

Institution: University of Central Lancashire
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Recovering American radicalism: Woody Guthrie through text and performance
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The primary object has been to reify the buried American radical tradition through text- and performance-based focus on the US songwriter Woody Guthrie. Kaufman seeks to establish and broadcast Guthrie's role in the development of a radical sphere that has been largely airbrushed out of post-McCarthyite American history and culture. The research is not to be disseminated solely through the book <i>Woody Guthrie, American Radical</i> (2011) and scholarly essays but also through a series of public performances foregrounding Guthrie's political activism. Impact has been at least twofold: (1) on cultural and historical awareness, establishing through attention to Guthrie a (re)awakened sense of radical American culture and history; (2) economic, in terms of revenues brought to charities, organisations and venues hosting Kaufman's performances.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>For the book and journal articles: Kaufman (Professor of American Literature and Culture) was the sole researcher for the first political biography of Woody Guthrie. The bulk of the research (2008-10) was archival, taking place at the Woody Guthrie Archives in New York, the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress in Washington, and two private collections – the Barry Ollman collection in Denver and the Ronald D. Cohen collection in Gary, Indiana. Through examination of songs, letters, newspaper columns and essays – many of which had never been published – Kaufman charted the development of Guthrie's radical ethos and political activism from his arrival in California from the Dust Bowl in 1937, through his immersion into the Popular Front in both California and New York, the writing of his Columbia River anthems, his wartime CIO agitation and his Merchant Marine/US Army experience. Guthrie's radical post-war initiatives were examined in relation to two significant areas: the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation and the anti-communist backlash. Kaufman explored Guthrie's anti-racism through his musical engagement with lynching, miscarriages of justice and the oppression of African American veterans, while Guthrie's reactions to the Cold War were examined in the context of the anti-communist purge of American labour unions and the red-baiting of radical musicians, impacting upon initiatives in which Guthrie participated including the People's Songs movement, the Henry Wallace presidential campaign of 1948 and the riots marring Paul Robeson's Peekskill concert of 1949 (Kaufman was the first scholar to establish Guthrie's physical presence at Peekskill). While Guthrie's descent into Huntington's Disease substantially removed him from the public sphere after 1952, he continued to wrestle creatively with the phenomena of Jim Crow, McCarthyism and the Cold War through a large body of unpublished songs and writings. Kaufman engaged with these late writings as Guthrie's final, often belligerent expressions of radical conviction before his work was taken up and perpetuated by the next generation of protest singers who came to be known as 'Woody's Children' (Baez, Paxton, Dylan, Ochs et al).</p> <p>For the performance pieces: Kaufman has developed two 'live musical documentaries' for public presentation. The first, <i>Woody Guthrie: Hard Times and Hard Travelin'</i>, sets Guthrie's songs (among others) in the context of the American 1930s – the Dust Bowl, the Depression, the New Deal and the state of popular music itself, charting through musical performance, historical narrative and projected visual images the development of Guthrie's political awareness, culminating in the writing of 'This Land is Your Land' (1940). The second, <i>Woody Guthrie: The Long Road to Peekskill</i> (formerly '<i>All You Jim Crow Fascists!</i>' <i>Woody Guthrie's Freedom Songs</i>),</p>

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focuses solely on a lesser known aspect of Guthrie's work: his engagement with race and racial oppression. Most of the songs in this show were never recorded, but they are the legacy of Guthrie's own personal transformation from a casual Oklahoma racist in his youth to the committed civil rights activist who held the line against American fascism during the Peekskill riots of 1949. The extensive research for both pieces required the uncovering and learning of song renditions, identifying visual images, and locating primary and secondary narrative materials.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Key outputs

Monograph

Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011). Italian translation by Seba Pezzani (Rome: Arcana, 2012).

Journal article

Will Kaufman, 'Woody Guthrie's Union War', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 16, nos. 1-2 (2010): 109-124.

