

Talking Dust Blues  
I'm Blowing Down  
Do Re Mi  
Dust Cain't Kill Me  
Tom Joad  
The Great Dust Storm  
Dusty Old Dust  
Dust Bowl Refugee  
Dust Pneumonia Blues  
I Ain't Got No Home In  
This World Anymore  
Vigilante Man

DUST BOWL BALLADS  
SUNG BY WOODY GUTHRIE

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FOLKWAYS FH 5212

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# DUST BOWL BALLADS

by

**WOODY GUTHRIE**

NOTES ON SOIL EROSION BY  
JOHN ASCH, AUTHOR, "STORY OF  
PLANTS" (PUTNAM'S)

In order to cultivate plants man must disturb the upper or surface soil by tillage operations. By stirring the soil man accelerates the normal geological weathering that has been going on for ages under normal conditions - which is part of the whole soil forming process - and exposes it to devastatingly rapid gravity, wind, and water erosion, which removes in a short time, the rich surface layer that took centuries to build up.

In the United States physical, economic, and social circumstances have contributed to the spread of soil erosion at a rate perhaps unequalled in history. Physically more than three quarters of the continental United States is subject to some degree of erosion process where the land is exposed to wind and rain. Moving over these naturally vulnerable lands the march of agricultural occupation across our continent left wide swept soil erosion in its wake. The pioneering ax and plow rapidly upset the interplay of natural forces that had formed and preserved rich soils through ages of undisturbed development. The same tide that rolled the frontier forward from the Atlantic rolled back nature's stabilizing mantle of trees and grasses and bared virgin soil to weathering processes.

The soils of the dry land areas as a whole have developed under a light rainfall, therefore they have lost little of the elements of fertility present in the parent material by leeching, and as a result are rich in nitrogen and other elements needed for plant growth. The fertility of these semi-arid soils is their greatest asset, but it is also the cause of their greatest misuse. Crop returns are so abundant in years of ample rainfall that a succession of years with above average precipitation has almost invariably led to an expansion of production that was entirely unjustified, when yields that could be expected over a series of years are taken into consideration. This has frequently led to disaster when good periods have been followed by successive years of below average rainfall. Periodically the dust bowl of the west is the scene of the sorry destruction of crops and top soil by winds.

Coney Island, later days of May, 1950.

I just beat my way from NYC to L. A. and then back home again here in Coney.

I rolled a ways with experts of every kind. I stood a while, I rode a while, I talked a mite with young



Woody Guthrie

and old weather birds, about too much or not enough water, too much wind or not enough wind, too much mud or not enough mud, too much work or not enough work, too much money or not enough money, too much of everything or not enough of nothing.

I heard folks talk and cry about the dust storms all out across our 16 middlewest states. I saw that lost gone look on their faces when they told me the government didn't follow the plan of FDR and so our land is still a dustbowl hit by dust-storms and the duststorms are getting higher and wilder and meaner, and the hearts of the people are sickly worried.

No job, low pay, high prices, higher taxes, bum houses, slummy houses. Great diseases are running and great sores are spreading down across our map and the duststorm and the cyclone and the dirty winds and the twisters ride high and wide low across our whole land. Government experts tell me these dusters will get lots worse.

I've lived in these duststorms just about all my life. (I mean, I tried to live). I met millions of good folks trying to hang on and to stay alive with the dust cutting down every hope. I am made out of this dust and out of this fast wind and I know that I'm going to win out on top of both of them if only my government and my office holder will help me.

I wrote up these eight songs here to try to show you how it is to live under the wild and windy actions of the great duststorms that ride in and out and up and down.

That old dustbowl is still there, and that high dirt-wind is still there. The government didn't fix that and Congress couldn't put a stop to it. Nobody tried very hard.

That's why FOLKWAYS is putting out these BALLADS FROM THE DUSTBOWL, to let you listen to these songs and to ask your own heart what kind of work you can do to help all of the refugees which you hear of in this Album.

Woody Guthrie



SIDE I, Band 1: TALKING DUST BLUES

Back in 1927 I had a little farm  
And I called that heaven.  
And the price is up and the rain come down  
And I hauled my crops all into town.  
I got the money.  
Bought clothes and groceries  
Fed the kids and raised a family.

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 gasoline.  
I started rocking and rolling.  
Over the mountains out towards  
The old Peach Bowl.

