

## I Ain't Got No Home

Recorded in 1940, this song captures the hardships of Dust Bowl refugees during the Depression Era.

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

**Commented [K201]:** Poor migrant workers faced police intimidation and harassment.

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

**Commented [K202]:** Capitalism rewards the rich at the expense of the poor.

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

**Commented [K203]:** As share croppers, farmers were often stuck in an endless cycle of debt, never able to get ahead.

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

**Commented [K204]:** The wealth from mining and farming that benefited owners was created by the labor of workers with little reward for them.

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

**Commented [K205]:** The man who actually performs the labor and works hard every day can't make a living, while the man who doesn't actually work continually benefits from the economic system.

### Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). *I ain't got no home*. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/I\\_Aint\\_Got\\_No\\_Home.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/I_Aint_Got_No_Home.htm)

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, September 24). *I ain't got no home in this world anymore* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUgzXJACXzs>

**Commented [K206]:** Generally, this song addresses issues of economic inequality and exploitation.

## Union Maid

Written in 1940, this song references the organized labor unions that were created in the United States to protect the interests of workers.

There once was a union maid, she never was afraid  
Of goons and ginks and company finks and the deputy sheriffs who made the raid.  
She went to the union hall when a meeting it was called,  
And when the Legion boys come 'round  
She always stood her ground.

**Commented [K207]:** Companies used questionable tactics to maintain power over their workers.

Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union.  
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union 'til the day I die.

**Commented [K208]:** Workers began forming unions to use their collective power to fight the excessive power of corporations.

This union maid was wise to the tricks of company spies,  
She couldn't be fooled by a company stool, she'd always organize the guys.  
She always got her way when she struck for better pay.  
She'd show her card to the National Guard  
And this is what she'd say

**Commented [K209]:** Workers organized in effort to protect their rights and dignity.

**Commented [K2010]:** Unions used strikes as a form of protest to fight for things like better pay.

Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union.  
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union 'til the day I die.

**Commented [K2011]:** Generally, this song addresses economic exploitation, workers' rights, and the power of union organizing.

You gals who want to be free, just take a tip from me;  
Get you a man who's a union man and join the ladies' auxiliary.  
Married life ain't hard when you got a union card,  
A union man has a happy life when he's got a union wife.

## Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). Union maid. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Union\\_Maid.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Union_Maid.htm).

Arlo Guthrie - Topic. (2016, February 27). Union maid [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1g4ddaXR0>

## I've Got To Know

Recorded in 1951, this song was written as the United States joined the Korean War and moves from critiquing war to the decisions made by those with political and economic power.

I've got to know, yes, I've got to know, friend;  
Hungry lips ask me wherever I go!  
Comrades and friends all falling around me  
I've got to know, yes, I've got to know.

Why do your war boats ride on my waters?  
Why do your death bombs fall from my skies?  
Why do you burn my farm and my town down?  
I've got to know, friend, I've got to know!

**Commented [K2012]:** He is questioning war as he reflects on how it affects people.

What makes your boats haul death to my people?  
Nitro blockbusters, big cannons and guns?  
Why doesn't your ship bring food and some clothing?  
I've sure got to know, folks, I've sure got to know!

**Commented [K2013]:** Instead of fighting each other, why don't we help each other?

Why can't my two hands get a good pay job?  
I can still plow, plant, I can still sow!  
Why did your lawbook chase me off my good land?  
I'd sure like to know, friend, I've just got to know!

**Commented [K2014]:** He speaks to the plight of many farmers who are willing to work hard but have lost their land to the large farming corporations and struggle to make a living.

What good work did you do, sir, I'd like to ask you,  
To give you my money right out of my hands?  
I built your big house here to hide from my people,  
Why you crave to hide so, I'd love to know!

**Commented [K2015]:** The wealthy and powerful use the labor of the poor to further separate themselves from the poor.

You keep me in jail and you lock me in prison,  
Your hospital's jammed and your crazyhouse full,  
What made your cop kill my trade union worker?  
You'll hafta talk plain 'cause I sure have to know!

