

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

This Land Is Your Land

WOODY GUTHRIE

Page | 1

Not everybody took to “God Bless America.” Songwriter, folk singer, and radical political activist Woody Guthrie (1912–1967) wrote this popular folk song in 1940 as an answer to Irving Berlin and Kate Smith. Troubled by many scenes of poverty and desolation that he had witnessed on his travels during the Great Depression, Guthrie wrote “This Land Is Your Land” in a populist egalitarian and antiestablishment spirit.¹

What is celebrated in this song? What does Guthrie mean in his claim “This land was made for you and me”? Is this a patriotic song? Is there anything particularly American about its message? How does singing this song make you feel?

(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.

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

(Repeat Chorus)

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

(Repeat Chorus)

¹ The song caught on right away, after Guthrie expunged a couple of his overtly Marxist verses.

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

(Repeat Chorus)

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

(Repeat Chorus)

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

(Repeat Chorus)

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