Way up yonder on the 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 pop corn popping.  
I had a breakdown.  
Sort of a nervous bustdown of some kind.  
And was a fellow there, a mechanic fellow,  
Said it was engine trouble.

Way up yonder on a mountain curve  
It was way up yonder in the piny woods,  
I gave that rolling Ford a shove  
And was going to coast as far as I could.  
Commence coasting...  
Picked up speed with a half-in turn turn...  
I did not make it.

Man alive I'm telling you the fiddles  
And the guitars really flew.  
That Ford took off like a flying Squirrel  
And it flew half way around the World.  
Scattered wife and children all over  
The sides of that mountain.

We got out to the west coast broke,  
I was so hungry I thought I would croak.  
And I bummed up a spud or two,  
My wife fixed up a 'tater stew.  
Filled three of the kids full of it.  
Mighty thin stew though, you could read  
A magazine right through it.

Always have figured that if it had been  
Just a little bit thinner  
Some of these politicians could have  
Seen through it.



SCHOOL CHILDREN,  
PHOTO BY SHAHN  
ARKANSAS, 1935

SIDE I, Band 2: I'M BLOWING DOWN

I'm blowing down  
This old dusty road, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

I'm going where the water  
Tastes like wine, (3)  
And I ain't going (to)  
Be treated this a way.

I'm going where them  
Dust storms never blow, (3)  
And I ain't going (to)  
Be treated this a way.

They say I'm  
A dust bowl refugee, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

I'm looking for a job  
With honest pay, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

My children need  
Three square meals a day, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

It takes a ten dollar shoe  
To fit my feet, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

Your two dollar shoe  
Hurts my feet, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

I'm going down  
This old dusty road, (3)  
And I ain't gonna  
Be treated this a way.

SIDE I, Band 3: DO RE MI

Lots of folks back east, they say;  
Leaving home ev'ry day,  
Beating a hot and dusty trail  
To the California line.  
Cross the desert sands they roll,  
getting out of that old dust-bowl  
Think they're going to a sugar bowl,  
but- here is what they find.

For the police at the port of entrance say,  
"You're number fourteen thousand for today."  
Oh, If you ain't got the Do Re Mi, boys,  
If you ain't got the Do Re Mi,  
Better go back to beautiful Texas,  
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee.  
California's a Garden of Eden,  
A paradise to live in or see.  
But believe it or not,  
You won't find it so hot,  
If you ain't got the Do Re Mi.

If you want to buy a home or farm,  
That can't do nobody harm,  
Or take your vacation by the mountain or sea.  
Don't swap your old cow for a car,  
You'd better stay right where you are;  
Better take this little tip from me.

'Cause I look through the want ads every day,  
But the headlines in the papers always say, Oh --  
If you ain't got the Do Re Mi, etc.





Benton's lithograph of dust bowl refugees packing to leave for the promise land.

#### SIDE I, Band 4: DUST CAIN'T KILL ME

That old dust storm killed my baby  
But it can't kill me, Lord,  
It can't kill me.

That old dust storm killed my family  
But it can't kill me, Lord,  
It can't kill me.

That old landlord got my homestead  
But he can't get me, Lord  
He can't get me.

That old dry spell killed my crop, boys  
But it can't kill me, Lord,  
It can't kill me.

That old tractor got my home, boys,  
But it can't get me, Lord,  
It can't get me.

That old tractor run my house down,  
But it can't get me down  
It can't get me.

That old pawn shop got my furniture,  
But it can't get me, Lord,  
Can't get me.

That old highway got my relatives,  
But it can't get me, Lord,  
It can't get me.

That old dust might killed my wheat, boys,  
But it can't kill me, Lord,  
It can't kill me.

I have weathered many a dust storm  
But it can't get me, boys,  
It can't kill me.

#### SIDE I, Band 5: TOM JOAD

Tom Joad got out of the old McAlester pen  
There he got his parole,  
After four long years on a man killing charge,  
Tom Joad come a walking down the road. Poor boy,  
Tom Joad come a walking down the road.

Tom Joad he met a truck driving man  
There he caught him a ride  
He said: "I just got loose from McAlester's pen  
On a charge called Homicide.  
A charge called Homicide."

That truck rolled away in a cloud of dust,  
Tommy turned his face toward home,  
He met Preacher Casey and they had a little drink,  
But they found that his family they was gone.  
He found that his family they was gone.