Book chapters

Will Kaufman, 'Woody Guthrie and the Cultural Front', in John S. Partington, ed., *The Life, Music and Thought of Woody Guthrie: A Critical Appraisal* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011): 35-49.

Will Kaufman, 'Woody Guthrie at the Crossroads', in Neil Wynn and Jill Terry, eds., *Transatlantic Roots Music: Folk, Blues and National Identities* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).

Public performances

Over 175 since January 2008 throughout the UK, Ireland, continental Europe and the United States, including performances at Glastonbury, the Bath Music Festival, the Smithsonian Institution, a coast-to-coast US tour in 2011 and film/radio coverage (NPR, PBS, C-Span). See www.willkaufman.com for filmed performances, programme descriptions, links to US media appearances (*Democracy Now!*, C-Span's *Book-TV* and National Public Radio) and – on the tab "Gigs and Contact" – a complete list of performances in the census period.

Key grants

BMI-Woody Guthrie Fellowship (2008, \$2500) and AHRC Fellowship (2009, £34,000) for research at Woody Guthrie Archives and public dissemination through US performances.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The book's potential impact on the reading public – both outside and inside of academe – is asserted by the pre-eminent US folk music scholar, Ronald D. Cohen, who calls it 'a fresh, challenging look at Woody Guthrie's political life and musical contributions'. Music historian Clark D. Halker deems it 'a much needed and extremely valuable book on Woody Guthrie', arguing that 'examining Guthrie in this broader historical and cultural framework yields new insights into both Guthrie and radicalism'. *Kirkus Reviews* calls it 'an overdue rediscovery of folk music's great agitator', whilst *Utopian Studies* calls it 'a stunning accomplishment and the first sustained monograph on Guthrie's political involvements, opinions, and impacts'. For the *American Music Review* it is 'unquestionably the most significant scholarly work to emerge around the [Guthrie] Centennial'. The publication led to an hour long interview on the US news programme *Democracy Now!*, a broadcast on C-Span's *Book-TV* show, extensive interviews on US National Public Radio, positive notices in the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, an appearance in a forthcoming French documentary, *Mais ou est donc passé Woody* and a consultancy with Douglas Brinkley and

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Johnny Depp for their publication of Guthrie's lost novel, *House of Earth* (in which they refer to Kaufman as one of "two great Guthrie scholars"). The book was translated into Italian in 2012, with major notices and interviews in the three major Italian broadsheets, *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa* and *Il Tempo*. In personal correspondence, two of the English-speaking world's greatest folk musicians describe the book's impact upon them. Ralph McTell: 'The book is a true revelation and threw a different light on Woody for me'; Andy Irvine: 'It really opened my eyes to Woody as the fierce radical he was!' And a 'vox pop' from *Goodreads*: 'So much of labor history is little known in this country and this book is important in filling in some of those gaps in knowledge'.

A selection of responses to Kaufman's **performances** attests to their impact in terms of historical and cultural awareness: '[It was] invaluable for those of us whose teachers inexplicably skipped the chapter on early 20th century American history. He has a relaxed style; with well rehearsed one-liners and a deep knowledge of the subject ... but although I learned a great deal, I never felt that I was being lectured at. A lot of the time, he feels more like a story-teller than an academic speaker' (<http://www.andrewrilstone.com/2010/04/will-kaufman-jazzfutureinns-bristol-24.html>). From Ralph McTell's blog, 24 April 2010: 'On Friday evening I attended the Bodmin Folk Club and listened spellbound to the wonderful Will Kaufman's one man show on the life of one of my musical and spiritual heroes, Woody Guthrie. I cannot recommend this performance too highly... In Will Kaufman's show you will see and hear in graphic and affectionate detail why this writer has inspired so many guitar singer songwriters. I was deeply moved by the whole performance. Try to catch Will sometime'. (http://www.ralphmctell.co.uk/journal_apr.php). From a young audience member in Connecticut, after a performance tied in with the NEH 'Big Read' initiative focused on *The Grapes of Wrath* (15 October 2010): 'The combination of the slides, songs, and stories was so interesting and entertaining at the same time. Sometimes it was quite sad and other times he made us laugh, but I felt like I was transported to another time and place and it made me want to revisit the novel once again' (<http://www.nea.gov/bigreadblog/?cat=8>). From an audience member, July 2013: 'What a way to kick off a series of gigs at La Dolce Vita. 'Exploring the thirties in USA is like exploring the world as it is today. But as WG himself said: if you've got a song, you've got a way of changing things. This was not just a moving musical documentary but an education in resistance.' Spin-off and return invitations are common – hence externally funded presentations in 2013 at the Woody Guthrie Center in Oklahoma, a return to the Shetland WordPlay Festival, and a return to Westchester, New York, for a commemoration of the 1949 Peekskill Riots, sharing the bill exclusively with Pete Seeger.

