was just one. But they hit up there between the forward fire room and the ammunition storage area. It probably was a much bigger explosion than just a torpedo.

BN: You figure about half the people who died, died in the initial explosion?

EJ: That's right. Fifty percent of them died right then. There was nobody in the ship anymore. We were all in the water then at that time. That killed a lot of us. Fifty percent of those who got off on the back, those fifty percent were killed by the depth charges.

The other fifty percent died when the depth charges began to explode 50 feet below the surface, as the *Reuben James* sank toward her grave on the bottom of the sea. Some were seriously injured, but not killed, by the explosions; Bob Carr from Buffalo had his knee broken – but he was alive.

Jaeggi said there was no one aboard ship who'd come with him from Detroit. The men, he said, were from all over. Did he lose some good friends on the good *Reuben James*? "They were all good friends," he said. "In a small ship like that, you know everybody."

The *Niblack* took the survivors ahead to Iceland, from where the men shipped back to New York. The ship's medical officers on the *Niblack* looked after them; most of them didn't need to visit a hospital in Iceland.

Earl said, "I went to the Pacific after that." Jaeggi served in the Navy for more than 30 years.

BN: Have you kept in touch with any of the other people who survived?

EJ: Not really. During the war, we went our different ways.

BN: It would be a bond that you shared.

EJ: That didn't come into it after December 7. We were somewhere else.

BN: How long did you stay in the Navy?

EJ: Thirty years, 11 months, and 14 days.

BN: What rank did you end up with?

EJ: Master Chief. 1969.

BN: What have you done since that time?

EJ: I worked for the City of San Diego. I was with the Recreation Department.

BN: How often does it come up, that you think about the *Reuben James*?

EJ: Maybe once or twice a year. Certain things that the Navy does kind of jogs my memory, and that's about it.

He was aware that there have been two other ships subsequently named the *Reuben James*, but has never visited either of them. More than half the survivors attended the 1986 ceremony for the launching of the third *Reuben James*.

The German U-boat

The commander of the German U-boat was Kapitän-Leutnant Erich Topp. He was also the commander who later fired on the tramp steamer *David H. Atwater* off Chincoteague, Virginia on April 2, 1942. The submarine crew's machine guns killed 24 of the 27 sailors on board. Topp was responsible for sinking 35 boats. He survived the war.

Perhaps unexpectedly, according to the site www.uboa.net, "After the war Topp worked for some months as a fisherman before he became a successful architect. In March 1958 he rejoined the [German] Navy. He then spent four years in the USA as a staff member of the Military Committee of NATO. Later he served in several staff positions and for a month was commander of U-boats in deputize. Konteradmiral Erich Topp retired in December 1969. He was decorated in that year with the Große Bundes-Verdienst-kreuz (Great Federal Merit Cross). From 1970 to 1984 he worked as industrial consultant for, among others, the Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft."

Topp died on December 26, 2005. And, perhaps grotesquely, autographed photographs of him can be found on eBay in July 2012.

Of course, the *Reuben James* was not itself an unarmed vessel. One of the reasons its depth charges went off as they sank in the water was that they had been armed because of ongoing activity to defend the convoy from submarine attacks. According to the site www.wv2pacific.com: "*Reuben James* had dropped two depth charges on targets and had tied the safety locks to automatically arm the depth charges." Two more depth charges had been left on the ship's "Y" guns, armed and ready to fire if they detected a submarine. One had been set to detonate at 50 feet and the other to explode at 100 feet. "Twenty minutes after the torpedo struck, while dozens of men were thrashing about in an effort to find the life rafts, the stern of the *James* went down. In a few moments, the first depth charge exploded, hurling a tremendous column of water into the air. A second blast followed. Men were tossed out of the water. Life jackets were torn off. One raft was cleared of eight occupants. When the force of the two blasts subsided, only 45 of the 100 men who jumped into the ocean were left to be rescued."⁸

Storekeeper third class Leonidas C. Dickerson had written a letter to his aunt from Iceland a few weeks earlier; it arrived the week before the *Reuben James* was sunk. In the letter, he referred to the anti-submarine work. He said he'd been at sea for 42 consecutive days and said, "I have lots to tell you when I see you," adding, "We have gotten two subs, maybe more."⁹ Dickerson was among those who lost their lives.

As mentioned, the tanker *Salinas* had been hit by a torpedo just the night before the *Reuben James* was. Passengers on board the *Godafoss*, an Icelandic steamship carrying passengers in the opposite direction, from Reykjavik to New York, said they had heard the explosion when the *Salinas* was hit, and an American newsreel cameraman aboard the steamship said that the *Reuben James* had left the convoy to aid the *Salinas*. The very next morning, it was the *Reuben James* which was hit.

Had Topp intended to sink the *Reuben James*? Perhaps not. Survivor Bob Carr was a fireman second class. He was emphatic: "No chance at all the Germans fired that torpedo at the *Reuben James*," Carr said. "It was aimed at one of the freighters or tankers – they'd never waste a fish on a tin can like the old Rube. She took a blow that was aimed at someone else . . . just like her namesake!"¹⁰ Carr was, of course, harking back to the original James taking the blow aimed at Stephen Decatur.

After the sinking of the *Reuben James*

The sinking of an American Navy destroyer by hostile German activity propelled the United States closer to war. Understandably, it was a major front-page story when it occurred, with the reported loss of 100 American lives. In stories datelined the next day, readers learned that the wives of about 60 of the *James*' complement who had taken up residence in the ship's U.S. home base of Portland, Maine were awaiting word. The *Chicago Tribune* story on November 2 was headlined "Frantic Wives Wait In Vain for Word of Rescue." Mrs. Solon Boyd, wife of an 11-year Navy veteran only a couple of days from being due for promotion from machinist's mate to chief machinist, said that he had told her before departing, "I'm afraid I won't be back this time." She herself said she thought the *James* had a holiday jinx on it, having run aground at Key West on Thanksgiving 1940 and now having been sunk on Halloween 1941. Nonetheless, "I couldn't believe my ears when I heard the news on my radio – I just froze in the chair." The couple's six-year-old daughter had recognized the name of her father's ship – the *Reuben James* – and began to cry inconsolably." The Boyds, like the rest, had to wait a few days to get word as to whether their loved ones were among the 45 they soon learned had been saved. In the case of the Boyds, good news arrived.

REUNION OF SURVIVORS ABOARD THE NEW REUBEN JAMES, FFG 57.



On the afternoon of November 24, 42 of the survivors of the *Reuben James* arrived at the New York Port of Embarkation in Brooklyn on a U.S. Maritime Commission transport, the *Algorab*. They were interviewed for more than four hours at the receiving ship, the *USS Seattle*, based on 52nd Street on the Hudson. Chief Petty Officer William Bergstresser was the only officer who had survived. He told of ordering three life rafts thrown overboard and of the men boarding them. About 20 minutes later, while they were about 100 yards away, there was another explosion as the *James* went under for good. "They felt there was something there as long as the ship was floating," Bergstresser said, "they felt lost when she went down."¹² There was a little black humor, of course, to help them get by, jibing each other as being "Mack Sennett bathing beauties."¹³ About 20 minutes after that, the men were rescued by another vessel (which we now know was the *Niblack*, but which name was not released at the time.) They stayed aboard the *Niblack* for two days and then were transferred to another ship. Among the survivors were two brothers – Charlie and Parmie Appleton of Sardis, Mississippi.

On December 14, one week to the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and just 45 days after the sinking of the *Reuben James* by German action, the U.S. Navy held a memorial ceremony aboard "Old Ironsides" in Boston, attended by Mrs. Heywood L. Edwards, widow of the commanding officer of the *James*, and five other widows. The *Constitution* ("Old Ironsides") had itself seen duty on the Barbary Coast and in the War of 1812, as had the man himself, Reuben James.

As an aside, we note that one of the men who died was named Woody – to be precise, Seaman First Class George Woody, Jr., USN.

As the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted, "Because Nazi torpedoes make no distinction between admirals and messmen," three of those lost were messmen Raymond Cook, Nebraska Dunston, and Joseph Johnson.¹⁴ The accompanying photographs in the African American newspaper made clear the ethnicity of the three. The *New York Amsterdam Star-News* had been less circumspect in its headline: "3 Negroes Go Down on Reuben James."¹⁵

Wanting to continue to honor the name, there have been two other ships commissioned as the *Reuben James*. Construction on the second *James* began within the year, on September 7, 1942. It was a Buckley class destroyer (DE-153) which was commissioned on April 1, 1943 and conducted anti-submarine patrols while providing training in convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare. In June 1944, she escorted a convoy from New York to Norfolk. Between July 13 and November 7, 1944, she escorted two convoys to the Mediterranean, returning with westbound convoys. During her first eastbound voyage, nine German bombers attacked her convoy off Algeria on August 1, 1944. This second *Reuben James* shot down one enemy bomber.

Returning to Boston, she joined an anti-submarine group operating in the North Atlantic. Operating south of Newfoundland, she was present when *USS Buckley* (DE-51) sank German submarine U-879 on April 19, 1945.

Arriving at Houston, Texas on July 4, 1945, she completed conversion to a radar picket ship on November 25, 1945. Subsequently, she operated in the Atlantic and the Caribbean out of Norfolk, Virginia, then was decommissioned on October 11, 1947. She remained in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet until she was struck from the Navy List on June 30, 1968. Her hulk was used as a target and sunk on March 1, 1971.

The third *Reuben James* (FFG-57) was commissioned on March 22, 1986. Assigned to Mideast Force on her maiden deployment, she participated in 22 Operation Ernest Will convoy missions, serving as the convoy commander's flagship on ten of those missions. As a unit of the Pacific Fleet Anti-Submarine Warfare Readiness Squadron, she was a key participant in the continuing research and development of anti-submarine tactics and equipment, a fitting role in tribute to the men of the first *Reuben James*.

For nine months from July 2002 to April 2003, *Reuben James* deployed to the Arabian Gulf and participated in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. From February-April 2004, she deployed to the Eastern Pacific in support of counter-drug operations.

USS Reuben James appeared in the movie *The Hunt for Red October* and was the first ship to find Soviet submarine captain Marko Ramius and his crew of defectors. Of course, the Soviet sailors who stood on her foc'sle were not really Soviets – they were actually *Reuben James* crew members. The *Reuben James* also had a prominent role in the book *Red Storm Rising*. The ship is still in active service but is scheduled to be decommissioned in August 2013.

Attending the 1986 commissioning of the third *Reuben James* were 20 or so of the survivors of the first *Reuben James*. Woody Guthrie's song refers to 44 who had been saved, but the number was 45 and Samuel Orme, an ensign aboard the *Niblack* explained: "We got them out of the water as fast as we could. For a long time we thought just 44 had survived... Later it turned out another man had been rescued – and got lost in the shuffle. Things were kind of confusing that night."¹⁶ Confusion had also resulted when five living men were mistakenly included among the initial listing of fatalities. At least one mother received a telegram incorrectly announcing the loss of her son, Frederick Bishop.¹⁷

10

IT IS WITH DEEP REGRET THAT THE NAVY DEPARTMENT NOTIFIES
 YOU THAT FROM LATEST AVAILABLE INFORMATION IT APPEARS
 THAT YOUR SON GENE GUY EVANS BOILERMAKER SECOND CLASS US NAVY
 LOST HIS LIFE IN LINE OF DUTY AND IN THE SERVICE OF HIS
 COUNTRY WHEN THE USS REUBEN JAMES WAS TORPEDOED AND SUNK

 C W NIMITZ
 CHIEF OF BUREAU OF NAVIGATION

9

Name EVANS, Gene Guy
(Name in full, surname to the left.)
 No. 268-35-16 Rate E.1c (P.A.)
 Date reported March 24, 1941
 Ship or Station U.S.S. REUBEN JAMES (245)
 From R/S NOB Norfolk, Va.

