

WOODROW AND ISRAEL

Prepared for the Literary Club of Cincinnati
by Jerry Kathman
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Woody Guthrie, 1943
from the Library of
Congress collection

Named after the governor of New Jersey, the democratic candidate who would soon be elected the 28th President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson Guthrie was born almost 100 years ago on July 14, 1912, Bastille Day, in Okemah, Oklahoma to Nora and Charley Guthrie. He was the third of the couple's five children.

No one called him Woodrow. John Steinbeck said it best, "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 the 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." Steinbeck continues, "There is the will of the people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit."

The corpus of Woody Guthrie's work covers vast territory, physical and intellectual, in the American 20th century. Woody Guthrie's songs do not merit the status of great literary work. His best songwriting efforts, however, evidenced by the longevity and ubiquity of his most famous work, *This Land is Your Land*, have the power to enthrall.

In discussing that song, Studs Terkel notes his satisfaction that Woody's birth date is on Bastille Day, July 14. Terkel states, "On that day, the French 'ordinary' sang their anthem, *La Marseillaise*. In America, we sing ours, *This Land is Your Land*. It has nothing to do with bombs bursting in air, nor with sanctimonious blessing. It has to do with what this country is all about."

We hear *This Land is Your Land* sung everywhere, from VFW halls to primary school assemblies. We hear it sung around campfires and at political rallies (both on the left and the right). The great Mormon Tabernacle Choir has performed it in concert and the faux bohemians in Washington Square Park sing it to the passing distracted crowds. It has been embraced perhaps as no other song about our country.

Yet the story of that song is little known. Exploring the genesis of it offers us a way to begin exploring Woody Guthrie and, perhaps more importantly, to examine a counter-narrative to a stretch of American history that informs our political discourse today.

This Land is Your Land celebrates our collective inheritance, the expanse of the American landscape and the physical beauty of our country. It honors no king or

leader of any type. It simply sings of our land, “your land,” “my land.”

The first four verses are what have been most recognizably handed down to us today. The song begins:

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.

In this verse, we are reminded of the vast expanse of our country. And we first encounter the refrain—telling us that it’s our land.

The song continues and establishes the writer as a sojourner. The observations become personal.

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.

The third verse continues the journey. This time an unidentified voice sounds the refrain:

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.

In the fourth and final verse of the popular version, a glorious image of the shining sun and wheat fields waving in a gentle breeze is envisioned. Curiously, a reference to “dust clouds rolling” appears and the voice is now almost spiritual, chanting that this land is our land.

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.

The verses conjure up Walt Whitman's America. Woody, like Whitman, desired to be "of the people." In *Song of Myself*, Whitman assumes the identity of the common people. Whitman believed that "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."

And like the work of Whitman, we will learn tonight that Guthrie's work is malleable, as we continue to rethink the meaning of America.

Over the years, *This Land is Your Land* has found its way into our national consciousness. I suspect that most in this room are familiar with the melody. Some may know that Woody Guthrie wrote it.

Its recognition cannot be attributed to commercial success. It was never found on the hit parade. But it has been described by Clifton Fadiman in *The New York Times* as "A national possession like Yellowstone or Yosemite, and part of the best stuff this country has to show the world, rising to the status of our *National Anthem, America the Beautiful* and *My Country 'Tis of Thee*." In a recent book, *The Prophet Singer*, Mark Allan Jackson states, "It has entered the bloodstream of our national cultural body."

But there is more to the song than vivid and idyllic references to the redwood forest, the golden valleys and the diamond deserts. In contrast to the four verses most familiar to us, there are three additional verses in the original version as Woody penned it; and those verses, sometimes described as the protest verses, reveal very different intentions. Their very existence would be a surprise to many and cause discomfort to some.

The fifth verse starts with a reference to a sunny morning, but quickly notes the despair of people, "his people," says Woody—in the very shadow of a church, standing in a relief line, hungry. It turns the song on its head. Is this really our land? Causing us to pause, asking us how can this be?

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

The protest continues in the next verse and establishes Woody's ambivalence to that most American of rights—private property. His wit is illustrated as well.

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.