He found his mother's old fashion shoe  
Found his daddy's hat.  
And he found little Muley and Muley said:  
"They've been tractored out by the cats.  
They've been tractored out by the cats."

Tom Joad walked down to the neighbor's farm  
Found his family.  
They took Preacher Casey and loaded in a car  
And his mother said "We got to git away."  
His mother said "We got to get away."

Now the twelve of the Joads made a mighty heavy  
load  
But Grandpa Joad did cry.  
He picked up a handful of land in his hand  
Said: "I'm stayin' with the farm till I die.  
Yes, I'm stayin' with my farm till I die."

They fed him short ribs and coffee and soothing  
syrup  
And Grandpa Joad did die.  
They buried Grandpa Joad by the side of the road,  
Buried Grandma on the California side,  
They buried Grandma on the California side.

They stood on a Mountain and they looked to the  
West  
And it looked like the promised land.  
That bright green valley with a river running  
through,  
There was work for every single hand, they thought.  
There was work for every single hand.

The Joads rolled away to Jungle Camp,  
There they cooked a stew.  
And the Hungry Little Kids of the Jungle Camp  
Said: "We'd like to have some too."  
Said: "We'd like to have some too."

Now a Deputy Sheriff fired loose at a man  
Shot a woman in the back.  
Before he could take his aim again  
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.  
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.



They handcuffed Casey and they took him to  
Jail  
And then he got away.  
And he met Tom Joad on the old river bridge,  
And these few words he did say, Poor boy.  
These few words he did say.

"I preached for the Lord a mighty long time.  
Preached about the rich and the poor.  
Us workin' folks is all get together  
Cause we ain't got a chance anymore.  
We ain't got a chance anymore."

The Deputies come and Tom and Casey run  
To the bridge where the water run down.  
But the vigilante they hit Casey with a club,  
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.  
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.

Tom Joad he grabbed that Deputy's club  
Hit him over the head.  
Tom Joad took flight in the dark rainy night  
A Deputy and a Preacher lying dead. Two men.  
A Deputy and a Preacher lying dead.

Tom run back where his mother was asleep  
He woke her up out of bed.  
Then he kissed goodbye to the mother that he  
loved  
Said what Preacher Casey said, Tom Joad.  
He said what Preacher Casey said.

"Ever'body might be just one big soul  
Well it looks that a way to me.  
Everywhere that you look in the day or night  
That's where I'm gonna be, Ma,  
That's where I'm gonna be.

Wherever little children are hungry and cry  
Wherever people ain't free.  
Wherever men are fightin' for their rights  
That's where I'm gonna be, Ma.  
That's where I'm a gonna be."

## SIDE II, Band 1: THE GREAT DUST STORM

On the 14th day of April  
Of 1935, there struck  
The worst of dust storms  
That ever filled the sky.

You could see that dust storm coming,  
The cloud looked death-like black,  
And through our mighty nation  
It left a dreadful track.

From Oklahoma City  
To the Arizona line,  
Dakota and Nebraska  
To the lazy Rio Grande.

It fell across our city  
Like a curtain of black rolled down,  
We thought it was our judgment  
We thought it was our doom.

The radio reported,  
We listened with alarm,  
The wild and windy actions  
Of this great mysterious storm.

From Albuquerque and Clovis  
And old New Mexico,  
They said it was the blackest  
That ever they had saw.

From old Dodge City, Kansas,  
The dust had rung their knell,  
And a few more comrades sleeping  
On top of old Boot Hill.

From Denver, Colorado,  
They said it blew so strong,  
They thought that they could hold out  
They did not know how long.

Our relatives were huddled  
Into their oil-boom shacks  
And the children they was crying  
As it whistled through the cracks.

And the family was crowded  
Into their little room,  
They thought the world had ended  
And they thought it was their doom.

The storm took place at sundown  
It lasted through the night.  
When we looked out next morning  
We saw a terrible sight.

We saw outside our window  
Where wheatfields they had grown,  
Was now a rippling ocean  
Of dust the wind had blown.

It covered up our fences,  
It covered up our barns,  
It covered up our tractors  
In this wild and dusty storm,

We loaded our jalopies  
And piled our families in,  
We rattled down the high-way  
To never come back again.





SIDE II, Band 2: DUSTY OLD DUST

I sung this song  
But I'll sing it again.  
Of the place that I lived  
On the wild windy plains.