OFFICIALLY DECLARED TO HAVE LOST
 HIS LIFE ON OCTOBER 31, 1941, BEING
 A MEMBER OF THE CREW AND ABOARD
 THE USS REUBEN JAMES WHEN THAT
 VESSEL WAS TORPEDOED AND SUNK THAT
 DATE IN NORTH ATLANTIC. (SEE SECNNAV
 LETTER OF NOV. 13, 1941, DD 245/
 P16-1(36)- CASUALTY FILE.

RANDALL JACOBS
 CHIEF OF BUREAU

D. W. CANNON, USNR
 BY DIRECTION

Date transferred _____

To _____

Signature and rank of Commanding Officer.

Date received _____

Ship _____

or Station _____

From _____

Signature and rank of Commanding Officer. 6-0111

The survivors began to hold reunions starting in 1983, at which point six had died but a full 24 had simply been out of touch. By the time of the 1986 ceremony, several more had been located. Orme was invited to attend as well. Survivor Guy Graham said, "A man who will go into a freezing sea for you...we want to keep him around."¹⁸

The monument in Portland, Maine was dedicated on Memorial Day 1999 and stands near the Old Marine Hospital on the grounds of the Martin's Point Health Care facility. It lists the names of 105 men, but mistakenly includes four of the men who had not been aboard (Anderson, Bishop, Campbell, and Krystanak). It does not include the name of 18-year-old first class seaman Joseph Gustave Little, of Brooklyn, New York.¹⁹ The *Reuben James* had been based in Portland, hence the location for the monument. Four of the survivors attended the dedication.

The *Washington Post*, reporting on a 1991 reunion of ten of the survivors at the Navy Memorial in Washington, told stories of several of the survivors, and then mentioned Jack Fink, who'd been a 21-year-old radio operator on the *Reuben James* – and the last man off the ship before it left on its final voyage. Fink had been transferred to another ship in Newfoundland. He was on duty at the radio when he learned of the fate of the men who'd been his shipmates. He readily admitted he "cried like a baby" – and that he had felt guilty ever since. "I was the only man technically qualified on sonar. The others were still learning. I've always wondered whether we would have heard that sub if I'd been there."²⁰

The *Post* continued: He thought he had put the memory and guilt behind him, he said, until one day in the 1950s when he was sitting with his wife at breakfast and heard for the first time the song that is most Americans' link with the ship he loved.

Tell me, what were their names?

Tell me, what were their names?

Did you have a friend on the good Reuben James?

Asked what he thought about the song, he "pondered the question but remained silent." "Well, you must have thought something," said his wife, Vivian. "You got up and left the room."

LIST OF PERSONNEL LOST WHEN THE USS REUBEN JAMES WAS TORPEDOED AND SUNK ON OCTOBER 31, 1941.

The official listing of fatalities in the sinking of the *Reuben James* was reported on December 5, 1941 by the Commanding Officer of the receiving ship in New York City.

To that list, we have added the home communities of all the men for which we have such information, as provided earlier by the Navy Department on November 6. In the case of the officers, this was their place of birth. For the enlisted personnel, it was their home addresses at the time.

Lieutenant Commander Heywood Lane EDWARDS, U.S. Navy (Commanding), San Saba, Texas

Lieutenant Benjamin GHETZLER, U.S. Navy, born in Brooklyn, New York

Lieutenant Dewey George JOHNSTON, U.S. Navy, born in Newcastle, Oklahoma

Lieutenant (junior grade) John Justus DAUB, U.S. Navy, Salsburg, Pennsylvania

Lieutenant James Mead BELDEN, D-V (G), U.S. Naval Reserve, Syracuse, New York

Ensign Craig S. POWERS, U.S. Navy, Newark, New Jersey

Ensign Howard Voyer WADE, D-V (G), U.S. Naval Reserve, Albany, New York

BAUER, John Francis, Jr., Chief Radioman (AA) Class V-3, U.S. Naval Reserve, Chester, Pennsylvania

BEASLEY, Harold Hamner, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Hinton, West Virginia

BENSON, James Franklin, Machinist's Mate second class, U.S. Navy, Swan Quarter, North Carolina

BIEHL, Joseph Peter, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

BOYNTON, Paul Rogers, Yeoman first class, U.S. Navy, Carthage, Texas

BRITT, Harold Lelie, Coxswain, U.S. Navy, Athol, Massachusetts

BURRELL, Herbert Ralph, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Cleveland, Ohio

BYRD, Hartwell Lee, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Asheboro, North Carolina

CARBAUGH, Leftwich Erastus, Jr., Fireman first class, U.S. Navy, Princeton, West Virginia

CARUSO, Joseph James, Radioman second class, U.S. Navy, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

CLARK, James Brantley, Fire Controlman second class, U.S. Navy, Akron, Ohio

COOK, Raymond, Mess Attendant first class, U.S. Navy, Warner, Virginia
 COOPERRIDER, Carl Eugene, Gunner's Mate third class, U.S. Navy, Bucyrus, Ohio
 COSGROVE, Lawrence Randall, Gunner's Mate second class, U.S. Navy, Brockton, Massachusetts
 COUSINS, Alton Adelbert, Chief Machinist's Mate (PA), U.S.N.R., Class F-4-C, Auburn, Rhode Island
 COX, Charles Beacon, Chief Torpedoman (AA), U.S. Navy, Fort Worth, Texas
 DANIEL, Dennis Howard, Yeoman third class, U.S. Navy, Jesse, West Virginia
 DEVEREAU, Lawrence Delaney, Chief Boatswain's Mate (PA), U.S.N.R., Class F-4-D, Troy, Kansas
 DICKERSON, Leonidas Camden, Jr., Storekeeper third class, U.S. Navy, Stuart, Virginia
 DOIRON, Gilbert Joseph, Water tender first class, U.S. Navy, Sanford, Maine
 DRINKWALTER, Karl Lee, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Chaffee, New York
 DUNSTON, Nebraska, Mess Attendant third class, U.S. Navy, Spring Hope, North Carolina
 DYSON, Corbon, Radioman third class, U.S. Navy, Caryville, Florida
 EVANS, Gene Guy, Boilermaker second class, U.S. Navy, Vero Beach, Florida
 EVANS, Linn Stewart, Fire Controlman third class, U.S. Navy, Harrisville, North Carolina
 EVERETT, Carlyle Chester, Fireman second class, U.S. Navy, Canandaigua, New York
 FARLEY, Edwin Louis, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Hurricane, West Virginia
 FITZGERALD, John Joseph, Quartermaster third class, U.S. Navy, Hampstead, New Hampshire
 FLYNN, William Aloysius, Torpedoman second class, U.S. Navy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 FRANKS, Hartley Hardy, Ship's Cook second class, U.S. Navy, Gatesville, Texas
 FRENCH, Ralph George, Chief Commissary Steward, U.S. Navy, Hartford, Connecticut
 GASKINS, Lester Carson, Machinist's Mate first class, U.S. Navy, Pamplico, South Carolina
 GREER, John Calvin, Chief Electrician's Mate (PA), U.S. Navy, Long Beach, California
 GREY, Ernest Dwane, Jr., Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Radisson, Wisconsin
 GRIFFIN, Arthur Raymond, Signalman second class, U.S. Navy, information provided gave address in care of
 Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts
 GUNN, Donald Knapp, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy (mistakenly listed as Donald Kapp), almost certainly
 Ithaca, New York
 HARRIS, Charles Waldon, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Caryville, Florida
 HAYES, Charles Chester, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Akron, Ohio
 HENNIGER, William Henry, Gunner's Mate first class, U.S. Navy, Newburgh, New York
 HOGAN, Francis Robert, Gunners' Mate third class, U.S. Navy, Springfield, Massachusetts
 HOUSE, Hugh, Gunner's Mate third class, U.S. Navy, Palmyra, North Carolina
 HUDLIN, Maurice Woodrow, Fireman first class, U.S. Navy, Revere, Massachusetts
 JOHNSON, Joseph, Mess Attendant first class, U.S. Navy, Elm City, North Carolina
 JONES, Glen W., Chief Quartermaster (PA), U.S. Navy, Ocean View, Virginia
 KALANTA, Anthony J., Boatswain's Mate second class, U.S. Navy, Worcester, Massachusetts
 KEEVER, Leonard A., Chief Machinist's Mate (PA), U.S. Naval Reserve, F-4-C, Little River, Kansas
 KLOEPPER, Ralph W.H., Signalman third class, Class V-3, U.S. Naval Reserve, St. Louis, Missouri
 LITTLE, Joseph Gustave, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Brooklyn, New York
 MAGARIS, Paul L., Radioman first class, U.S. Navy, Fort Stevens, Oregon
 MC KEEVER, William James, Sean second class, U.S. Navy, Detroit, Michigan
 MERRELL, Windell Harmon, Fireman second class, U.S. Navy, unknown
 MERRITT, Auburn F., Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Baker, Florida
 MILLS, Gerald Edward, Seaman second class, Class V-1, U.S. Naval Reserve, Detroit, Michigan
 MONDOUX, Albert J., Chief Water Tender (PA), U.S. Naval Reserve, Class F-4-C, Glen Falls, New York
 MUSSLEWHITE, Edgar W., Machinist's Mate first class, U.S. Navy, Plant City, Florida
 NEELY, Kenneth Cecil, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Cunard, West Virginia
 NEPTUNE, Aldon W., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Manningston, West Virginia
 NEWTON, William Harding, Yeoman third class, U.S. Navy, Roanoke, Virginia
 ORANGE, Harold J., Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Chicago, Illinois
 ORTIZUELA, Pedro, Officer's Cook first class, U.S. Navy, Manila, Philippine Islands
 OWEN, Benjamin T., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Cornerville, Arkansas
 PAINTER, William H., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Greenville, South Carolina

PARKIN, Joseph J., Chief Water Tender (PA), U.S. Navy, Worcester, Massachusetts
 PATERSON, William N., Coxswain, U.S. Navy, Buffalo, New York
 PENNINGTON, Burl G., Quartermaster second class, U.S. Navy, Bigstone, Kentucky
 POLIZZI, Joseph C., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Detroit, Michigan
 PORTER, Corwin D., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Wauscon, Ohio
 POST, Frederick R., Boatswain's Mate first class, U.S. Navy, New York City, New York
 POWELL, Lee P., Pharmacist's Mate first class, U.S. Navy, Lenoir, North Carolina
 RAYHILL, Elmer R., Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, New Point, Missouri
 REID, Lee Louis N., Torpedoman first class, Class V-6, U.S. Naval Reserve, Dallas, Texas
 RESS, John R. Jr., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, New York City, New York
 ROGERS, James W., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Chattanooga, Tennessee
 RYAN, John J., Jr., Coxswain, U.S. Navy, Somerville, Massachusetts
 RYGWELSKI, Clarence, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Rogers City, Michigan
 SALTIS, Edward Peter, Boatswain's Mate first class, U.S. Navy, Charleston, West Virginia
 SCHLOTTHAUER, Eugene, Chief Water Tender (AA), U.S. Navy, Visalia, California
 SETTLE, Sunny J., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Charleston, West Virginia
 SORENSEN, Walter, Gunner's Mate third class, U.S. Navy, Omaha, Nebraska
 SOWERS, Wallace L., Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Cheriton, Virginia



MONUMENT HONORING THE MEN LOST ON THE REUBEN JAMES, PORTLAND, MAINE.