The final verse returns to the journey but now it's not just a highway, it's "freedom highway" and no one can stop us or make us turn back.

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.

Understanding how the dominant version of the song came to be known and how the meaning changed over time in different eras, as presented in different circumstances and contexts, offers a fascinating tale.

Woody Guthrie's image today is clouded by hyperbole, myth, half-truths and outright lies, told by those who love him as well as those who see him as a dangerous fool or worse. The facts of how the song was created and why it was created provide perspective on the man who wrote it and our country at the time he sang about it.

Guthrie wrote the song as a critical response to the success of *God Bless America* by Irving Berlin, made famous by Kate Smith.

Before we can explore Woody's life and why he was compelled to write his most celebrated work, we need to understand a bit about Berlin and the development of his song. We will discover a surprising life story of the man who wrote the song that Woody despised.

First, we must travel back to 1917 in Yaphank, New York. A young Irving Berlin was serving at Camp Upton in the U.S. Army. He was busying himself writing a musical review, which would be used as a military fundraiser. He wrote *God Bless America* as part of the production.



Irving Berlin, 1948
from the Library of
Congress Prints and
Photographs Division

The song is unashamedly and appropriately patriotic. But even the creator judged the nationalism of the song to be a bit over the top. *The New York Times* quotes Berlin as saying, "Everyone was emotionally stirred and realized what we were up against." But having a bunch of soldiers come out and sing *God Bless America* was deemed too much. Because of his concerns, he ended up cutting the song from the show, filed away a copy and virtually forgot about it.

Twenty years later, in 1938, with yet another war looming in Europe, Kate Smith asked Berlin for a song to use on her Armistice Day radio broadcast to stir patriotic fervor. He set out to write something and then remembered the song he cut from his earlier work. He knew he would need to rework it to be more appropriate for the situation in 1938. I'll read the lyrics as Kate Smith performed them:

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free,
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer.

God Bless America,
Land that I love.
Stand beside her, and guide her
Through the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans, white with foam,
God bless America, My home sweet home.

While reworking the original 1917 version, Berlin first changed the line “Stand beside her and guide her to the right with a light from above” in the original lyrics to “Stand beside her and guide her through the night with a light from above.” When the song was penned, “to the right” meant the right path, but by 1938, the political discourse was intense. The meaning would be interpreted as supporting the political right.

He also didn't want it to be a war song. He changed “Make her victorious on land and foam, God bless America, my home sweet home” to “From the mountains, to the prairies, to the oceans white with foam; God bless America, my home sweet home.” The beauty of the land replaced the call for victory over the enemy.

He did keep the opening vision of “storm clouds gathering from across the sea,” appropriately evoking a fearful image. Then comes his plea for allegiance. Like Guthrie, he used “us” to establish that the songwriter is unified with the listener.

The song is nationalistic though less jingoistic than if Berlin hadn't made the changes. Smith is reputed to have read the lyrics and told Irving that he had written the second *Star Spangled Banner*.

Kate Smith broadcast the tune on November 11, 1938, on CBS radio. The song was an instant hit across America, rising to the top of the hit parade. The sheet music did equally well, among the best sellers for the first half of 1939.

Kate Smith was right, *God Bless America* was treated as a virtual national anthem. For example, on Memorial Day in 1939, the fans at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn stood and even took off their hats when they heard it, just as they would for *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

When Woody heard it, he did not hold Berlin's song in high esteem. Guthrie's America did not align with Berlin's vision. The things that Woody had lived and witnessed were far different. Woody's America could not reasonably be called 'home sweet home.'

Woody's life experience reveals important reasons for his dissatisfaction with the sentiments expressed in the song.

He was a dustbowl refugee. He traveled with landless migrant workers from Oklahoma—Okies as they soon became known—to California. The movement of

dustbowl refugees escaping the collapse of their way of life because of a cruel drought, exacerbated by poor soil management practices, is one of the great migrations in American history. The migration brought disruption and unwelcome change to California. The sudden surge in the available labor pool in the central valley caused an instant collapse in wages. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* captures the often-terrifying struggle of these migrants.