**Commented [K2016]:** The wealthy and powerful have often created policies that disproportionately affect the poor and minority groups.

Why can't I get work and cash my big paycheck?  
Why can't I buy things in your place and your store?  
Why do you close my plant down and starve all my buddies?  
I'm asking you, sir, 'cause I've sure got to know!

**Commented [K2017]:** Again, he speaks to the inability of people to make a living even though they are willing to work and to the power of those who own the businesses over the livelihood of others.

## Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). I've got to know. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Ive\\_Got\\_To\\_Know.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Ive_Got_To_Know.htm).

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, May 19). I've got to know [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_f1nlorvU0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_f1nlorvU0)

**Commented [K2018]:** Generally, this song is questioning the political and economic systems that benefit the wealthy and politically powerful while asking how the disparities created by these systems can be justified by those in power.

## Pastures of Plenty

Written and recorded in late April 1947, this song recounts the experience of migrant workers and fruit pickers in the West, whom Guthrie spent time with while touring the Columbia River.

It's a mighty hard row that my poor hands have hoed  
My poor feet have traveled a hot dusty road  
Out of your Dust Bowl and Westward we rolled  
And your deserts were hot and your mountains were cold

**Commented [K2019]:** He describes difficult working conditions.

I worked in your orchards of peaches and prunes  
I slept on the ground in the light of the moon  
On the edge of the city you'll see us and then  
We come with the dust and we go with the wind

**Commented [K2020]:** He notes that migrant workers are the ones who harvest the food that feeds the nation.

California, Arizona, I harvest your crops  
Well its North up to Oregon to gather your hops  
Dig the beets from your ground, cut the grapes from your vine  
To set on your table your light sparkling wine

**Commented [K2021]:** He again acknowledges that the food and drink enjoyed by the wealthy are possible only because of the migrant workers' labor.

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

**Commented [K2022]:** Migrant laborers have made fertile, productive land out of land that was previously unable to support crop production.

It's always we rambled, that river and I  
All along your green valley, 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

**Commented [K2023]:** The migrant workers feel justified in organizing and fighting for their rights and human dignity. He specifically suggests that migrant workers should have access to the land to farm for themselves in order to make a livable wage.

## Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). *Pastures of plenty*. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Pastures\\_Of\\_Plenty.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Pastures_Of_Plenty.htm).

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, June 23). *Pastures of plenty* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ5zA368EJs>

## All You Fascists

Written in 1942 and performed on a 1944 radio broadcast with Sonny Terry, this song was a response to not only the fascism of Hitler and Nazi Germany during WWII but also issues much closer to home, such as racism, that plagued the United States.

I'm gonna tell you fascists  
You may be surprised  
The people in this world  
Are getting organized  
You're bound to lose  
You fascists bound to lose

**Commented [K2024]:** People are organizing to fight oppression in various forms.

**Commented [K2025]:** He suggests that fascism can be eliminated if people join together to do so.

Race hatred cannot stop us  
This one thing we know  
Your poll tax and Jim Crow  
And greed has got to go  
You're bound to lose  
You fascists bound to lose.

**Commented [K2026]:** He voices support for the fight for racial equality, calling out injustices of Jim Crow laws, including poll taxes.

**Commented [K2027]:** He acknowledges the greed of individuals and that when greed is built into social systems it created inequities that need to stop.

All of you fascists bound to lose:  
I said, all of you fascists bound to lose:  
Yes sir, all of you fascists bound to lose:  
You're bound to lose! You fascists:  
Bound to lose!

People of every color  
Marching side to side  
Marching 'cross these fields  
Where a million fascists dies  
You're bound to lose  
You fascists bound to lose!

**Commented [K2028]:** He again notes the strength in diversity and in people coming together to create a society that is more just and equal.