STANKUS, Anthony Gedminus, Seaman second class, U.S. Navy, Worcester, Massachusetts
 STELMACH, Jerome, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, New Castle, Pennsylvania
 TAYLOR, Wilton L., Fireman first class, U.S. Navy, unknown
 TOWERS, George F., Chief Gunner's Mate (AA), U.S. Navy, Gadsden, Alabama
 TURNER, Lewis Aubrey, Signalman third class, U.S. Navy, Atkins, Arkansas
 VOILES, Loyd Z., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Chattanooga, Tennessee
 VORE, Harold M., Fireman first class, U.S. Navy, Glouster, Ohio
 WEAVER, Jesse, Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, West Point, Tennessee
 WELCH, Chester L., Fireman second class, U.S. Navy, Cabin Creek, West Virginia
 WHARTON, Kenneth R., Fire Controlman first class, U.S. Naval Reserve, Class F-4-C, San Diego, California
 WOODY, George, Jr., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Accoville, West Virginia
 WRAY, Edwin E., Seaman first class, U.S. Navy, Dequeen, Arkansas

The list of 99 fatalities includes men from 28 of the then-48 United States, plus one from the Philippine Islands. New York lost 12 men, more than any other state. Ranking second and third were West Virginia with nine, and Massachusetts with eight.

Initially listed as dead, but found to be living were: Peter Anderson, Frederick Bishop, Jack Campbell, Vernon Howell, Hirman Morgan, and Marvin Wilson.

endnotes

- 1 *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1941
- 2 *Washington Post*, November 1, 1941
- 3 http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ship/reuben_james.htm
- 4 <http://www.ussholder.com/DD819-pasi-Howard.html>
- 5 *Washington Post*, October 5, 1991
- 6 *Ibidem*
- 7 *Washington Post*, October 5, 1991
- 8 *Chicago Tribune*, November 27, 1941
- 9 *New York Times*, November 2, 1941
- 10 *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1986
- 11 *New York Times*, November 2, 1941
- 12 *New York Times*, November 25, 1941
- 13 *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1941
- 14 *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 15, 1941
- 15 *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, November 8, 1941
- 16 *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1986
- 17 *Washington Post*, November 5, 1941
- 18 *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1986
- 19 His name was added to the list by the Navy Department on November 8, 1941. See the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* of November 9.
- 20 *Washington Post*, October 5, 1991

V . D . S O N G D E M O S

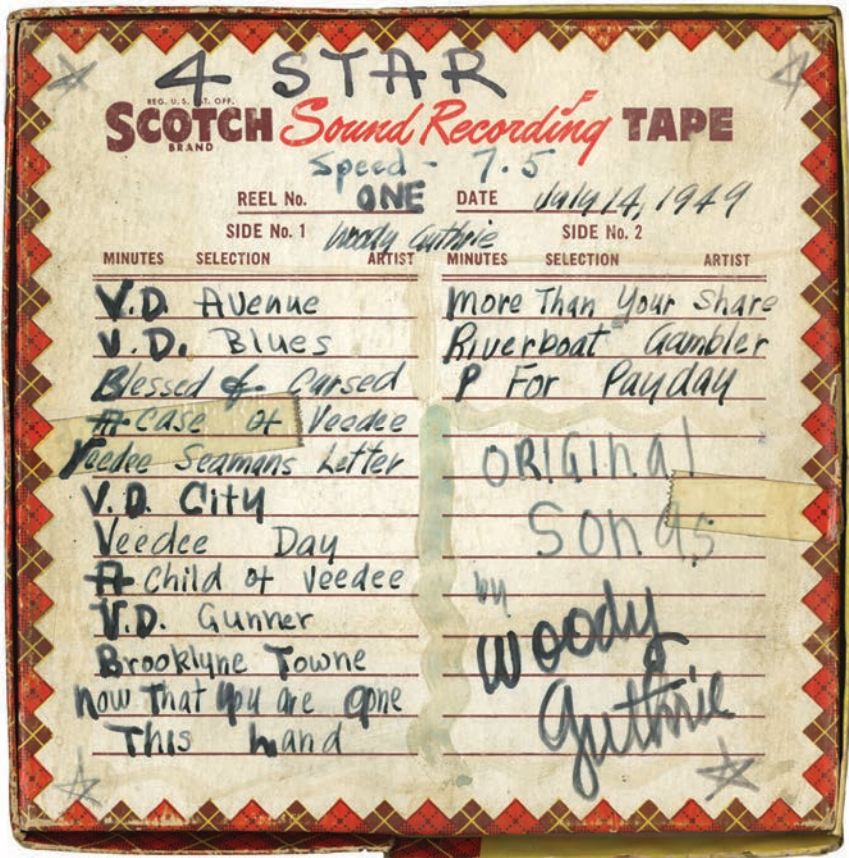
A N D

" T H E L O N E S O M E

T R A V E L E R "



ORIGINAL TAPE BOXES FROM WOODY'S HOME RECORDINGS OF V.D. SONGS MADE ON HIS 37TH BIRTHDAY



THE V. D. SONG DEMOS

It's clear in listening to the July 14, 1949 home recording made at his Coney Island home on his 37th birthday that Woody was offering a demo of sorts. He sings partial sets of lyrics and provides the tunes for someone else, perhaps Alan Lomax or others associated with the effort at Columbia University. In context, considering his comments at the end of three of the songs, it appears that he has offered a more complete set of lyrics to accompany the tape. Woody sings without stopping, moving on without stopping from one tune to the next, only pausing to conclude one song and introduce the next.

Surviving song lyrics of these songs exist in every case except for "Brooklyn Town" (or "Brooklyne Towne" as he spelled it on the tape box), but often differing significantly from the way he renders them on the tape. The lyrics we have attempted to transcribe here are as he has sung them. In several cases, there were additional written lyrics, which we have also supplied.

Disc 6: TRACK 10 – "VD AVENUE"

Come take a trip with me
If you've got nothing else to do;
We'll take a little trip along V. D. Avenue.

Whistle down this taxi cab;
Ask that driver where to go;
Well, it's a two-buck ride to V. D. Avenue.

At the old Stink Hole Hotel
I'll write my wrong name down;
Got a three-buck room on V. D. Avenue

My telephone it rings,
And I can hear them chippies sing
Have a little fun on V. D. Avenue.

Additional lyrics not sung on the home recording demo:

*She tapped upon my door
Then she walked into my room
'Bout as perty as they come
Along V.D. Avenue*

*It's to buy a little farm
For Poppy and for Mom
This is what keeps me
Along V. D. Avenue.*

*I kissed her fevered head
On the pillow of my bed
In my three bucks room
Along V.D. Avenue.*

*When I woke up at home
I found one week was gone
But I still had dreams
Along V. D. Avenue.*

*My friends did try to help;
My wife and family, too;
To tell the truth
About V.D. Avenue.*

*My family worked 12 years
They paid with burning tears
For my wild night
'Long V.D.'s Avenue.*

*Man, when your hope gets low,
You'd better hear for home
Then to ride that cab
Along V.D.'s Avenue.*

–June 14, 1949

Disc 6: TRACK 11 – INTRO

Well, that pretty well tells you how that one goes. This here next one is called "The Veedee Blues." This here is a whole lot like the tune of the "T.B. Blues," only the words is VD instead of TB. It goes like this:

Disc 6: TRACK 12 – "THE V.D. BLUES"

I hear folks a-tellin' that them VD blues ain't bad
Well, I hear folks a-tellin' that them VD blues ain't bad
But these VD blues, they're the worst old blues I've
had.

Well, I got disgusted and I sailed out on a spree
Man, I got disgusted and I sailed out on a spree
When I got back home, well, I had that old VD.

I had bad dreams, man, I just couldn't sleep in bed
Yes, I had bad dreams and I just couldn't sleep in bed
I couldn't tell my folks it was that old VD I had

VD it give me the chills and the fevers, too
 VD it give me the chills and the fevers, too
 My mind went blank and I didn't know what to do

Additional lyrics not sung on the home recording demo:

Too sick to work, then I just had to quit my job
 Too sick to work, then I just had to quit my job
 I told my people it was troubles with my boss

It was aches and pains and misery night and day
 It was aches and pains and misery night and day
 Why did I lie to my family? About this old veedee?

I went to my doctor and my doctor looked at me
 I went to my doctor and my doctor looked at me
 "Why did you wait so long to catch this old veedee?"

"I was nervous, Mister Doctor, scared and shaky, too
 I was nervous, Mister Doctor, scared and shaky, too
 I didn't have the money and I didn't know what to do."

"It wouldn't cost so much money if you come at your first sign
 It wouldn't cost so much money if you come at your first song
 It costs a lot more money if you let it go too long."

No worse than a cold if I catch it the first few days
 No worse than a cold if I catch it the first few days
 But its worse than any cancer if you let it spread thisaway.

Oh, my sweet brother, oh, sweet sis of mine
 Oh, my sweet brother, oh, sweet sis of mine
 Don't lie to yourself about veedee, don't lie, don't lie, don't lie!

Tell Mommy and Pappa, tell your friend and family all
 Tell Mommy and Pappa, tell your friend and family all
 With some sulfa shots an' tablets you can whop it in a week or so

If you see a little sign, don't run, don't hide, don't lie
 If you see a little sign, don't run, don't hide, don't lie
 You can beat veedee if you catch it in the nick of time

I'm a veedee fighter, feedin' off my veedee case
 I'm a veedee fighter, feedin' off my veedee case
 By the help of my doctor and nurse and friends, I think I'm
 gonna win my race

I've had bad chills, flu, and carbuncles, too
 I've had bad chills, flu, and carbuncles, too
 If you wanta win out against veedee, don't let it get a start on
 you.

– June 15, 1949

Disc 6: TRACK 13 – INTRO

That pretty well covers the "VD Blues." This here next one here is a spiritual song based on an old Biblical story in a way, an awful simple idea about the blessings and curses. It tells how you'll be blessed if you do one thing and how you'll be cursed if you do something else. It goes like this:

Disc 6: TRACK 14 – "BLESSED & CURST"

Blessed you'll be, oh blessed you'll be
 If your foot does not stray, foot does not stray
 Through the doorway of sin
 That stands in your way

Cursed you'll be, cursed you'll be
 If your hand it does stray, your hand it does stray
 The doorways of sin, doorways of sin
 That stand in your way

Your time will be blessed, time will be blessed
 If our soul does not stray, soul does not stray
 To the house of lost souls
 That stands in your way

It's cursed your days, cursed your days
 If your soul it does stray
 To that house of lost souls
 That stands in your way

Additional lyrics not sung on the home recording demo:

Your night will be blessed (night will be blessed)
 If you walk on your way (walk on your way)
 To your children and wife (children and wife)
 At home as they wait (at home as they wait)

But, cursed you will be (cursed you will be)
 If you lay down your head (lay down your head)
 If this foul sickly bed (foul sickly bed)
 That stands in your way (stands here in your way)

Your years will be blessed (years will be blessed)
 If your temple's kept clean (temple's kept clean)
 If you steer past this trap (steer past this trap)
 That lays in our way (lays here in your way)

Your years will be cursed (years will be cursed)
 If you kiss these dried lips (kiss these dried lips)
 And breathe this dead breath (breathe this dead breath)
 That stands in your way (that stands in your way).

–June 19, 1949

*"A song and prophecy
And a song of warning
To fight the cursed spread of sexual disease."*

I didn't get all the repeats right on that but you can get them when you practice them together.

