

These Songs Were Made for You and Me

This booklet was compiled in 2024 at the Peace & Justice Center
in Burlington, VT

A Peace & Justice Songbook

Editor's Note

All of the songs contained in this booklet come from the American folk song tradition, and all of these songs are in the public domain. I tried to collect a small representative sample of revolutionary songs; in other words, songs that were written and sung by people who were fighting for a better world. This is not an exhaustive list of either American folk songs or revolutionary songs, but I hope that it is a good sample and jumping off point for anybody who wants to dive deeper.

The point of this booklet is to help people sing in community with each other. Since all of these songs are in the public domain, they belong to each and every one of us, and we can do with them as we please. If there are songs in here that you don't like, maybe you can change them into something you like better? Rearrange them into something that speaks to the revolutionary in you? That freedom is yours!

Of course, this booklet can be copied, edited, modified, and distributed to anybody from anywhere for any reason – please feel free to do so!

- Kason

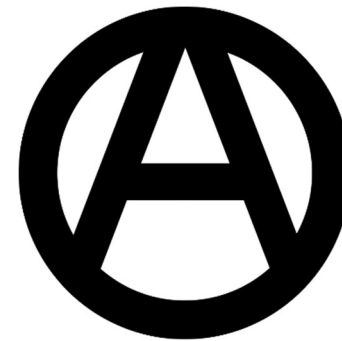


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Postscript

I hope you enjoyed this short booklet! For more songs to sing together, I highly recommend the songbook collections *Rise Up Singing* and *Rise Again*, both of which contain the songs found here as well as many others.

There's much I could say about the joy found in singing in community with others, but I worry that anything I say may come across as trite. Let it just be known that humans have been singing together since before we had language, and if there is any hope for us to build a better and more just world, that hope will be found in music as much as anything. Let your voices ring out with the hope of the new world we are building together!



We Shall Overcome

Derived from a Hymn by Charles Tindley, 1960s

This song would become one of the defining songs of the Civil Rights Movement thanks to the iconic use of the song by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. It was later performed all over the country by artists like Pete Seeger and Joan Baez.

Chords: C F C (x2)/C FG Am D G D G/C F C F G Am/C F C G C

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome some day

Refrain: Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome some day

We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand some day [Refrain]

We shall all be free
We shall all be free
We shall all be free some day [Refrain]

We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid today [Refrain]

Repeat First Verse [Refrain]

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Traditional; African American Spiritual

This song was written and sung by African people who were enslaved by white European landowners in what is now the United States. It is one of the most well-known Christian hymns all over the world. In addition to its use as a spiritual, it was utilized as a signal by conductors of the Underground Railroad in the decades directly preceding the American Civil War.

Chords: D - G D / - - A - / D D7 G D/ - A D -/

Refrain: Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,
Coming for to carry me home.
A band of angels coming after me,
Coming for to carry me home. [Refrain]

If you get there before I do,
Coming for to carry me home.
Tell all my friends I'm coming too,
Coming for to carry me home. [Refrain]

I'm sometimes up and sometimes down,
Coming for to carry me home.
But still my soul feels heav'nly bound,
Coming for to carry me home. [Refrain]

Down in the River to Pray

Traditional; African American Spiritual

In addition to its use as a spiritual, this song was utilized as a signal by conductors of the Underground Railroad in the decades directly preceding the American Civil War.

Chords: D – A D / D – A G D / A D G G D / A D G D

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown?
Good Lord, show me the way

O, sisters, let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
O, sisters, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

Repeat, substitute the underlined word with brothers,
fathers, mothers, siblings, sinners, comrades, etc.

This Land is Your Land

Woody Guthrie, 1940

Although appropriated as a patriotic song, this song was originally written in angry response to “God Bless America” as a socialist anthem. The full original lyrics, which are often omitted, make that clear, with Guthrie’s direct attack on the system of private property.

Chords: D G - - / - D - - / A - - D / - G - D / - - AD /

Chorus: 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.

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. [Chorus]

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. [Chorus]

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.[Chorus]

Was a big high wall there that tried to stop me
A sign was painted said "Private Property"
But on the other side it didn't say nothing.
That side was made for you and me. [Chorus]

And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth
And the hens lay soft-boiled eggs
The farmers' trees are full of fruit
And the barns are full of hay
Oh I'm bound to go
Where there ain't no snow
Where the rain don't fall
And the wind don't blow
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks
And the little streams of alcohol
Come trickling down the rocks
The brakemen have to tip their hats
And the railway bulls are blind
There's a lake of stew
And of whiskey too
You can paddle all around it
In a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
The jails are made of tin.
And you can walk right out again,
As soon as you are in.
There ain't no short-handled shovels,
No axes, saws nor picks,
I'm bound to stay
Where you sleep all day,
Where they hung the jerk
That invented work
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Simple Gifts

Traditional; Shaker Hymn

The Shakers were one of the most successful religious communitarian experiments in the United States. This song represents the joy found in their values of communal simple living.