Migrants have continually changed America, making our country a more complex, fascinating place. Our food is tastier, our music better and our literature richer. New people bring new ideas. Migrants, however, challenge the complacent in the areas where they settle, and these itinerants seldom are embraced with open arms.

Woody saw the migrant laborers toiling in the field in California's farming communities in the Central Valley. He knew the stories of hardship and studied the weather-beaten, desperate faces made famous to us by the photography of Dorothea Lange, which the Farm Security Administration commissioned during the worst of the Great Depression.

Woody wrote explicitly about what he saw, "I saw the hundreds of thousands of stranded, broke, hungry, idle, miserable people that lined the highways." He knew that these people had been little blessed by America.

The suffering he saw was not limited to agricultural communities. He also saw the despair and hatred in American cities toward the migrants. First, he saw the angry reaction to the Okies pouring into the urban landscape of Los Angeles. Later, arriving in New York City, he travelled down to the Bowery and saw the flophouses, the cheap bars and the relief agencies. He saw that human misery was an inconvenient, untold story in America, and he was angry. His emerging political consciousness allowed him to connect the poverty in the fields and the cities. He saw it all as a result of the unfairness of the distribution of wealth in America. To Woody Guthrie, the great gulf between the wealthy and the poor stood out most vividly in New York City. It was there where he listened to Kate Smith sing Irving Berlin's *God Bless America*.

One might be prepared to assume that Irving Berlin's sentiments toward a blessed country are the result of a charmed life—an uninformed life of privilege. But Irving, it turns out, was a migrant too—an immigrant in fact. Berlin's childhood was even more horrific than Woody's. But he rose from immigrant poverty to great wealth. By the 1930s, he was part of a social circle in New York that was largely unaffected by the economic contraction of the Great Depression. While Guthrie and his family fell from fragile middle-class status to harsh poverty in Okemah with the collapse of the oil boom, Berlin was living a grand cosmopolitan life and appropriately grateful to the country that made his prosperity possible. The two men clearly had gravely different perspectives on America.

Berlin is widely considered one of the greatest songwriters in American history. His first hit, *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, became world famous, sparking a dance craze internationally, including his native Russia, which was described as throwing itself into the ragtime beat with abandon, bordering on mania.

In his 60-year career, Berlin wrote more than 1,500 songs, including scores for Broadway and Hollywood films: *Easter Parade*, *White Christmas*, and *There's No Business Like Show Business*. Ethel Merman, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Rosemary Clooney and Ella Fitzgerald have recorded his songs. In the 1942 film *This is the Army* a young actor named Ronald Reagan asked Kate Smith to sing her by-then-famous rendition of Berlin's *God Bless America*.

Celine Dion recorded *God Bless America* after the September 11th attacks in 2001, as a tribute to the fallen. It made number one on the charts—60 years after its initial arrival on the hit parade!

Composer Douglas Moore places Berlin apart from his contemporaries and includes him instead with Stephen Foster and Carl Sandburg as one who “caught and immortalized in his songs what we say, what we think about and what we believe.” Jerome Kern concluded, “Irving Berlin has no place in American music—he is American music. Emotionally, he honestly absorbs the vibrations emanating from the people, manners and life of his time and, in turn, gives these impressions back to the world—simplified, clarified, and glorified.”

George Gershwin describes the importance of Berlin’s compositions. “I want to say at once that I frankly believe that Irving Berlin is the greatest songwriter that has ever lived. ... His songs are exquisite cameos of perfection, and each one of them is as beautiful as its neighbor. Irving Berlin remains, I think, America’s Schubert. But apart from his genuine talent for song writing,” continues Gershwin, “Irving Berlin has had a greater influence upon American music than any other one man. It was Irving Berlin who was the very first to have created a real, inherent American music. ... Irving Berlin was the first to free the American song from the nauseating sentimentality which had previously characterized it, and by introducing and perfecting ragtime he had actually given us the first germ of an American musical idiom; he had sowed the first seeds of an American music.”

So who was this fellow? Why did he write the unabashedly patriotic song that Woody detested? What is his life story?

Berlin was born Israel Baline on May 11, 1888, one of eight children of Moses and Lena Lipkin Baline. Born in Eastern Russia, his father, a cantor, uprooted the family to America, as did many Jewish families escaping the pogroms of Russia in the late 19th century.