Disc 6: **TRACK 15 – "A CASE OF VD"**

This next one is called "A Case of VD." It goes like this:

*The birds can sing in the morning trees
But the birds are not singing for me
My man did meet with a flirt on the street
And she gave him a case of veedee*

*I begged him to look up the doctor and go
When it broke out and itched on his skin
But he rubbed himself with some drugstore salve
And he told me, it's not the veedee.*

*I've been in the Army and the Merchant Marines
My dear wife, long enough to know
That these little hot rashes that itch on my skin
They are not the veedee, I am sure.*

Additional lyrics not sung on the home recording demo:

*Oh, Hon, why take a chance with a sore on your skin?
It is not good for these kids and me.
My husband got sore and he stayed gone a week
'Cause I told him he might have veedee.*

*He drank all around with pals he knew
Then he rang me one night on the phone
He sounded half sick and begged to come home
And he told me his itching was gone*

*I've been out alookin' for a job, my sweet,
I walked over towns all around
I wanted to bring you my paycheck home
And show you my veedee is gone.*

*Well, the little itchy sores they'd gone away
I bathed him in lye soapy foams
'Twas about three weeks I scalded him down
And he broke out with old runny sores
Yes, he broke out with old runny sores*

*I carried him down to that veedee place
And I wrestled him in through the door*

*The nurse lady said, Veedee, veedee.
I can tell by these hard burning sores
I can tell by these hard burning sores.*

*It's lucky for you, the doctor man said
You carried her in here today
It can pass to your children and blind their eyes
If it gets to its bad catchy state
When it gets to its bad catchy place*

*Well, those birds can sing in the morning trees
But he birds are not singing for me
My good man fell in with a flirt on the street
And she gave him this case of veedee
She has given him this case of veedee.
–June 20, 1949*

And that goes on in the same vein. You can follow the words to it pretty easy. It's in a simple waltz time.

Disc 6: **TRACK 16 – "VD SEAMAN'S LETTER"**

This here next one here is an old-time tune that everybody knows, with some new words. About the VD. This here's about a sailor or seaman that shipped out to...on a trip, after making his wife a lot of promises. She promised to be true to him and he promised to be true to her. When he got over to the other side of the ocean, why, he sort of forgot what he'd promised and here's a song that tells about it.

This here's "The VD Seaman's Last Letter."

*Well, as I take my pencil and paper, my dear, in my
hand
The plans that we dreamed like wild waves rise in the
mind
And the cottage and kids that we dreamed of will never
come true
I've got that old syph and I'll not bring it home, dear,
to you*

*I can't write so plain for my boat rides the high pitch-
ing sea
As you read my words there is no telling where I will be
You kept your promise, you saved all your kisses for me
I broke my vows, and I'm wrecked by that awful
veedee.*

*I sit on the edge of my bunk, dear, to write you these
lines
And the rest of my crew they're asleep in the land of
their dreams*

As I work the deck and look out on the ocean or skies
I hear all your weeping my syphilis will bring to your
life.

I can taste your wet lips as you kissed me goodbye at
the pier
In the splash of the foam I can hear your sweet words
in my ear:
“Keep yourself healthy and keep yourself clean, oh, my
dear,
We’ll kiss again here if you’re gone for a week or a
year.”

Each night the wild waves rise up, my love will rise
more
My loud thumping heart will steer right back to your
shore
I tossed this away for a drink in that galley house door
With syphilis my cargo, I’ll dock in your harbor no
more.

Well, the words of my letters, they’re soaked in my
unfaithful tears
The storm it gets worse now and all of my dreams I
have smeared
It jars me a lover with a soul just as pure as your own
I’ll drown my syphilis somewhere in this wild windy
foam.

Come all you salt seamen that walk on the lands or the
waves
Don’t let a wild hour lay all your good hopes in the
grave;
Steer from that quicksand and sail by your brightest of
stars
Don’t let that syphilis wreck you in these hot fiery
waves.

–June 23, 1949

That’s almost the same as the tune of “The Last Letter.”

Disc 6: **TRACK 17 – “V.D. CITY”**

This next one here is one called “V.D. City.” This here’s an
old-time one based on a...sort of like a religious prophet,
only where sometimes they’ve seen a vision of heaven,
sometimes they seen just the opposite. This here’s a city
where everybody that’s had the V.D. was called to this city
to tell about it. So this is sort of a little song about the way
it’d look.

You’ve seen your bright visions of glory
When love built your city on high
I’ve just seen the cold lower dungeons
Where the victims of syph roll and cry

They’re called to this city of sorrow
To confess all the wrong things they’ve done
Their teardrops and weeping runs louder
Than the cities blown out by the bombs.

There’s a street named for every disease here
Syph Alley, and Clap Avenue
And the whores and their pimps and their victims
Crawl past on the curb to my view

Once young and once healthy and happy
Now a whirlpool of raving insane
Lost here in this wild V. D. city
Nobody here knows you by name.

Your eye is too festered to see here
Worse than lepers your skin runs with sores
Every window stands full of lost faces
Human wrecks pile the steps and the doors

Must you pay your way to this city
With an hour of passion’s desire?
I pray that I’ll not see your face here
Where the millions now burn in the fires.

They’re called to this city of sorrow
To confess all the wrong things they’ve done
Their teardrops and weeping runs louder
Than the cities blown down by the bombs.

–June 27, 1949

Disc 6: **TRACK 18 – “VD DAY”**

And this next one here’s sort of a idea of when it’s a
holiday for some people, it’s V. D. day for me. This here’s
called “V.D. Day.” It goes like this.

It’s a holiday for some folks
It’s a day to dance and sing
A wedding day for sweethearts
But it’s V D Day for me.

It’s V D Day for me, boys
It’s V D Day for me
It’s a day of pain and misery
And it’s V D Day for me.

Well, it's a planting day for kinfolks
 And some the reaping day
 It's a day of birth for lots of us
 And it's V D Day for me

V D Day for me, folks,
 It's V D Day for me
 The day of pain and misery
 A V D Day for me.

It's a fasting day for some folks
 And some a feasting day
 It's a day you can give our loving gifts
 But it's V D Day for me.

And it's V D Day for me, folks,
 V D Day for me
 The day of pain and misery
 And V D Day for me.

—no date indicated

That's roughly it, anyway.

Disc 6: **TRACK 19 – "A CHILD OF VD"**

This next one here's is one that's based on an old-time song that got around quite a lot called "Papa's Never Stays At Home, He's Drinking All the Whole" but this one's different, called "A Child of VD."

Papa don't stay home no more
 And Mom cries all the day
 The sores upon the baby's eyes
 Are caused by old veedee

Rocky, baby, go to sleep
 No sleep for you there'll be
 The sores that make you cry and cry
 They're caused by old veedee

Mama rocks the baby's bed
 And the cries are killing me
 Baby's eyes will never see
 They're blind by the old veedee

Mommy, hold the baby's shoes
 The shoes you'll never use
 Your toes will never dance with me
 They're crippled by veedee

Rocky, baby, go to sleep
 No sleep for you there'll be
 Sores that make you laugh and cry
 They're caused by the old veedee.

Additional lyrics not sung on the home recording demo:

*Mommy, Daddy, tell me plain
 What is this old veedee?
 Why does it make my baby cry?
 And take my dad away?*

*Baby, don't look pretty now
 The flies buzz 'round his head
 Daddy, Mommy, come home quick
 I think the baby's dead.*

*The doctor man stood by the bed
 He locked and shook his head
 Oh, doctor, please, why did veedee
 Take baby sweet away?*

—July 6, 1949

And then you can finish the rest of it from there on.
 That's the way the tune goes, anyhow.

Disc 6: **TRACK 20 – "V.D. GUNNER BLUES"**

And this next one here is one that I wrote when I was in the Army camp. They was having some talk around the Army camp about writing some songs or doing something about the spread of venereal diseases. I don't know what they done about it for sure, but when you stop to think of three million people in the United States have got syphilis alone – not counting, I don't guess, the other kinds of these diseases, if all 24 songs on the juke boxes was about these diseases, there wouldn't be too many. Here's another one. This was wrote was I was in Scott Field, Illinois, down there in the Army camp.

Well, lady, hey landlady, come open up this rusty old
 screen
 Landlady, hey landlady, come open up this rusty old
 screen
 Well, I come to kill that satchel that give me this old
 VD

Quit your beating, stop your banging,
 Stop yelling around my door.
 And that woman that give you that VD, she don't live
 here no more

Landlady o landlady, you're telling me a lie
 Landlady o landlady, you're telling me a lie
 Here's a dose of hot lead to stop your lying tongue.

Blow your whistle, policeman, my poor feet are born
 to run.

Blow your whistle, policeman, my poor feet are born
 to run.

And that VD woman I'm saving for in my gun.

You can tell me to halt, you can yell at me to stop.
 You can yell at me to halt, you can yell at me to stop.
 But I can't stop my feet till that VD dame I've shot

I hear them singing past me sweet bullets from that
 deputy's gun
 I hear them singing past me sweet bullets from that
 deputy's gun
 Out of this hole in my back I can feel my hot blood run.

Additional lyrics not sung on the home recording demo:

*Officer! Mr. Officer! Please help me to my feet.
 I see that woman yonder she's running down the street.*

*Yes, I'm your woman running with my barlow down the street
 I'm going to cut that man's throat that bring v.d. to me.*

— written at Scott Field by Pvt. W. Guthrie on September 8, 1945

And you can take it from there on. That's the "VD Gunner's
 Blues." That's V D Gunner's Blues. I forgot to tell you what
 it was before I started.

Disc 6: TRACK 21 – "BROOKLYN TOWN"

Here's an old one I changed around a good deal, possibly
 changed so completely that it's almost new. This is called
 "Brooklyn Town." It goes like this....

I stepped out in Brooklyn town to see what I could find
 I found myself one pretty, pretty gal and she put her
 hand in mine
 She's got two big sparkling eyes, waving curls, and a
 great big smile
 She's got two bright sparking eyes and she's got a roll-
 ing smile

We walked in and we walked out some joints in Brook-
 lyn town
 She had my money and a long time gone when the
 daylight rolled around
 She's got two big sparkling eyes, waving curls, and a
 great big smile
 She's got a bright... and a pair of eyes and she's got a
 rolling smile.

Twelve o'clock by the midnight moon we struck that
 last saloon
 I woke up on the wet grass lawn and she was out and
 gone
 She had two big sparkling eyes, waving curls, and a
 great big smile
 She'd got a great big pair of eyes and she's got a rolling'
 smile.

We danced, we sung, we tumbled, folks, in the ways
 that I admired
 Got my daze from that night and thought my soul was
 afire, boy
 Had two big sparkling eyes, waving curls, and a great
 big smile
 She had two big sparkling eyes and she had a rolling
 smile.

And there's one more verse and a chorus on there, and
 that's all the songs about the V.D. that I got right now.

Woody also wrote some other songs on the subject which he did not record, including "Talking Seaman" (undated), "Syphilis,
 Gonoreea, and Hotty Balls" (in June 1955), and "Palmetto Veedee Blues" (April 19, 1949).

"THE LONESOME TRAVELER"

by

Alan Lomax

CAST

Announcer
Tim
Girl
Moxie
Guard
Doctor
Boy

Director -- Alan Lomax

Producer -- Erik Barnous

Produced by the health departments of the nation by

COMMUNICATION MATERIALS CENTER
Columbia University Press
New York 27, N. Y.

University 4-3000, Ext. 16

*Woody
don't
wander*

*Cast playing to woody
tempo
volume
projection*

“THE LONESOME TRAVELER” RADIO DRAMA

Disc 6: **TRACK 22**

(begins with harmonica playing)

NARRATOR: Your health department presents “The Lonesome Traveler” starring Woody Guthrie as Rusty, the Traveler.

RUSTY: Howdy! Sit down over here by the fire. Nice quiet place for a little guitar pickin’. That freight from San Antone won’t be along for quite a while yet. Got a nice fire goin’ here, so ...sit down, take it easy, swap a couple of stories. My name’s Rusty... some folks sometimes call me The Lonesome Traveler.

Disc 6: **TRACK 23 – “THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE”**

I’m just a lonesome traveler, the great historical bum
 Highly educated, from history I have come
 I built the rock of ages ‘twas the Year of One
 That’s about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

I’m straw boss on the pyramid, and the Tower of Babel, too
 I sailed with Chris Columbus, in 1492
 Fought the Battle at Valley Forge and Battle of Bull-y Run
 That’s about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

Well, Hitler’s dead and buried ‘cause he got too fresh with me
 Einstein learned to split that atom on my knee
 We’ve found the cure for syphilis now, and when the battle’s won
 That’ll be one of the biggest things that man has ever done.