Chords: D - / A - / D - / A GD // DA D / - A / D - / A GD

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

Chorus: When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right

The Earth is our mother and the fullness thereof,
Her streets, her slums, as well as stars above.
Salvation is here where we laugh, where we cry,
Where we seek and love, where we live and die

[Repeat Chorus]

Editor's Note: If these religious songs inspire you, there are many more to discover! I recommend the songs "Go Down Moses", "Roll Jordan Roll", and "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" for more examples of rad American spiritual songs.

John Brown's Body

1861

The following three songs all have the same tune, and it is one of the most famous tunes in the United States. John Brown was a radical abolitionist who raided the military base at Harper's Ferry in 1859 in a doomed bid to arm Southern slaves and end slavery. He was hung by the State of Virginia for treason. Once the Civil War started, many Union soldiers sang this song to honor the man who sparked the fight for liberation. It is likely that it was first sung in 1861 by Union soldiers in Boston.

Chords: G - - - / C - G - / - - B7 Em / Am D7 G - :||

John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave; (x3)
His soul is marching on!

Chorus: Glory, Glory, Hallelujah! (x3)
His soul is marching on!

The stars above in heaven are a-looking kindly down (x3)
On the grave of old John Brown.

[Repeat Chorus]

Well he's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord (x2)
But his soul goes marching on!

[Repeat Chorus]

Big Rock Candy Mountain

Harry McClintock, 1928

Yet another IWW songwriter. Here, McClintock comically depicts a worker's paradise wherein cops are disempowered and food is free.

Chords: C - - G C/C - - G C/FC FC FC G/C - - G C//C - - F C/F C F
G/C - - F C/FC FC FC FC/G - - C// (repeat second half)

One evening as the sun went down
And the jungle fires were burning,
Down the track came a hobo hiking,
And he said, "Boys, I'm not turning
I'm headed for a land that's far away
Beside the crystal fountains
So come with me, we'll go see
The Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
There's a land that's fair and bright,
Where the handouts grow on bushes
And you sleep out every night.
Where the boxcars all are empty
And the sun shines every day
And the birds and the bees
And the cigarette trees
The lemonade springs
Where the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
All the cops have wooden legs

Dump the Bosses Off Your Back

John Brill, 1919

Another IWW song, encouraging workers to revolt against the bosses that oppress all of us

Chords: D G D A / D G D A D / A D G D A / 2nd /

Are you poor, forlorn and hungry?
Are there lots of things you lack?
Is your life made up of misery?
Then dump the bosses off your back.

Are your clothes all patched and tattered?
Are you living in a shack?
Would you have your troubles scattered?
Then dump the bosses off your back.

Are you almost split asunder?
Loaded like a long-eared jack?
Friend—why don't you buck like thunder?
And dump the bosses off your back.

All the agonies you suffer,
You can end with one good whack—
Stiffen up, you orn'ry duffer—
And dump the bosses off your back.

Battle Hymn of the Republic

Julia Ward Howe, 1861

The popularity of “John Brown’s Body” among Union Soldiers pressed songwriters in the Union to produce a genuine Republic marching anthem. Julia Ward Howe, the wife of one of John Brown’s financial accomplices, wrote these words to the same tune.

Chords: G - - - / C - G - / - - B7 Em / Am D7 G - :||

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

Chorus: Glory, Glory, Hallelujah! (x3)
His truth is marching on.

I have seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps/
They have builded him an altar in the evening dews and damps;/
I can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps/
His day is marching on. [Chorus]

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free!
While God is marching on. [Chorus]

Solidarity Forever

Ralph Chaplin, 1915

The same tune adapted for another cause, these lyrics were written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915 for the Industrial Worker's of the World (IWW)

Chords: G - - - / C - G - / - - B7 Em / Am D7 G - :||

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood
shall run/There can be no power greater anywhere beneath
the sun/Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble
strength of one?/But the union makes us strong.

Chorus: Solidarity forever (x3)
For the union makes us strong.

It is we who plowed the prairies; built the cities where they
trade/Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless
miles of railroad laid/Now we stand outcast and starving
'midst the wonders we have made/But the union makes us
strong. [Chorus]

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to
earn/But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel
can turn/We can break their haughty power, gain our
freedom when we learn/That the union makes us strong.
[Chorus]

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded
gold/Greater than the might of armies, multiplied a
thousand-fold/We can bring to birth a new world from the
ashes of the old/For the union makes us strong. [Chorus]

Preacher and the Slave

Joe Hill, 1911

Joe Hill was one of the most prolific songwriters for the IWW. Here is perhaps his most famous composition, mocking condescending preachers, in which he coins the phrase "pie in the sky." Joe Hill was executed by the State of Utah in 1915.

Chords: G C G - / - - D - / G C G - / - D G - //G - D - / - - G - / - -
C - / G D G - //

Long-haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
But when asked how 'bout something to eat
They will answer with voices so sweet:

Chorus: You will eat, bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.

If you fight hard for children and wife,
Try to get something good in this life,
You're a sinner and bad man, they tell,
When you die you will sure go to hell. [Chorus]

Workingmen of all countries, unite,
Side by side we for freedom will fight:
When the world and its wealth we have gained
To the grafters we'll sing this refrain: [Chorus]