In 1893 they settled in New York City. According to his biographer, Laurence Bergreen, Berlin’s only memory of Russia is “lying on a blanket by the side of a road watching his house burn to the ground. By daylight, the house was in ashes.” The Tsar of Russia had revived with utmost brutality the anti-Jewish pogroms, which created the spontaneous mass exodus to America. Other families escaping included those of George and Ira Gershwin, Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, L. Wolfe Gilbert (who wrote *Waiting for the Robert E. Lee*) and Jack Yellen (who wrote *Happy Days Are Here Again*). Louis B. Mayer of MGM was also among this wave of Russian immigrants. It is hard to imagine American popular culture without the contribution of this amazing infusion of immigrants from Russia. And I also note that our own beloved Literary Club is enriched by sons of this great migration.

The Balines settled on Cherry Street in a cold-water basement flat with no windows on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Berlin was thirteen years old when his father died. He had only two years of schooling and took to the streets to support his family, selling newspapers in the Bowery. He found that if he sang songs while selling papers, people would toss him a coin or two in appreciation, sometimes without taking a paper. Soon he left home and became what his biographer described as a “foot soldier in the city’s ragged army of immigrants. There were no charitable institutions or government relief offices; just filth, meanness and a Dickensian insensitivity to ordinary human existence.”

Soon, Berlin was singing popular ballads to earn his keep. Music itself, not newspapers, became his source of income. In 1908 at the age of 20, Berlin took a new job at a saloon in the Union Square neighborhood in lower Manhattan. There

he collaborated with other young songwriters and got his big break as a staff lyricist with the Ted Snyder Company. His meteoric rise as a songwriter in Tin Pan Alley had begun.

Berlin was grateful to the country that made his life possible. Far away from where the Cossacks rampaged, he had found a home—a safe, welcoming home that God had truly blessed.

Whatever their convictions, both Guthrie and Berlin shared an ideology concerning the power of song. Take away Guthrie's exaggerated vernacular style, and they are quoted as essentially saying the same thing. Guthrie writes, "A song ain't nothing but a conversation fixed up to where you can talk it over and over without getting tired of it." Berlin writes, "A good popular song is just sort of the feeling and conversation of people set to music."

Both songwriters believed, like Whitman, that their work gave the American people a voice. Guthrie's purpose, however, was to point to suffering and explain how to lessen it. When he heard Berlin's song celebrating the unmitigated, the unmarred magnificence of America, Guthrie felt that the song neglected to address many people's pain. It failed to document the injustices and suffering that stretched along with the land. And Guthrie had the talent to counter Berlin's song with one of his own.

The words to the original version of the song are intended to be a direct challenge to Berlin. In fact, Guthrie originally titled it *God Bless America for Me*, suggesting that his America was not Berlin's. Guthrie celebrates the beauty of America along with Berlin, but he quickly introduces a discordant vision. The first four verses of Guthrie's song sound very much like Berlin's. He speaks of beautiful landscapes, lush images, redwood forests, gulf-stream waters, golden valleys and sparkling sands, but as I noted earlier, he curiously added, "dust clouds rolling," suggesting something perhaps more ominous. The next verse, as Guthrie had originally penned it, described the shame of public relief. In Guthrie, the bad and the good lived side by side in America and his song, he believed, needed to tell the whole story. As songwriter Ernie Marris noted, "I don't know of another song so full of love for these United States, recognition of the injustices in them, and determination to do something about the latter."

Guthrie does not look to God to explain things. He does not turn to faith to resolve them. His song does not even suggest answers—a far different tone from the command from Berlin that ends with *God Bless America*. Woody stands there wondering, allowing the audience to share his question and form their own answers.

Guthrie's desire for an honest expression about America that fit his experience was very much at odds with the direction of the American political scene in the 1930s. By May, 1938, Congress had commissioned the Dies Committee, which eventually became the House Un-American Activities Committee. By June, 1940, President Roosevelt had signed the Alien Registration Act (also known as the Smith Act), with the goal of quelling socialist and communist protest against the war in Europe and what was clearly America's growing part in it.

