

Introduction to Volume 2

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A year ago we — “we” meaning a community of interested Guthrie scholars — launched the *Woody Guthrie Annual* with a hopeful vision. As Darryl Holter and I wrote in the introduction to the first issue:

Launching a scholarly journal is often a labor of love and a very tenuous enterprise. Countless promising titles have sunk into oblivion after the first or second issue. The future of the *Woody Guthrie Annual* will depend on the steady contribution of able scholars as well as the continued interest of readers — so please, spread the word as far and wide as you can. Meanwhile, we welcome you with open arms, open minds, and open access to the first issue. Enjoy the conversation!

Well, we have made it to the second issue — a little thinner, perhaps, but more than a faint breath on the mirror. This issue goes to press roughly two months after one of the most disorienting political upsets in American and, arguably, global history. Not since 1860 has the election of a US president caused such immediate and bitter reaction. Some are already asking how certain progressive values — values openly championed by Woody Guthrie — will survive the next presidency, and what form they will take if they do manage to survive. Indeed, Guthrie himself forced a direct intervention into the presidential campaign, not only through his writings on the landlord whom he called “my worst enemy” (see “Woody Guthrie and Fred Trump” in this issue), but also via the numerous reflections on the meaning of “This Land Is Your Land” prompted by Bernie Sanders’s adoption of the song as well as the ongoing court battle over the song’s copyright. During the campaign, both Sanders and Hillary Clinton made the point of visiting the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa to gaze upon Guthrie’s handwritten lyrics to “This Land Is Your Land.” Candidate Trump did not, although he, too, visited Tulsa.

During the campaign and after the election, YouTube versions of Guthrie’s “All You Fascists Bound to Lose” were circulated freely on Facebook and other social media sites, as were images of his famous guitar bearing the legend, “This Machine Kills Fascists.” In the press, editorial debates still continue over whether the use of the phrase “fascism” is appropriate in the current political context. Readers will have their own opinions about this. But it is worth returning to Guthrie’s own thoughts as expressed in a letter to Marjorie Mazia in December of 1942:



Images courtesy of the Woody Guthrie Center.

Sometimes, even, fascism sounds soft and sweet and tender, sentimental, and moody, loving and kind, because fascism feels all of these feelings towards the members of its own family just as free people feel about each other. Fascism would like for you to think that all of the world's troubles are your own personal fault. Fascism would like for you to weep and hang your head and cry and get so mixed up in your thinking that you'd walk into one of its own churches looking for some kind of a personal salvation.

Mark Allan Jackson notes in this issue that Guthrie had his own ideas about who might make the ideal president, invoking a different kind of "church" membership. In quoting Guthrie's song, "Christ for President," Jackson flags up Guthrie's call for "a truly democratic leader — an advocate for economic equality, for justice in this world and not just Heaven." Meanwhile, some may think wistfully of Guthrie's lines as they are inserted into the title of Liam Maloy's essay on Guthrie's children's songs: "Why couldn't the wind blow backwards?" Regardless of the direction the political winds might blow in the coming months and years, we do know of Guthrie's conviction that where there is life, there is hope. Woody had some things to say about both life and hope — hence the "hoping machine" that he described for Marjorie in 1942, in the midst of the global battle against fascism:

Now I know from actual experience that what is going to come as a complete surprise to every enemy of mankind is, that the hoping machine, if it is not dead, if it still hopes a little, can, by a simple process of coming in contact with a new, strong, powerful and brilliant hoper, as I say, the seemingly deteriorated hoping machine, attunes itself to the strong beam or ray of the more powerful set, and, in many many cases, adjusts its own mechanism in a surprisingly short period of time, and very often springs back to a life of hoping again.

Deana McCloud, Executive Director of the Woody Guthrie Center, writes here in her end-of-year report: "In times like these, it is important to stand up for justice, empathy, and the American ideal of equal opportunity for all ... these values that Woody held so dear." Where there is life, there is hope — and as Woody himself said about life, "I ain't dead yet."