RUSTY: Now, maybe not every word of that song is strictly and absolutely true, but the main idea of it is. The big shots’ll make history but us little guys have got to take the consequences. Scientists have discovered how to split the atom and get the energy out of it, but the energy can kill us all or make a better life for everybody. I mean, it’s me and you and Mary Jane that uses or abuses these scientific inventions. Now the doctors have found some new ways of curing this syphilis, that terrible disease. But what’ll be the final result? Well, that’s up to you and me. One person with that disease is more dangerous than a mad dog. Maybe you think I’m exaggerating, but my years of hoboining, I’ve seen a thing or two about this syphilis.

Disc 6: **TRACK 24 – “THE OLD CRACKED LOOKING GLASS”**

I’ve seen a lot of this human tribe, every color, flavor and size
 One scared me so bad, I can’t forget. She had lips of cherry and eyes of jet,
 In a Frisco barroom’s where we met.

It was in this sad saloon at the clouding of the moon
 I sat down to drink my cares away
 In that old cracked mirror glass, I first saw her dancing past.
 She caught my eye. She smiled and looked away.

Not a soul knew me in town, just a tramp and outward bound
 I did ache to feel her hot hand touching mine
 When she touched me on the neck, saying, “Pardner, buy the drinks”
 Her hand felt colder than the night outside.

WOMAN: What're you drinkin'?

RUSTY: The same.

WOMAN: Waiter! Two drinks for two little bums! (to Rusty:) You want to dance?

RUSTY: My feet feel like hamburger steaks already.

WOMAN: Oh, you talk like an Okie.

RUSTY: Well, I'm from that part of the country.

WOMAN: Say, I know you! I've seen you before. You...you're Rusty.

RUSTY: How'd you know my name?

WOMAN: Why, I'm from your home town. Used to play with your sisters. Don't you remember Alvy?

RUSTY: Ohhh, the one they used to call "Skinnyrink."

ALVY: Yeah, that's me.

RUSTY: Ah, you've certainly filled out!

ALVY: (laughs) Well, Rusty, tell me all about yourself. How's the old town? How's Bessie? And you remember that little brown dog we used to have?

(brief saloon piano interlude)

ALVY: So, that was when I just couldn't stay with my folks any longer. Nothing to stay for. And I took this job because about all I knew was to dance. Somehow it just got harder and harder to leave.

RUSTY: Well...everybody's got to eat.

ALVY: But that's not why I'm staying here now.

RUSTY: Maybe you got to like it.

ALVY: I hate it. *I hate the place!* Especially the men.

RUSTY: That don't make sense to me. You're a hostess, and hate the men?

ALVY: Look, look, look. The first guy I went with, he made me think he liked me. And I loved him. And then suddenly he left me flat and went away with another woman. But that wasn't all he did. After a while, I realized he left me with one of those diseases.

RUSTY: Did you go see a doctor?

ALVY: Nah. I thought about it for a while, but then it didn't bother me anymore. And I kept thinking, these men, how I hate 'em. What if I have got it? So what if I do give it to them? See, Rusty, it's my revenge on 'em. I'm little Alvy and I'm poison, see? Well, don't you want to put your arms around me, Rusty? Why you goin', Rusty?

RUSTY: Well, I'll be...I'll be seein'...

ALVY: Don't go, Rusty. Ah, you afraid? Aw, come on back. What're you runnin' away for? Ah, ha ha ha.

(sounds of departure)

RUSTY: Well, I got out of that place fast and I moved on. Little Alvy. You know, if I'd have known then what I know now, I'd have got her to a doctor, quick. But then I hadn't yet seen what the syphilis can do. I did see it later, though, one night that I'll never forget. I was booked for vagrancy, in the Durant, Oklahoma jail.

Disc 6: **TRACK 25 – "HARD TIMES IN THE DURANT JAIL"**

Oh, the Durant jail beats no jail at all
If you want to catch hell, go to Wichita Falls
It's-a hard times in that Durant jail, hard times, poor boy.

Straight from the free world and into a cell
Just like a-sailin' from Heaven to Hell
It's-a hard times in that Durant jail, hard times, poor boy.

FELLOW PRISONER IN JAIL: Hey, come here, guard! Hey, I want a sandwich! Hey, Lazy, come on. I can keep this up all night, I can holler even louder. HEY, GUARD!

GUARD: OK, Moxie, OK. Maybe you want me to come in and give you a rubdown with my stick.

MOXIE: You and your big brother.

GUARD: OK, Moxie. What's the matter?

MOXIE: How come you put this little fresh-faced punk in with me?

GUARD: You mean him with the guitar?

MOXIE: Yeah, the kid. How come?

GUARD: Well, he come in tonight, Moxie. Not an empty accommodation in this hard-rock hotel, so what am I going to do? Turn a customer away? Just 'cause I got no place for him to sleep? Poor guy, I wouldn't do that to him. We'll shove him along in the morning. OK?

MOXIE: Oh, OK, but be sure you have him out early. I don't like nobody watchin' me while I eats my breakfast.

RUSTY: Hey, guard. What's the matter with him? Is he nuts?

GUARD: No, he's just a murderer. Maybe he's a little off his rocker, then you know what they say, we're all a little cracked, right? Ha ha ha. Good night.

RUSTY: 'Night.

MOXIE: Hey, you! What're you in for?

RUSTY: Vagrancy.

MOXIE: Hey, listen, I seen you somewhere before.

RUSTY: Yeah? I ain't seen you...I ain't never been here before.

MOXIE: Yeah! I seen ya!

RUSTY: I ain't never seen this town until two hours ago.

MOXIE: Quit yer kiddin'. I know you. Moxie knows you. I never forget a face. Now, come clean!

RUSTY: I'm a-tellin' you. I just come in here from California.

MOXIE: What'd they put ya in here for, huh? How much're they paying ya?

RUSTY: I'm in jail. Just like you. Can't you see?

MOXIE: Now quit stallin'! A stool...you're a stoolie! You're a dirty stoolie, aren't ya?

RUSTY (exasperated): OK, I am a stoolie.

MOXIE: You know too much. You know what I'm going to go to stoolies? The same as I give that other one...

RUSTY: Help!

(fighting sounds)

MOXIE: It's too late now for help. I'll beat you to death against these bars, that's what I'll do, I'll beat you to death! Ah, yuh stoolie! (beating Rusty)

RUSTY (interjecting during the above): Help! Help!

(a bit of transitional music)

DOCTOR: Well, I see my patient's awake.

RUSTY: Where am I?

DOCTOR: A hospital.

RUSTY: What happened?

DOCTOR: That Moxie nearly beat you to death. The guard just got there in time.

RUSTY: I ache all over.

DOCTOR: I guess he tried to break you to pieces.

RUSTY: What's eatin' that guy? I never had seen him before.

DOCTOR: He went insane. You were the object of his insane rage.

RUSTY: I didn't say *anything*.

DOCTOR: Poor guy has paresis.

RUSTY: What's that?

DOCTOR: It's a brain infection, from syphilis. A man can have syphilis in his system for years and not even know it. Then sometimes the germ gets to work on your brain, after many years, without much warning, a man can go mad. That's what happened to him.

RUSTY: I met some people with syphilis. At least they *thought* they had it.

DOCTORS: The ones who don't know they have it, but do, they're even more dangerous. Anytime you ever meet anybody who may have syphilis, you get them to a doctor for a checkup.

RUSTY: Yeah, I sure will.

DOCTOR: Well, now, you'd better get some sleep. Get over Moxie's beating. See you again tomorrow.

RUSTY: OK, Doc.

Disc 6: **TRACK 26 – "EMPTY BOXCAR, MY HOME"**

St. Louis, on the M & O [Mobile and Ohio line train]
 A hard road but I gotta go
 Catch the Pennsy on the fly
 Pittsburgh mama, don't you cry.

Ride the Seaboard on the blinds,
 Miami water tastes like wine
 Mobile, Alabam'
 Baton Rouge, Lousiane
 San Francisco, San Antone
 Empty boxcar, my home
 Empty boxcar, my home.
 Empty boxcar, my home.

RUSTY: I remember one day, I was sitting in an empty box car way out in mesquite flats somewhere, waiting for the freight to move on. There's a young kid crawled up in there with me, and it seemed like he's all excited about something.

KID: Boy, am I relieved! Am I glad!

RUSTY: What about?

KID: Going home. Headed back home.

RUSTY: Did you run away from home?

KID: Yeah, I did, a few months ago. But I'm goin' back now.

RUSTY: What'd you run away from?

KID: Oh, I got mixed up with a girl and I thought I'd got a disease. I sure was scared. Had kind of a sore and then a rash. Little spots on my face and hands, I couldn't face my family or anyone. So I hit the road. But then the spots began to go away, and pretty soon they were all gone.

RUSTY: Hmm. That may not mean a thing.

KID: Yeah, but they're all gone, so I guess I'm alright.

RUSTY: Don't be too sure.

KID: I never meant to get mixed up with that girl anyway. I had a fight with the girl I was meaning to marry and, well, I took a few drinks.

RUSTY: You better get off this train quick.

KID: What do you mean?

RUSTY: You thinking of going back there and making up with your girl?

KID: Why not? I tell you, I'm all right.

RUSTY: That's what a lot of people have thought. (train whistle sounds) Listen, I'll give it to you quick because this train's a-pullin' out of here. I had some long talks with a doctor about this stuff. Those spots always go away, but then the germ stays inside you – unless you get the right treatment.

KID: Are you sure?

RUSTY: Then one day, just like that, it can do bad things to you. You might have a baby born sick, or dead. You get yourself to a doctor, because they'll give you a blood test, and that's the only sure way that you can tell.

KID: Yeah, but I haven't got any money.

RUSTY: Then get to a clinic. They'll cure you. You think they want you running around like this? But get cured here, now, before you go back home.

KID: Yeah, I better.

RUSTY: Jump offa here, man, quick.

KID: Thanks! Say, what's your name?

RUSTY: Rusty.

KID: Thanks, Rusty. Goodbye.

RUSTY: Bye.

KID: So long!

(train departs, music resumes)

Disc 6: TRACK 27 – “THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE”

I'm just a lonesome traveler, the great historical bum
 Highly educated, from history I have come
 I'm the man who signed the contract to raise the rising sun
 That's about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

I cured the plague that wrecked the towns, and nations did I heal
 Bubonic plague and bloody flux and rats with poison tails
 Malaria from the skeeter bites and chilly fever runs
 That's about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

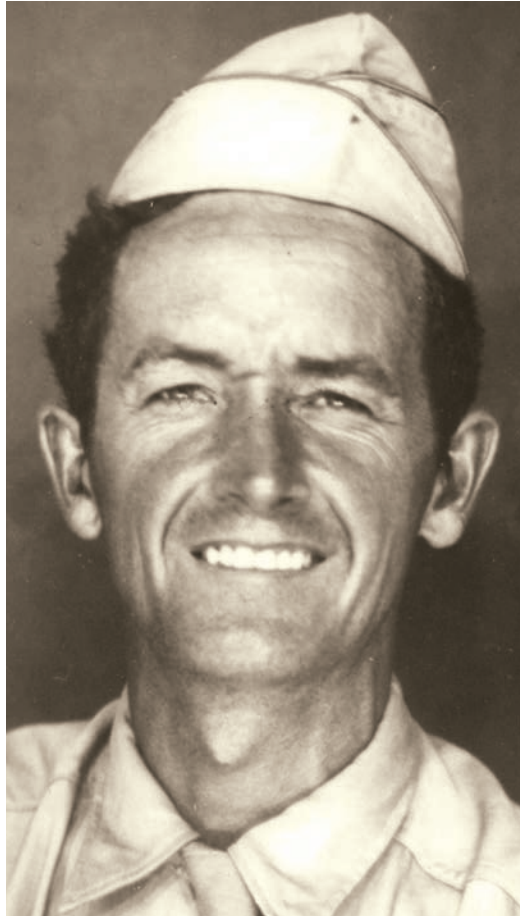
Well, I guess the toughest battle was to find the syphilis cure
 Now the doctors have the stuff that kills the bug for sure
 I guess it's up to me now, and when the battle's won,
 That'll be one of the biggest things that man has ever done.