I'm going into this battle  
And take my union gun  
We'll end this world of slavery  
Before this battle's won  
You're bound to lose  
You fascists bound to lose!

**Commented [K2029]:** He expresses his support for unions as a tool for advocating for workers' rights. In this context, when he refers to slavery he speaks to the wage slavery of laborers. In essence, he is asking for a more equitable economic system.

## Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). All you fascists. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/All\\_You\\_Fascists.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/All_You_Fascists.htm)

UnAmericanBandstand. (2009, January 4). Woody Guthrie - All you fascists bound to lose [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwckwGS7OSQ>

### Blinding of Isaac Woodard

*Written in 1946, this song was inspired by the 1946 assault and blinding of Black World War II veteran Isaac Woodward in a South Carolina jail. Woody Guthrie performed this song at the Isaac Woodard benefit show at Lewisohn Stadium on Aug. 16, 1946, and later wrote, "I made this ballad up because we'll need lots of songs like this one before we win our fight for racial equality in our big free United States."*

My name is Isaac Woodard, my tale I'll tell you;  
I'm sure it'll sound so terrible you might not think it true;  
I joined up with the Army, they sent me overseas;  
Through the battles of New Guinea and in the Philippines.

On the 13th day of February of 1946  
They sent me to Atlanta to get my discharge pin;  
I caught the bus for Winslow, going to meet my wife,  
Then we were coming to New York City to visit my parents both.

About an hour out of Atlanta, the sun was going down,  
We stopped the bus by a drugstore in a little country town;  
I walked up to the driver and I looked him in the eye;  
"I'd like to go to the washroom if you think we got time".

The driver started cursing and then he hollered, "No!"  
And then I cussed right back at him and really got him told.  
He said, "If you will hurry, I guess I'll take the time",  
It was in a few short minutes we was rolling down the line.

We rolled for thirty minutes, I watched the shacks and trees,  
Thinking of my wife in Winsboro waiting there for me.  
In Aiken, South Carolina the driver he jumped out;  
He came back with a policeman to take me off the bus.

"Listen Mister Policeman", I started to explain,  
"I did not cause no trouble and I did not raise no cain."  
He struck me with his billy, he cursed me up and down,  
"Shut up, you black bastard"; and he walked me down in town.

As we walked along the sidewalk, my right arm he did twist;  
I knew he wanted me to fight back, but I never did resist.  
"Have you your Army Discharge?" I told him, yes, I had;  
He pasted me with his loaded stick down across my head.

**Commented [K2030]:** The police were summoned because Isaac Woodard, a Black army veteran, had insisted upon using the restroom. In response, he was physically and verbally abused by the police.

I grabbed his stick and we had a little run, and had a wrastle;  
When another cop run up with a gun and jumped into the battle;  
"If you don't drop that sap, black boy, it's me that's dropping you."  
I figured to drop that loaded sap was the best thing I could do.

They beat me about the head and face and left a bloody trail  
All down along the sidewalk to the iron door of the jail;  
He knocked me down upon the ground and he poked me in the eyes;  
When I woke up next morning, I found my eyes were blind.

They drug me to the courtroom, and I could not see the judge;  
He fined me fifty dollars for raising all the fuss.  
The Doctor finally got there but it took him two whole days;  
He handed me some drops and salve and told me to treat myself.

It's now you've heard my story, there's one thing I can't see,  
How you can treat a human like they have treated me.  
I thought I fought on the islands to get rid of their kind;  
But I can see the fight lots plainer now that I am blind.

#### Source

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). *Blinding of Isaac Woodard*. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Blinding\\_of\\_Isaac\\_Woodard.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Blinding_of_Isaac_Woodard.htm).

