

Bill Wolff
Protest Music, Spring 2026
Woody Guthrie

Names:

For this in-class small-group assignment, each group will complete this sheet together as a group.

For homework, I asked you to “do some research on Woody Guthrie, who he is, why he and his work are important, and what influences he has had on those who came after him. Please also gain some basic background on the Dust Bowl era, which many of his songs focus on, including Okies.” Summarize what you learned.

Guthrie wrote “This Land is Your Land” in 1940 in response to Kate Smith’s version of Irving Berlin’s song, “God Bless America,” which was being played on the radio nonstop. Looking at the lyrics, where do you see the influence of “God Bless America” on “This Land is Your Land?”

Considering that lyrical influence, how and why do we see “This Land is Your Land” as a song of protest? Think about historical context, Guthrie as an artist, tone, delivery, and subject areas. What does Guthrie intend when he claims, “This land is your land”? Is that meaning consistent throughout the song? How does the song hold relevance today?

Moving to “Plan Wreck as Los Gatos,” what do you think are Guthrie’s objectives in composing a topical song like this? What is the significance of it being played by others throughout history? What does it remind us of?

Switching to Project 1, for homework I asked you “to read through Project 1 and come to class with a list of 3 possible themes/subject areas you might be interested in focusing on.” Please list everyone’s ideas here.