ANNOUNCER: You have heard “The Lonesome Traveler” starring Woody Guthrie as Rusty the Traveler and written and directed by Alan Lomax. This program was produced for the health departments of the nation by the Communication Material Center at Columbia University.

———— end ————

NOTE: Copies of the manuscript are in the collections of the Association for Cultural Equity and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The ACE copy contains the names of the performers, which include Jean Ritchie as Alvy and Joseph de Santis as Moxie. “Rusty” was originally “Tim” in Lomax’s typed script. Producer Eric Barnouw’s surname was misspelled as Barnous.

T I M E L I N E



1912

JULY 14, 1912 – Woodrow Wilson Guthrie born in Okemah, Oklahoma to Charley and Nora Belle (Tanner) Guthrie – 12 days after New Jersey Gov. Woodrow Wilson received the Democratic nomination for President of the United States.

1919

MAY 1919 – Charley and Nora's first-born child, Clara Edna Guthrie (born November 1904), died in a fire in the family home.

1923

JULY 1923 – the Guthries (Charley and Nora, and Roy, Woody, George, and Mary Jo) moved from Okemah to Oklahoma City.

1927

JUNE 27, 1927 – Nora Guthrie was sent to the Central Hospital for the Insane in Norman, Oklahoma, two days after an incident which saw kerosene splashed on Charley Guthrie and set on fire. Charley spent 18 months recovering from severe burns. Woody stayed with different families in Okemah over this period of time.

1929

1929 – Woody joined his father and his extended family in Pampa, Texas.

1930

1930 – Woody leaves high school, and is active playing music in and around Okemah. He formed his first band, The Corncob Trio.

JUNE 13, 1930 – Nora Guthrie died at the hospital in Norman.

1933

OCTOBER 28, 1933 – Woody married Mary Jennings in Pampa.

1935

APRIL 1935 – the great dust storm of April 1935 sweeps across Texas and Oklahoma, and Woody writes a song beginning:

On the fourteenth day of April
Of Nineteen thirty-five
There struck the worst of dust storms
That ever filled the sky.
–“Dust Storm Disaster”

NOVEMBER 1935 – Mary Guthrie gives birth to her and Woody's first child, Gwendolyn.

1937

LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH 1937 – Woody set out hitchhiking to California.

JUNE 1937 – Cousin Jack Guthrie and Woody perform in Western music shows in Los Angeles and Long Beach.



PREPARING TO LEAVE OKLAHOMA

JULY 19, 1937 – Jack and Woody begin their own 15-minute radio show on station KFVD, Los Angeles, *The Oklahoma and Woody Show*.

SEPTEMBER 1937 – Maxine Crissman joins Woody as a singing partner on radio and after Jack left on the 13th, the two began performing as *The Woody and Lefty Lou Show*, performing six days a week.

Woody began to write more songs exemplifying a strong sense of social consciousness, such as “Do-Re-Mi” and “Philadelphia Lawyer.”

NOVEMBER 12, 1937 – Woody and Lefty Lou are given a year’s contract as performers on KFVD.

1938

JANUARY 25, 1938 – Woody and his family, and Maxine (Lefty Lou) and her family moved to Chula Vista, north of the border from Tijuana so they could begin broadcasting over border radio station XELO. Frank Burke Jr., proprietor of KFVD, had graciously allowed them out of their contract for one that paid twice as much. Intimidation from Mexican federales prompted them to quit the show after three weeks, and they resumed broadcasting on KFVD on February 16, 1938.

EARLY 1938 – Woody wrote “I Ain’t Got No Home in This World Any More” (a/k/a “I Aint’ Got No Home”).

JUNE 18, 1938 – last broadcast with Lefty Lou. During the broadcast, Woody announced he would start writing for the weekly newspaper *The Light*, owned by Frank Burke, Sr., serving as their “hobo correspondent” and writing columns from the road. He hopped a freight train and traveled to Chico, California, to join migrant workers there and spent the summer sleeping out in migrant camps, part of the vast army of unemployed, many of them from Oklahoma.

NOVEMBER 1938 – Woody returns to Los Angeles, now imbued with a new mission. Ed Cray had written that Woody’s experiences had “given the aimless radio singer a compelling sense of purpose.” But for the next couple of months, Woody was singing on radio, and then singing on skid rows, trying to sell his mimeographed songbooks.



BONNEVILLE DAM DOWNSTREAM, 1940.

1939

JANUARY 1939 – Ed Robbin invited Woody to sing at a Tom Mooney victory rally. Mooney had just been freed by Gov. Olson of California after more than 22 years in prison. Robbin had a radio show as well, but was also bureau chief of the *People's Daily World*, the Communist Party newspaper in California.

MAY 12, 1939 – Woody begins writing a “Woody Sez” column for the newspaper.

JULY 1939 – Robbin introduces Woody to actor Will Geer. (Woody later met Burl Ives and Cisco Houston at Geer's home.) Through Geer, Woody met filmmaker Pare Lorentz and also writer John Steinbeck. At some point in the summer, Woody wrote “Vigilante Man” which clearly references “Preacher Casey” from Steinbeck's book *The Grapes of Wrath*, which had become a major best-seller during 1939.

AUGUST 24, 1939 – A non-aggression pact was signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Many Americans who had been sympathetic to Soviet Russia began to question their support.

SEPTEMBER 18, 1939 – emboldened by the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Russian troops invaded Poland.

FALL 1939 – Woody performs to cotton field workers in Bakersfield as part of two Steinbeck Committee events, in September and October, Woody, Will Geer, and Steinbeck spent time traveling to migrant camps in California's Imperial Valley.

NOVEMBER 1939 – Woody's radio show at KFVD comes to an end and he, Mary, and the family moved back to Pampa.

1940

Woody and wife Mary appear briefly in Pare Lorentz's film *Fight for Life*, which dramatizes the emergency childbirth and death of an urban woman who was unable to afford good pre-natal care.

JANUARY 1940 – The *People's Daily World* publishes the last “Woody Sez” column.

FEBRUARY 16, 1940 – Woody arrived in New York City, invited by Will Geer, after a hazardous journey that might have resulted in his death as he hitchhiked east from Pittsburgh during a major snowstorm.

John Ford's film of *The Grapes of Wrath* had opened in New York on January 24.

FEBRUARY 23, 1940 – the date Woody put on the manuscript of his song “This Land Is Your Land”

FEBRUARY 25, 1940 – Mecca Temple show in New York City, a benefit for the Spanish Refugees Relief Fund. Will Geer, MC. Lead Belly was on the bill, too.

MARCH 4, 1940 – performed at the Forrest Theatre, New York City for a “Grapes of Wrath Evening” put on by the Steinbeck Committee for Agricultural Workers. There Woody met Alan and Elizabeth Lomax, Pete Seeger, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Lead Belly.

MARCH 21, 1940 – Woody's first recordings, at the Department of the Interior in Washington DC for Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress.

MARCH 22, 1940 – second Library of Congress recording session

MARCH 27, 1940 – third Library of Congress recording session, this time interviewed and recorded by Elizabeth Lomax Resumed writing some “Woody Sez” columns for the *People's Daily World*, some of which were printed in the *Daily Worker*.

APRIL 2, 1940 – Woody appears on CBS radio for Alan Lomax's show *American School of the Air*, singing “Do-Re-Mi” and “Talking Dust Bowl Blues.” Guthrie also appeared on several of Norman Corwin's *Pursuit of Happiness* shows on CBS.

APRIL 26, 1940 – recording session for RCA Victor in New York City

MAY 3, 1940 – additional recording done for RCA Victor, to complete two albums' worth of material

MAY 1940 – Woody and Pete Seeger drove to Washington, where they worked with Alan Lomax on the manuscript for the book *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* and then, they drove west to Oklahoma and to Pampa, and then back to New York.

JUNE 19, 1940 – Woody narrates a Lead Belly radio show.

JULY 1940 – RCA releases the two *Dust Bowl Ballads* albums.

AUGUST 19, 1940 – Woody appeared on the CBS pilot of Alan Lomax's program *Back When I Come From*.

That fall, he wrote a radio script on the life of Wild Bill Hickok for National Broadcasting System's *Cavalcade of America*, and performed on WNYC's *Adventures in Music* and another CBS show, *We The People*.

NOVEMBER 25, 1940 – Woody sang the theme song for and participated in a new show called *Pipe Smoking Time*.

1941

JANUARY 4, 1941 – recording session at the Library of Congress for Alan Lomax and John Langenegger

JANUARY 1941 – Perhaps starting to feel too confined by what threatened to become a more conventional life, Woody left New York and drove to Louisiana, to El Paso, then to Los Angeles, and then to Columbia, California.

FEBRUARY 1941 – begins work on his autobiography, later published under title *Bound for Glory*.

IN EARLY MAY 1941 – a letter from the Bonneville Power Administration invited Guthrie to narrate a film the BPA planned to produce, and to write and sing songs for the movie as well.

MAY 12, 1941 – Woody arrived in Portland, Oregon and met Stephen Kahn. He was hired that day, officially beginning work on May 13, but just for a month, rather than the year's appointment originally anticipated. Over the course of the month which followed, Woody toured the area and wrote 26 songs in support of public power and the BPA.

JUNE 11, 1941 – Guthrie's tenure with the BPA comes to a close.

JUNE 22, 1941 – as Woody was hitch-hiking back across the country to New York, he learned that Nazi Germany had invaded the Soviet Union.

JULY 7, 1941 – recording sessions for General Recordings in New York with Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, and others, resulting in albums *Deep Sea Chanties and Whaling Ballads* and *Sod Buster Ballads*.

SUMMER 1941 – Woody travels across the country with the Almanac Singers, often performing in union halls, with stops in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chico, Portland, and Seattle, among other places, arriving back in New York in early October.

OCTOBER 31, 1941 – the sinking of the *Reuben James*

DECEMBER 7, 1941 – Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor

1942

FEBRUARY 14, 1942 – The Almanac Singers performed “Round and Round Hitler’s Grave” on a four-network broadcast *This Is War*, which may have reached as many as 30,000,000 listeners.

FEBRUARY 17, 1942 – both the *New York Post* and the *New York World-Telegram* run stories regarding how the Almanacs had changed their songs from anti-war and anti-intervention positions to ones in support of the war effort.

LATE FEBRUARY, 1942 – Woody is given a contract and advance for his autobiography by editor William Doerflinger of New York publishing house E. P. Dutton.

MARCH 1942 – Sophie Maslow, a member of the famed Martha Graham Dance Company, created the “group composition” *Folksay*, which drew both on lyrics by Carl Sandburg with musical accompaniment by Woody Guthrie and Earl Robinson. It premiered in March. [See a review of a later performance in *The New York Times*, December 6, 1942.] One of Maslow’s friends and colleagues – likewise a Graham Company dancer – was Marjorie Mazia, who married Woody in November 1945.

SPRING 1942 – the literary journal *Common Ground* published Woody’s article “Ear Players” and Woody was encouraged to begin work in earnest on the autobiography which Alan Lomax had urged him to write a year earlier.



CISCO HOUSTON, WOODY GUTHRIE, JIM LONGHI SINGING AT THE NATIONAL MARITIME UNION HALL IN NEW YORK, 1943

APRIL 24, 1942 – Woody read selections from his autobiography-in-progress at a League of American Writers meeting.

MAY 1942 – Steve Kahn from the BPA comes to New York and has Woody record several of the Columbia River songs at Reeves Sound Studios.