It was probably his good fortune that Guthrie, just like Berlin, did not realize the potential of his song immediately. He did not even record it until 1944, thereby avoiding the danger of prosecution, as evidenced by the later attacks on other left-leaning songwriters such as Pete Seeger.

By 1947, the evolved and, by then, authoritative text of the song had eliminated all of the protest verses. It was a changed America. The booming post-war economy mitigated the relief problem that Woody had described. By the 1950s, a standard version of *This Land is Your Land*, including the lyrical and the beautiful and nothing more, entered the American cultural mainstream. The protest verses were largely forgotten. Pete Seeger, who we learned about in an earlier paper by Allan Winkler, hoboed with Guthrie after dropping out of Harvard. Seeger knew that Guthrie was dissatisfied with what had become the song's standard presentation. Guthrie lamented that school children were only learning select verses, while other lyrics were ignored.

One might ask, how did this version of the song become popular? In the late 1940s and early 1950s, several liberal private schools in the metropolitan New York City area such as Little Red School House and the Brooklyn Community School began using Guthrie's song as part of their general music curriculum. Harold Leventhal, who was Guthrie's manager, theorizes that the teachers and the students in these schools took the songs with them and disseminated them through their teaching assignments and travels. Eventually the song found its way into America's public school systems nationwide.

By the end of the 1950s, Guthrie's earlier fears had definitely been realized. None of the protest verses were released in wide recordings or published versions.

But within in a few years, as the '60s counter-culture was in full flower, a resurgence of the protest verses began. But ironically, the shortened version of the song had been around so long that Pete Seeger feared no one would believe that Guthrie even wrote the additional verses.

Let's leap to the near present to close out the section of my reading tonight that focuses solely on Guthrie's greatest song. In January, 2009, Barack Obama became the 44th President of the United States. Sunday, January 18, was a bitterly cold day, but a scheduled inaugural concert was held at the Lincoln Memorial—sacred ground where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. first allowed us to dream, just 40 years before. It was a very different America from the country that Berlin or Guthrie witnessed. Bruce Springsteen, a spectacularly successful singer/songwriter and rock icon, flew his hero, a fragile, 89-year-old Pete Seeger in his private jet to join him in Washington for the inauguration and to sing Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land*, along with half a million people standing in the audience, including my daughter, Alexandra. She and everyone there knew the words—or at least the standard verses to the song.

Seeger's voice was largely gone. He did not even attempt to play his iconic banjo in the bitter cold. Some say you could see a twinkle in his subversive eye as he did his call and response to the crowd gathered below. In his most solemn voice, he added the protest verses. America heard the song the way Guthrie intended it. For some of us, for an all too brief moment, America felt like the country Guthrie knew it could be.

David Brooks, in a recent column in *The New York Times*, talks about his "other education." He notes that we go to high school and college, we take classes, earn grades and amass degrees; but hopefully, concurrent with that work, if we're lucky, we gather a second education. For reasons he suggests that have to do with the peculiarities of our civilization, we pay a great deal of attention to our scholastic education, which is formal and supervised. We devote much less public thought to our emotional education, which is unsupervised and haphazard. Brooks find this odd because it is, after all, our emotional education that is much more important

to our long-term happiness and what will determine the quality of our life. The knowledge that is transmitted from our emotional education, Brooks suggests, seeps through the cracks. It is generally a by-product of the search for pleasure. The learning is indirect and not conscious.

In discussing his emotional education in his column, Brooks notes the important role that the music of Bruce Springsteen played in his life. Frankly, I struggle to imagine David Brooks rocking with the crowd at a Springsteen concert, but I suppose others would find the importance of Guthrie's songs to me a bit odd. But Guthrie's songs and other writings are indeed part of the core curriculum of my emotional education, helping me understand, from a very different perspective, the nature of bigotry, class struggle, my religious tradition, and most importantly, the majesty of our land and its people.

Ultimately, Woody Guthrie filled in some important gaps in my education—gaps left by the good Sisters of Notre Dame and the kind Christian Brothers, who were lovingly engaged in providing, in their careful way, my scholastic foundation.

Bruce Springsteen, by the way, is a descendant of the musical genre established by Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan is an apostle of Woody Guthrie. So maybe Brooks and I aren't that far apart after all.