**Commented [K2031]:** This man was assaulted by police to the point that they blinded him.

**Commented [K2032]:** Even though he had been abused and blinded, the judge fined Isaac for "causing trouble."

**Commented [K2033]:** Isaac was not given proper medical attention.

**Commented [K2034]:** The word "see" is used figuratively to mean "understand," but it is also a nod to the fact that Isaac was blinded by the police, taking away his ability to see. The injustice that he experienced was a racist act. Even though Woodard fought against the Nazis' racial and ethnic oppression in WWII, it is abundantly clear that racism must be confronted in the United States as well.

## Talking Centralia

*Recorded in 1947, this song was written after the March 1947 Centralia No. 5 coal mine disaster. The coal mine, near Centralia, Illinois, exploded, killing 111 people.*

I'm just a miner in a mining town  
I dig like a mole in a hole in the ground  
When the sun comes up til the sun goes down  
I don't see much sun when I'm down in the ground

Soft coal and hard coal and lead and zinc and all other kinds of hard stuff  
It's a hard living.

Got up this morning in the same old way  
Dropped my hot coffee to start off my day  
My wife give me breakfast in her stocking feet  
And I kissed the kids in bed and then I walked down the street

Just walking along watching the sun come up, I was just thinking and wondering  
Wondering and thinking.

Centralia here is a pretty little town  
You can see Illinois for miles around  
Can't see too good with my eyes full of sleep, though  
I'm gonna quit mining someday and I'm gonna sleep 'bout a week

Just solid sleep  
Hard down, hard up  
Good old warm sleep

Dream myself up a lot of pretty dreams  
About pretty mine holes and pretty mine bosses  
And pretty mine owners and pretty women all over the place

Most men don't talk what's eatin' on their minds  
About different ways of dying down here in the mines  
But every morning we walk along and joke  
About the mines caving in, the dust and the smoke

And one little wild spark of fire  
Blowing us sky high and crooked  
One little spark blowing us cross-eyed and crazy  
Up to shake hands with all the Lord's little angels

**Commented [K2035]:** The work of a miner is exhausting and dangerous.

**Commented [K2036]:** Miners live in constant fear of getting hurt or dying on the job.



Well, I knock at the gate and stand and laugh  
And the elevator man drops us down his shaft  
We scatter and kneel and crawl different places  
With fumes in our eyes and dust on our faces

**Commented [K2037]:** He illustrates the harsh working conditions of the miners.

Gas on our stomach and water on our kneecap,  
Aches and pains and rheumatism, all kinds of crazy pictures flying through our heads  
Well, a spark did hit us in the number five  
I don't know if anybody ever did come out alive  
I got carried out with a busted head  
The lady said there's a hundred and eleven was dead

**Commented [K2038]:** This miner was in an explosion where 111 people died.

Well, this ain't my first explosion  
I come through two cave-ins and two more fires before this one  
Twenty-two dead down in Ohio and thirty-six I seen in Kentucky laid up  
And a hundred and eleven here in Centralia

**Commented [K2039]:** The risk of explosions and cave-ins is high.

Well, it seems like the very best men go down  
And don't come back in these mining towns  
Keep on a-wondering how things would be  
If a cave-in had come to the senator's seat

Or a big explosion of some kind was to go off up there in them Congress walls  
Wonder what sort of words and messages that they'd write on their slates  
Wonder if they'd hire anybody to come down to them Senate chambers and put in some safety devices,  
Nine hundred dollars worth

**Commented [K2040]:** If those with political power were at risk, they would make the changes necessary to protect themselves. This statement begs the question, why aren't things being done to protect the people working in the mines?

Think there's just about enough loose gas around that Capitol dome up there, though  
To make a mighty big blow if a spark ever hits it just right

**Commented [K2041]:** If people organized, they could spark change for better working conditions and a more equitable economic system.

### Sources

Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. (n.d). *Talking Centralia*. Lyrics. Retrieved March 11, 2021, from [https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Talking\\_Centralia.htm](https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Talking_Centralia.htm).

Woody Guthrie - Topic. (2015, May 19). *Talking Centralia (Talking miner)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGGJe8pAwkw>