AUGUST 29, 1942 – The OWI-produced radio drama *Labor for Victory* was broadcast on NBC.

SEPTEMBER 1942 – Woody finishes the manuscript for his autobiography, which became titled *Bound for Glory*.

1943

JANUARY 5, 1943 – “OWI Plows Under the Almanac Singers” – *The New York Times* reported that the Office of War Information declared it had “pulled a blunder” in hiring the Almanac Singers to record songs for broadcast in support of the war effort. The reason, the paper made clear, had to do with them being too closely associated with the Communist Party in the public eye.

FEBRUARY 6, 1943 – Cathy Ann Guthrie born to Marjorie Mazia and Woody.

MARCH 21, 1943 – The first newspaper reviews of *Bound for Glory* appear. Some are raves, such as the *Chicago Tribune's*; others are more balanced, such as the *New York Times*.

MARCH 23, 1943 – Mary Guthrie signed divorce papers in El Paso and mailed them to Woody.

APRIL 7, 1943 – Dutton offers Woody a three-book contract.

MAY 1943 – Woody receives a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to write books or songs or other works. At some point in May, he also received a notice from the U. S. Army asking him to report for a physical examination in June.

JUNE 1943 – Woody and Cisco Houston and Jim Longhi join the Merchant Marine and ship out on the Liberty ship, the S.S. *William B. Travis*. Longhi tells the full story in his 1997 book *Woody, Cisco, and Me: Seamen Three in the Merchant Marine* (University of Illinois Press). They went to Palermo, Sicily, and then on to Tunisia.

SEPTEMBER 12, 1943 – On the crossing to Tunisia, their vessel was struck by a torpedo and ultimately sank, but only after limping into Bizerte. One Army soldier was killed.

1944

JANUARY 12, 1944 – Woody shipped out a second time, on the Liberty ship, the S.S. *William Floyd*, landing in the Algerian port of Oran.

LATE MARCH – recorded the documentary *The Martins and The Coys* at the Decca Studios in New York. Written by Elizabeth Lomax and arranged by Alan Lomax.

APRIL 16, 19, 20, 24, 25, 1944 – Woody recorded a large number of songs in New York for Moses Asch.

MID-MAY 1944 – Woody embarked on his third trans-Atlantic crossing on the troopship S.S. *Sea Porpoise*.

JULY 5, 1944 – about a month after D-Day, the *Sea Porpoise* arrived off Normandy's Omaha Beach to deliver their supply of replacement troops. After the troops disembarked and the ship was leaving, it was struck by an underwater mine which destroyed the engine room. It was towed to Southampton.

JULY 7, 1944 – Woody recorded two to four songs at the BBC Studios in London.

JULY 13, 1944 – Woody, Cisco, and Jim Longhi left London by train, heading for Glasgow to begin their last voyage in the Merchant Marine, heading back to the United States.

OCTOBER 1944 – Woody and Cisco and Will Geer joined a “Bandwagon” tour in support of Pres. F. D. Roosevelt's re-election, but the tour was sponsored by the Communist Political Association.

DECEMBER 3, 1944 – began a weekly 15-minute Sunday afternoon radio show named *Ballad Gazette* on WNEW in New York.

DECEMBER 25, 1944 – *America for Christmas*, NBC Radio broadcast.

1945

MARCH 1945 – received induction notice from the U.S. Army. The exemption he had by virtue of serving in the Merchant Marine was lifted, when a Naval Intelligence officer refused to stamp his seaman's papers, after questioning him about Communist Party affiliations.

MARCH 1 AND 23, 1945 – more recordings in New York for Moe Asch. (Robert Santelli's book lists a session on May 24 as well, but that was after Woody had been inducted into the Army.)

ALSO IN MARCH, an *American Documentary* album containing six of Woody's songs was released through a collaboration of Moe Asch and Herbert Harris. These were his first recordings released since *Dust Bowl Ballads*.

APRIL 9, 1945 – passed Army physical

MAY 7, 1945 – inducted into the United States Army at Fort Dix, New Jersey, the day before V-E Day. Assigned to the Army Air Force, he was sent to Sheppard Field, just outside Wichita Falls, Texas. In early July, he was assigned to teletype school at Scott Field, outside East St. Louis, Illinois.

JULY 8, 1945 – Pvt. Guthrie arrived at Scott Field.

AUGUST 14, 1945 – V-J Day – the formal surrender of Japan

NOVEMBER 13, 1945 – married Marjorie Mazia in New York City while on a two-week furlough from the Army

DECEMBER 21, 1945 – released from active duty

1946

JANUARY 13, 1946 – P.F.C. Guthrie honorably discharged from the Army. Thus ended the final service which Woody Guthrie directly performed for the United States Government.

APRIL 12, 1946 – Duncan Emrich of the Library of Congress wrote Woody that he would welcome Woody to the Recording Laboratory.

1948

1948 – Woody and Cisco Houston sing for the Henry Wallace Presidential campaign.

1949

JUNE 10, 1949 – Article in *New York Daily News*, "Juke Box Songs to Fight Syphilis"

JUNE 15-JULY 6, 1949 – Woody writes at least songs on the subject of venereal disease.

NOTES: We have decided to conclude the timeline with his discharge from the Army in early 1946, with only occasional references to later matters touched on in these notes. A life and song timeline which also covers the rest of his life is available on the Woody Guthrie Archives website.

The Pare Lorentz film, *The Fight for Life*, is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOKjRBDTnso>

Woody himself appears, strumming a guitar on a tenement stoop, at 58:18 for about 11 seconds. Lorentz's film is a dramatized documentary on the additional dangers which poor people face in preparing for healthful childbirth. With about half the births occurring at home, in unhygienic conditions ("newspapers are the cleanest coverings we find in many of these houses," one doctor tells another), and with inadequate nutrition (scenes of people scavenging for food scraps from loading docks after trucks depart), the likelihood of a mother dying in childbirth was greater than one dying from cancer.

A discography of Woody Guthrie recordings made during his lifetime may be found in the book *Hard Travelin' – The Life and Legend of Woody Guthrie*, edited by Robert Santelli and Emily Davidson.

T H E 7 8 R P M R E C O R D

V.D. CITY

You've seen your bright visions of glory
When love built your city on high
I've just seen the cold lower dungeons
Where the victims of syph roll and cry

They're called to this city of sorrow
To confess all the wrong things they've done
Their teardrops and weeping runs louder
Than the cities blown out by the bombs.

There's a street named for every disease here
Syph Alley, and Clap Avenue
And the whores and their pimps and their victims
Crawl past on the curb to my view

Once young and once healthy and happy
Now a whirlpool of raving insane
Lost here in this wild V. D. city
Nobody here knows you by name.

Your eye is too festered to see here
Worse than lepers your skin runs with sores
Every window stands full of lost faces
Human wrecks pile the steps and the doors

Must you pay your way to this city
With an hour of passion's desire?
I pray that I'll not see your face here
Where the millions now burn in the fires.

They're called to this city of sorrow
To confess all the wrong things they've done
Their teardrops and weeping runs louder
Than the cities blown down by the bombs.

Recorded by Bob Dylan at the apartment of Bonnie Beecher in Minneapolis on December 22, 1961

THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAD EVER DONE

I'm just a lonesome traveler, the Great Historical Bum.
 Highly educated, from history I have come.
 I built the Rock of Ages, 'tis in the Year of One
 And that was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I worked the Garden of Eden, 'twas in the Year of Two,
 Amongst the pickers of the apples, I'm the champion picker, too
 I'm the man that signed the contract to raise the rising sun,
 And that was about the biggest thing that man had ever done
 That was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I was head boss on the Pyramid, and the Tower of Babel, too;
 Opened up the Red Sea to pass my children through,
 Fought a million battles and never lost a one,
 That was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I stomped old Caesar's Romans, I stopped the Kubla Khan;
 Took but half an hour's work to beat the Pharaoh's bands;
 Knocked old Kaiser Bill flat, I dumped the bloody Huns,
 That's about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I lived the Revolution when we set my country free;
 Me and a couple of Indian gals dumped the Boston tea;
 Won the battle at Valley Forge, and the battle of Bully Run;
 And that was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

Next, we won the slavery war, some other folks and me,
 Every slave from sea to sea was all turned loose by me.
 I divorced old Madam Slavery, and wed this freedom dame.
 And that's about the biggest thing that man had ever done.

I'm living with my freedom wife in the big great land we built;
 It takes all these forty-eight states for me to now spread out my quilt.
 My kids are several millions now; they run from sun to sun.
 And that's about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

I'd better to quit my talking now, I told you all I know,
 Please remember, pardner, wherever you may go,
 I'm older than your oldest folks, I'm younger than the young,
 And I'm about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

I'd better to quit my talking, I guess I told you all I know,
 Please remember, pardner, wherever you may go,
 I'm older than your old folks, I'm younger than your young,
 And that's about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

Recorded January 21, 1951 at Woody's home in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn

T H E D V D

“All you can write is what you see.” – Woody Guthrie

In early May of 1941, an unemployed Woody Guthrie and his wife, Mary, packed their three children into a battered Pontiac and left Southern California for Portland, Oregon. All he had waiting for him in the Northwest was the vague possibility of writing songs for a documentary film about the dams being built on the Columbia River.

When Guthrie arrived with his guitar and family, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) took pity and gave him a thirty-day contract as a temporary employee, paid at the rate of \$266.66 per month. Guthrie was expected to write a song a day – which he nearly did, producing 26 songs in 30 days, including American folk classics “Roll On Columbia,” “Jackhammer Blues,” “Pastures of Plenty” and “Grand Coulee Dam.”

The videotape was produced and directed by Michael Majdic and Denise Matthews, working with a production team of Lynette Boone, Andy Kirkpatrick, and Dan Miller.

This 1999 documentary is a production of the University of Oregon’s Knight Library Media Services and the School of Journalism and Communication.

We are pleased to be able to include the DVD in this Rounder Records package.

We asked Prof. Majdic what led him to work on this film.

MICHAEL MAJDIC:

I grew up and lived my whole life in Illinois before I moved to Oregon. I always liked music, played the guitar, and was in a college band. So I knew the name Woody Guthrie. Years ago I read the Joe Klein biography of Woody, and I always remembered the chapter on Woody's time in Oregon. Number one, there wasn't a whole lot of information there – it was a short chapter – but he ended it with the sentence, "It was probably the most productive month of his life." So that really struck me, that contradiction. The most productive, yet so little info? Secondly, it occurred to me that Oregon – the Columbia River, the Gorge – was probably a place I would never visit.

Flash forward – 5? 10? years, and I get a job at the University of Oregon as Associate professor and Television Producer-Director.

I'd flown into Eugene for the interview, but when I moved I drove out with my best friend (he then flew back to Illinois). It was the first time I'd driven all the way to the west coast, along I-80, through Iowa, Nebraska – mile after mile of corn field, all looking the same, then through Wyoming and Idaho, rough country, and then, finally, down through the Columbia River Gorge, which I think is the most beautiful part of America I've seen. And I remembered Woody's story, and what it must have been like when he saw it for the first time on his first trip, having grown up in Oklahoma and Texas, and driving up here from Southern California.

Flash forward another few years, and I'm having a cigarette outside with Denise Matthews, a professor in the UO school of Journalism and Communication, during a typical cold, rainy Oregon winter day. Denise had moved here from Gainesville, Florida, where, at the time, it was probably 70 degrees and sunny. So Denise is bemoaning the cold and rain, and generally questioning the wisdom of her move, and she says something like, "...and nothing has ever happened here." And I asked, "Have you ever heard of Woody Guthrie?" And I proceed to tell her the story. And one of us – I can't recall who – says, "That would make a good documentary." And the other says, "Yes, it would." And so we did!