Guthrie lived through some of the most significant events in the 20th century. After leaving Dustbowl, Oklahoma in the Great Depression, he travelled the land, served his country in World War II and witnessed the social and political upheavals that defined the era. Woody wrote and sang about what he saw.

I'm well into my fifth decade of fascination with the life and work of Woody Guthrie. My attraction is certainly based on more than one song. One of my early Guthrie discoveries describes his migration out of Oklahoma to California. It's called *Talking Dust Bowl Blues*. It shows his mastery of storytelling and his gentle humor. It is an early indicator of his emerging political sensibility.

Back in nineteen twenty seven

I had a little farm and I called it heaven.

The prices was up and the rain come down

I took my crops all in to town.

I got the money, bought clothes and groceries,

Fed the kids and raised a family.

But then the rain quit and the wind got high,

And a black old dust storm filled the sky,

And I swapped my farm for a Ford machine,

And I poured it full of this gasoline.

And I started—rocking and a-rolling—

Over the mountains out towards the old peach bowl—California.

Way up yonder on a mountain road,
I had a hot motor and a heavy load,
I was going pretty fast, I wasn't even stopping,
A-bouncing up and down like a popcorn popping.
Had a breakdown—a sort of a nervous bust out thing.
There was a fellow there, a mechanic fellow,
Said it was engine trouble, charged me five dollars.

Well, way up yonder on that mountain road,
way up yonder in the piney woods,
I thought I'd give that Ford a shove,
And I was going to coast as far as I could.
Commenced to coasting; picking up speed;
(there) was a hairpin turn; I ... didn't make it.

Man alive, I'm a-telling 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 the mountain.

We got out to the West Coast broke,
So dad gum hungry I thought I'd croak,
And I bummed up a spud or two,
And my wife fixed up a 'tater stew.
We poured the kids full of it. Mighty thin stew, though;
You could read a newspaper through it.

Always have figured that if it had been
Just a little bit thinner than that, some of
These here politicians could have seen through it.

When Guthrie arrived in California, he met a young man who would remain a life-long friend—Will Geer. Geer, an actor and earnest left-winger, helped Guthrie understand the injustice of an economic system that would allow people to live in the poverty and squalor of the migrant labor camps. Geer introduced Guthrie to communist circles first in southern California, and later in New York City.

Geer we know today from his most famous role as Grandpa on the television series, *The Waltons*, a popular program that ran in the 1970s. Yes, gentleman,

Grandpa was a commie! Good night, Comrade John Boy!

Guthrie himself never became a party member. The communist party in America would never allow anyone as disorganized and undisciplined as Guthrie to join their ranks. Guthrie's delightful quip at the time was, "I ain't no commie, but I have been in the red most of the life."

When he arrived in New York City, the leftist folk music community embraced him. Guthrie was invited to play a benefit concert hosted by the John Steinbeck Committee to Aid Farm Workers. It was at that concert, in fact, where Guthrie first met Pete Seeger.

In New York, Guthrie was beloved for his "authenticity." Guthrie was a real working-class Oklahoman. He personified the heart of America to the New York left, which was primarily Jewish and first- or second-generation American. This group was desperately trying to "get Americanized." A figure like Woody Guthrie was of great importance to them. Guthrie routinely emphasized his working-class image in his new setting. Agnes Cunningham, another Okie and member of the same circle in New York, would later recall that Guthrie "loved people to think of him as a real working class person and not an intellectual." He was better read than he ever let on.

It was in New York City where Guthrie's writing became prolific. He penned thousands of pages of unpublished poems and prose while living there. It was during this time that Guthrie met a dancer who would become his second wife, Marjorie, a member of the prestigious Martha Graham Dance School. The dance troupe was producing a work called *Folksay*, based on folklore and the poetry of Carl Sandburg. They were also introducing a number of Guthrie songs.

During this time, Guthrie wrote his autobiographical novel, *Bound for Glory*, completed in no small part due to the patient editing of Marjorie. E.P. Dutton published the novel in 1943. It is a vivid tale in Guthrie's special dialect. It demonstrated his gift as a storyteller. It sold well and was reviewed positively. Importantly, it gave Guthrie a measure of financial stability for the first time in his life.

