



By Davide

Throughout his whole career Woody Guthrie wrote thousands of songs and this, probably, is why he is considered one of the best folk singers that not only America, but the whole world, ever had. I particularly admire him for his ability of writing songs about happy and sad situations that he or all America lived during those hard years (from the 30s to the 60s). While learning about him, another thing that had a strong impact on me was his autobiography. On one side he was unlucky because many of his family members died and because he lived during the dust bowl disaster which brought

America to a terrible financial crisis. On the other side *we* were lucky because all this series of unfortunate events enabled him to become a singer, and *the* songwriter of the twentieth century. I would like to underline, as well, the fact that his songs are historical documents because they talk about all the events of those years, so we could say that, in some way, Woody Guthrie is an historian. In the paragraphs that follow, I've decided to talk about how all these occurrences bring Woody to write different songs, and how they influence the audience, especially me.

**T**he Dust Bowl or the Dirty Thirties was a period of severe dust storms causing major ecological and agricultural damage to American and Canadian lands from 1930 to 1936 (in some areas until 1940). The storms had also a big impact on the financial side of America because many farmers and workers didn't produce food anymore with their crops so they were forced to leave their land, their crops and their houses and go and look for another job somewhere else. The Storm also had a strong impact on Woody because after the disaster he moved to California in Sonora where his aunt Laura lived to find a job there. That's why he appreciated the film: 'The Grapes of Wrath' so much. He believed that that film was worth seeing because it talked about the people like him, the farmers. Guthrie also writes about single characters, both fictional and real ones and about different legends. Some examples are: Pretty boy Floyd, The Sinking of the Reuben James, and Jesus Christ. In the song 'Pretty Boy Floyd' Guthrie describes the life of Charles Arthur Floyd, an American gangster who lived from February 3, 1904 to October 22, 1934. He was considered the major criminal of whole Oklahoma and he was blamed for every crime that occurred. Woody wasn't directly connected to him but it was almost as if he was since he was a big fan of Charles and romanticized him in his song. The Reuben James instead was a warship that was torpedoed during World War 2 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1941.

**W**oody describes with a simple song the life of the American Gangster but strangely in this description there are some words of admiration because Charles Arthur Floyd actually was very generous with the people who helped him and he would rob from banks just to keep his family alive and maintain them financially. Floyd is romanticized by Woody in the sense that, since he admires him, he probably makes him look throughout his song a better person than what he actually was. While I listen to Woody singing the song 'The sinking of the Reuben James' and he asks: "Did you have a friend on the good Reuben James", it almost seems as if *he* had one because he looks very connected to this event in his voice I can also hear a bit sadness for the dead men. Guthrie decided to write about Jesus Christ because he was one of the men whom he admired the most. In his song, he says that Jesus was a man who, like him, travelled the land. In this song he honors Jesus by saying all the good things he did during his life and by underlining how generous and wise he is.

**T**he songs I talked about are some of the songs which I prefer out of all of Woody's. I find the song 'Pretty Boy Floyd' very interesting because thanks to Guthrie I got to know more about this famous gangster and stimulated me to do more research about him. The Reuben James, as well, is a song that I appreciated a lot because it shows how patriotic Woody Guthrie was and how much he was actively involved in the American political situation. The song 'Jesus Christ' instead is a song that shows Woody's religious involvement and I like him because he admires him not only as a figure but also as a man.

I find that journalists and critics are mostly right when they define Woody Guthrie as one of the best folk singers of the world. Writing the essay I realized that, if we could, we should thank Woody Guthrie because his songs can be defined as actual historical documents which help us to understand more about those years and help us see the different points of view of people. We also should admire him for his ability of making difficult stories or events into simple songs which are easy to understand and can be listened to and appreciated by every kind of person.

**Thanks Woody...**