We really didn't have to come up with much in the way of resources. My department here at the school charges for some services, so we had a little revenue. All the archival film was from the government – Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land management, etc. – so that was free. We had incredible luck with interview subjects just happening to be in the area. Ramblin' Jack Elliott was touring and came to Eugene. We interviewed Arlo before a show in Portland. Guy Logsdon was over in Redmond, Oregon – just over the mountains – for some sort of conference. Bill Murlin was just up in Portland. We interviewed Pete Seeger and Studs Terkel in Chicago, and we just stayed at my mom's place. So – it just seemed like the project was charmed all along.

I would say the reaction has been great. I think the story really touches a lot of people in a lot of different ways. I think anyone old enough to remember the Depression, or even if their parents went through the Depression – I think it's personal to them.

I think the basic premise – can you write 26 songs in 30 days for \$266 that people will remember and be singing for at least the next 70 years? – is so far-fetched – well, I guess truth is stranger than fiction.

For me, personally, it was a great pleasure and honor to work on. And the thing that I'll always remember – and I think this tells me something about Woody Guthrie – is how nice all these people really are. Arlo, Pete Seeger, Nora, Woody's first wife Mary – everybody we talked to was nice. And helpful. Talking to Elmer Buehler and Stephen Kahn was a hoot. The guys who worked on the dam we interviewed acted like we were doing them a favor! One couple we talked to actually delayed a vacation to see their grandkids so we could interview them. Famous people aren't always the same off-camera as on. Everybody we talked to was.

Michael Majdic

Producer-Director, Professor
Television Department, CMET
Knight Library
University of Oregon

Thanks and acknowledgments

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Notes by Bill Nowlin.

Produced by Bill Nowlin.

The Woody Guthrie Foundation & Archives

The Woody Guthrie Foundation & Archives is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote, perpetuate, and preserve the social, political and cultural values that Woody Guthrie contributed to the world through his life, his music, and his work. Open to the public in 1996, the Archives holds the largest collection of Woody Guthrie material in the world, and has provided source material for many award winning publications, special projects, exhibitions, and films.

The collection contains over 10,000 items including Woody Guthrie's original song lyrics, notebooks and diaries, manuscripts, photographs, correspondence, personal papers, scrapbooks, artwork, films, and audio recordings, all of which document his life and artistry as musician, writer, illustrator, and political activist.

In addition to supporting research, the Foundation & Archives also curates thematic exhibits for museums worldwide, delivers educational multimedia presentations that brings Guthrie's life and legacy to the public, supports an annual Woody Guthrie Fellowship, and has piloted an International Archives Exchange Program.

For more information about Woody Guthrie, his life, and legacy, and for a complete listing of All Things Woody, please visit: www.WoodyGuthrie.org

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Bill Nowlin – page 219
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Nora Guthrie personal collection – pages 49, 163, 169, front cover
<http://www.reuben-james.navy.mil/> – pages 214, 216

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THE COMPLETE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RECORDINGS

1 DISC ONE

1. **LOST TRAIN BLUES**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
2. *Growing up in Oklahoma*
3. **THE RAILROAD BLUES**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
4. *More talk of growing up in Okemah*
5. *The gang of kids Woody hung around with*
6. **RYE WHISKEY**
Traditional
7. *Some old-time square dance tunes*
8. **OLD JOE CLARK**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
9. *Alan Lomax asks for a tune*
10. **BEAUMONT RAG**
Music adapted by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
11. *Alan asks for another one*
12. **GREEN VALLEY WALTZ (a.k.a.) Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Feet?**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
13. *The troubles and tragedies that fractured Woody's family in Okemah*
14. **GREENBACK DOLLAR**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
15. *Lomax asks about the boll weevil*
16. **BOLL WEEVIL**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
17. *Jailhouse songs*
18. **THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL**
United States only:
New words and new music adaptation by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected, adapted and arranged by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
TRO – © Folkways Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI) – 50% Global Jukebox Publishing, Inc. (BMI) – 50%
World excluding United States:
New words and new music adaptation by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected, adapted and arranged by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
TRO – © Folkways Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI) - 100%
19. *When the great dust storm struck*

2 DISC TWO

1. *The end of the world*
2. **SO LONG, IT'S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YUH**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Folkways Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI)
3. *Dust storms devastate the farmland*
4. **TALKING DUST BOWL**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
5. *Migrants arrive in California*
6. **DO RE MI**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
7. **HARD TIMES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
8. *Songs about hard times*
9. **BRING BACK TO ME MY BLUE-EYED BOY**
Traditional
10. *Songs about outlaws*
11. **BILLY THE KID**
United States only:
Collected, adapted and arranged by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
© Global Jukebox Publishing, Inc. (BMI)
World excluding United States:
Collected, adapted and arranged by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
TRO – © Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
12. *Billy the Kid and Pretty Boy Floyd*
13. **PRETTY BOY FLOYD**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie / © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
14. *Jesse James*
15. **JESSE JAMES AND HIS BOYS**
Words by Woody Guthrie, Music traditional
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
16. *Takin' it from the rich and givin' it to the poor*
17. **JESUS CHRIST**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
18. *Songs about bankers*
19. **THE JOLLY BANKER**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
20. *Another song about the deprivations of the bankers*
21. **I AIN'T GOT NO HOME**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
22. *Hundreds of thousands made homeless*
23. **DIRTY OVERHAULS**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
24. *The story of Mary Fagan*
25. **MARY FAGAN**
Traditional
26. *The origins of the song*

 THE COMPLETE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RECORDINGS

3 DISC THREE

1. *Origins of the song, continued*
2. **CHAIN AROUND MY LEG**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
3. *Let's sing some blues*
4. **NINE HUNDRED MILES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
5. **WORRIED MAN BLUES**
A.P. Carter / APRS, BMI
6. *About the "Worried Man Blues"*
7. **LONESOME VALLEY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
8. *Railroad blueses*
9. **WALKIN' DOWN THAT RAILROAD LINE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
10. *Interlude*
11. **GOIN' DOWN THE FRISCO LINE**
Traditional
12. *Riding the rails*
13. **GOING DOWN THE ROAD**
Traditional
14. *Interlude*
15. **SEVEN CENT COTTON**
Bob Miller / Copyright control
16. **WISH I'D STAYED IN THE WAGON YARD**
Copyright control
17. *Interlude*
18. **DUST BOWL REFUGEE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
19. *Contractors duping the desperate*
20. *The dust storm of April 14, 1935*
21. **DUST STORM DISASTER**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
22. **FOGGY MOUNTAIN TOP**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)

4 DISC FOUR

1. *Breathing in dust*
2. **DUST PNEUMONIA BLUES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
3. *Leaving the Dust Bowl*
4. **CALIFORNIA BLUES**
Julien Hubert Bruyninx (SACEM) and Jimmie Rodgers (ASCAP),
published by APRS/BMI.
5. *Jimmie Rodgers*
6. *Migrants arriving in California*
7. **DO RE MI**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc.
8. *Refugees pouring into California*
9. **DUST BOWL REFUGEE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
10. *California as one of the 48 states*
11. **WILL ROGERS HIGHWAY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
12. *The flood that took over 100 lives*
13. **LOS ANGELES NEW YEAR'S FLOOD**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
14. *A good horse*
15. **STEWBALL**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
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16. *Interlude*
17. **STAGGER LEE**
New words and music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
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18. *Interlude*
19. **ONE DIME BLUES**
Traditional
20. *Interlude*
21. **GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES**
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22. *Interlude*
23. **THE TRAIL TO MEXICO**
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24. **GYPSY DAVY**
Words and Music adaptation by Woody Guthrie
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25. *Introducing an old song*
26. **HARD AIN'T IT HARD**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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THE BPA RECORDINGS + WAR EFFORT SONGS

5 DISC FIVE

THE BPA RECORDINGS

1. *Introduction*
2. **PASTURES OF PLENTY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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3. **OREGON TRAIL**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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4. **ROLL ON COLUMBIA**
Words by Woody Guthrie, Music based on “Goodnight, Irene” by Huddie Ledbetter and John Lomax
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
5. **NEW FOUND LAND**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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6. **TALKING COLUMBIA**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
7. **ROLL, COLUMBIA, ROLL**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
8. **COLUMBIA’S WATERS**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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9. **RAMBLIN’ BLUES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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10. **IT TAKES A MARRIED MAN TO SING A WORRIED SONG**
Words and Music adapted by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
11. **HARD TRAVELIN’**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
12. **THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE**
(a.k.a. *The Great Historical Bum*)
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
13. **JACKHAMMER BLUES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
14. **SONG OF THE GRAND COULEE DAM**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
15. **GRAND COULEE DAM**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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16. **WASHINGTON TALKIN’ BLUES**
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17. **RAMBLIN’ ROUND**
Words by Woody Guthrie, Music based on “Goodnight, Irene” by Huddie Ledbetter and John Lomax
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18. **PASTURES OF PLENTY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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19. **END OF MY LINE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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WAR EFFORT SONGS

20. **SINKING OF THE REUBEN JAMES**
Words and music by Almanac Singers, Woody Guthrie and Peter Seeger.
© Universal Music Corporation ASCAP
21. **TAKIN’ IT EASY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.
22. **RECKLESS TALK**
Words by Woody Guthrie
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WAR EFFORT SONGS + THE V.D. SONG DEMOS + “THE LONESOME TRAVELER”

6 DISC SIX

WAR EFFORT SONGS

1. **THE GIRL IN THE RED, WHITE, AND BLUE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
2. *Labor for Victory*
3. **FARMER-LABOR TRAIN**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
4. *Jazz in America, No. 93*
5. **WHOOPY TI-YI, GET ALONG, MR. HITLER**
Words and Music Adaptation by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
6. *Jazz in America, No. 116*
7. **SALLY, DON'T YOU GRIEVE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Pub, Inc. & Folkways Music Pub, Inc. (BMI)
8. *Narrator*
9. **DIG A HOLE**
Words and Music adapted by Woody Guthrie
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THE V.D. SONG DEMOS

10. **VD AVENUE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
11. *Intro*
12. **THE VEEDEE BLUES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
13. *Intro*
14. **BLESSED AND CURST**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
15. **A CASE OF VD**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
16. **VD SEAMAN'S LETTER**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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17. **VD CITY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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18. **VD DAY**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
19. **A CHILD OF VD**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
20. **V.D. GUNNER'S BLUES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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21. **BROOKLYNE TOWNE**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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22. *Narrator*

“THE LONESOME TRAVELER”

23. **THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE
(a.k.a. The Great Historical Bum)**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Pub., Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
24. **THE OLD CRACKED LOOKING GLASS**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Pub., Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
25. **HARD TIMES IN THE DURANT JAIL**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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26. **EMPTY BOXCAR, MY HOME**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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27. **THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE
(a.k.a. The Great Historical Bum)**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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7 DVD - ROLL ON COLUMBIA

THE SONGS

1. **OREGON TRAIL**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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2. **IT TAKES A MARRIED MAN TO SING A WORRIED SONG**
Words and Music adapted by Woody Guthrie
© Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (BMI)
3. **HARD TRAVELIN'**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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4. **GRAND COULEE DAM**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
WGP/TRO – © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc. (BMI)
5. **ROLL ON, COLUMBIA**
Words by Woody Guthrie, Music based on "Goodnight, Irene" by Huddie Ledbetter and John Lomax
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6. **THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE (a.k.a. The Great Historical Bum)**
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7. **JACKHAMMER BLUES**
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8. **PASTURES OF PLENTY**
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9. **TALKING COLUMBIA**
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11. **WASHINGTON TALKIN' BLUES**
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
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The original videotape for the DVD was produced and directed by Michael Majdic and Denise Matthews, working with a production team of Lynette Boone, Andy Kirkpatrick, and Dan Miller.

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78 78 RPM RECORD

VD CITY

Sung by Bob Dylan, 1961 Minnesota hotel recordings

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THE BIGGEST THING THAT MAN HAS EVER DONE (a.k.a. The Great Historical Bum)

1951 home recording

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