In the month called April  
The county called Gray,  
Here is what all of the  
People there say:

CHORUS:

So long it's been good to know you (3)  
This dusty old dust is getting my home  
And I've got to be drifting along.

A dust storm hit  
And it hit like thunder.  
It dusted us over and it  
Covered us under.

Blocked out the traffic  
And blocked out the sun.  
Straight for home all the  
People did run.

CHORUS:

We talked of the end  
Of the world and then,  
We would sing a song  
And then sing it again.

We would sit for a while  
And not say a word, and  
Then these words  
Would be heard:

CHORUS:

Sweethearts sat in the  
Dark and sparked.  
They hugged and kissed  
In that dusty old dark.

They sighed and cried  
And hugged and kissed.  
Instead of marriage  
They talked like this...

(CHORUS)

Now the telephone rang  
And it jumped off the wall,  
That was the Preacher  
A making his call.

He said: Kind friends  
This may be the end.  
You've got your last chance  
At salvation of sin.

The church it was jammed  
And the church it was packed.  
And that dusty old dust storm  
Blowed so black.

The preacher could not  
Read a word of his text,  
And he folded his specs  
And he took up collections:  
Said

(CHORUS)

SIDE II, Band 3: DUST BOWL REFUGEE

I'm a Dust Bowl refugee.  
Just a Dust Bowl refugee,  
From that Dust Bowl to the Peach Bowl  
Now the Peaches is killing me.

'Cross the mountain to the sea,  
Come the wife and kids and me,  
It's a hard old dusty highway  
For a Dust Bowl refugee.

Hard it Always has been that way  
Here today and on our way,  
Down that mountain, 'cross the Desert  
Just a Dust Bowl refugee.

We are ramblers so they say,  
We are only here today,  
Then we travel with the seasons,  
We're the Dust Bowl refugees.

From the southland and the droughtland  
Come the wife and kids and me,  
And this old world is a hard world  
For a Dust Bowl refugee.

Yes we ramble and we roam,  
And the highway that's our home,  
It's a never ending highway  
For a Dust Bowl refugee.

Yes we wander and we work  
In your crops and in your fruit,  
Like the whirlwind on the Desert  
That's the Dust Bowl refugees.

I'm a Dust Bowl refugee  
I'm a Dust Bowl refugee,  
And I wonder will I always  
Be a Dust Bowl refugee.



Still from film "Grapes of Wrath".



SIDE II, Band 4: DUST PNEUMONIA BLUES

I got the dust pneumonee, pneumonee in my lung (Repeat)  
And I ain't got long, no, I ain't got long.

Well, my good gal's got the dust pneumonee, too. (Repeat)  
And she ain't got long, no she ain't got long.

Down in Texas, my good gal fainted in the rain. (Repeat)  
Threw a bucket of dirt in her face to revive her once again.

SIDE II, Band 5: I AIN'T GOT NO HOME IN  
THIS WORLD ANYMORE

I ain't got no home, I'm just a-roamin' round,  
I'm just a wanderin' worker, I roam from town to town.  
The police make it hard where-ever I may go,  
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

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

Was a-farmin' on the share and always I was poor,  
My crops I laid 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.

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

SIDE II, Band 6: VIGILANTE MAN

Tell me what is that Vigilante Man?  
What, is that Vigilante Man?  
Does he carry a gun and a pistol in his hand?  
I've heard his name all over the land.

Have you seen that Vigilante man?  
Have you seen that Vigilante man?  
Have you seen that Vigilante man?  
I been hearing his name all over this land.

Rainy night, down in the engine house;  
Sleepin' just as still as a mouse;  
Man come along and chased us out in the  
rain,  
Was that a Vigilante man?

Stormy days we'd pass the time away,  
Sleepin' in some good warm place;  
Man come along and we gave him a little  
race.  
Was that a Vigilante man?



On the road, California the goal

Preacher Casey was just a working man,  
And he said, "Unite, all you working men!"  
Killed him in the river, some strange man.  
Was that a vigilante man?

Oh, why does a Vigilante man?  
Why does a Vigilante man  
Carry that sawed-off shotgun in his hand?  
Would he shoot his brother and sister down?

I've rambled around from town to town,  
I've rambled around from town to town,  
And they herded us around like a wild herd  
of cattle;  
Was that the Vigilante men?

Have you seen that Vigilante man?  
Have you seen that Vigilante man?  
Have you seen that Vigilante man?  
I have heard his name all over the land.