While never achieving the financial success of Irving Berlin, Guthrie settled into comfortable middle class status on Mermaid Avenue in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn. He and Marjorie had four children including their son Arlo, who would follow his father's footsteps as a singer and songwriter.

Marjorie's maiden name was Greenblatt. Her mother, Aliza Greenblatt, was a well-known Yiddish poet. As a result of his unusual collaborative relationship with his mother-in-law, who lived near the Guthries in Brooklyn, Guthrie and Greenblatt often discussed their projects and critiqued each other's work, finding common ground ultimately in their love of culture and their fight for social justice. Guthrie identified the Jewish struggle with that of his fellow Okies and other oppressed and disenfranchised people. With Aliza's help, he wrote numerous songs with Jewish themes—with titles like *Happy Joyous Hanukkah*.

Now, let's pause for a moment, gentlemen, and think about this. We have Irving Berlin, son of a cantor, writing *Easter Parade* and *White Christmas*, while Woody Guthrie, son of a prairie protestant, a few miles away, is writing *Happy Joyous Hanukkah*. What a fabulous country we live in!

It was around this time that Guthrie's son, Arlo, according to Pete Seeger, had what was certainly the world's first hootenanny bar mitzvah.

Woodrow and Israel, Woody and Irving. Both were masters of economy and memorability in their songwriting. Berlin, a political conservative, supported the presidential candidacy of General Dwight Eisenhower. His song *I Like Ike* was featured prominently in the Eisenhower campaign. According to Berlin's daughter, "He was consumed by patriotism." He often said, "I owe all my success to my adopted country," and once rejected his lawyer's advice to invest in tax shelters, insisting, "I want to pay taxes. I love this country."

George M. Cohan, in a toast to Berlin at a Friar's Club dinner in his honor, described Berlin as follows: "The thing I like about Irvie is that although he moved up-town and made lots of money, it hasn't turned his head. He hasn't forgotten his friends, he doesn't wear funny clothes, and you will find his watch and his handkerchief in his pockets, where they belong."

Berlin died at the age of 101 in 1989. After his death *The New York Times* wrote, "Irving Berlin set the tone and the tempo for the tunes America played and sang and danced to for much of the 20th century." An immigrant from Russia, his life became the "classic rags-to-riches story that he never forgot could have happened only in America."

Guthrie died of complications of Huntington's disease in 1967. The hundredth anniversary of his birth will be celebrated next year. His work has been discovered by generations of followers.

One young follower by the name of Bobby Zimmerman, heard Guthrie records while studying at the University of Minnesota. It changed his life. Guthrie's stinging honesty and humor gave direction to Bob's early songwriting endeavors.

Zimmerman dropped out of school to travel east—hell-bent on meeting his hero. He met with Guthrie several times while Guthrie was confined to Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in New Jersey—the ravages of his disease, by then, made it impossible to talk or walk. Guthrie loved listening to his songs performed by the 19-year-old Zimmerman.

Bob Zimmerman changed his name legally to Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan made his first professional appearance at Gerde's Folk City in Greenwich Village. He wore one of Guthrie's suits the night he began his career in New York. The torch had been passed.

This paper was originally intended to be an appreciation of Woody Guthrie—and nothing more. The role of Irving Berlin was to be minor—"the other" in my tale of Woody. Learning about Irving Berlin led me to a different, unexpected, delightful place. I found a remarkable, thoughtful, generous man whose life story was anything but what I expected. I'm embarrassed now that I planned to confirm in my research that Berlin was simply a cynical, tin-pan alley hack.

I will close, however, by turning back to Guthrie for a final reading. Tonight, I've shared some thoughts from two remarkable men concerning the role of song—what a song is meant to be. Guthrie also has some interesting things to say about what a song should never be. He had no patience with those who gave in to despair, fear, doubt, or worst of all, self-hatred or self-mockery—no one in Guthrie's world is ever born to lose, and no song should ever pander to these sentiments.

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 too young or too fat or too slim,
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 traveling.

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 how hard it's run you down, and rolled you over,
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.