Kaufman's performances have also generated real **economic impact**, as he regularly plays fundraising benefits for the likes of the People's History Museum, the Woody Guthrie Foundation, the Working Class Movement Library, the American Labor Museum, Windows for Peace, AsylumLink, the TUC, the Fire Brigades Union, the Los Angeles Carwashers' Union, the Brighton Unemployment Centre and many other charities and organisations. (Indicative evidence: email from Windows for Peace organiser, 21 February 2013: 'Tickets are going well. We have well over 100 booking so far – and they are still coming in'; Facebook notice from the Sheffield Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, 14 October 2012: 'We had 70 people filling Cafe Harland for an informational and inspiring night, courtesy of Will Kaufman. Still got ticket money coming in but the scores on the doors are £423 taken'; email from Freedom From Torture organiser, 7 October 2013: 'All I want say is summed up in one comment from a punter. They said the work the charity is involved in really came home to them when they listened to you singing and saw those extraordinary photos. We raised £600 and as I hoped celebrated a great charity. Thank you for being such a vital and inspiring part of that'.

Kaufman's reputation for high impact among his peers is reflected in his inclusion as a case study for the British Association for American Studies publication, *American Studies in the UK: Impact and Public Engagement* (2013) and an invitation to the University of Derby to address their Impact conference (2013). High-profile performers such as Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, Ralph McTell and Ry Cooder have publically attested to the impact of Kaufman's performances (see endorsements on www.willkaufman.com).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Feedback survey on public performance of *Woody Guthrie: Hard Times and Hard Travelin'*, UCLan, 6 March 2013 – available on request from UCLan.

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British Association for American Studies, *American Studies in the UK: Impact and Public Engagement* (2013) (see p. 6): http://www.baas.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/impact%20brochure_28web29.pdf

Guardian profile, 22 August 2011: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/aug/22/woody-guthrie-politics-biography-kaufman>

Democracy Now! appearance, 4 July 2012: http://www.democracynow.org/2012/7/4/woody_guthrie_at_100_pete_seeger – syndicated over 1,000 television, radio, cable and internet stations worldwide. 2.7K Facebook ‘likes’, 397 tweets, 577 shares as of 13 September 2013.

Blog review by Shahrar Ali of the London Young Greens, following June 2013 benefit performance: <http://shahrarali.net/younggreens-kaufman-woodyguthrie/>

Performance review, *Leicester Secularist*, November 2012 (see p. 5): http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk/newsletter/secularist_201211_45.pdf

Performance review and interview, *C-Ville Weekly* (Charlottesville, Virginia), 16 August 2011: http://www.c-ville.com/Revamping_Woody_Author_Kaufman_wants_to_renovate_Guthries_legacy/#.USTtVDIqGc0

Interview in *Salt Lake City Weekly*, 7 July 2011: <http://www.cityweekly.net/utah/article-137-14399-will-kaufman.html>

The Guardian on benefit performance for the Working Class Movement Library, 7 May 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/the-northerner/2012/may/07/salford-museums-workingclassmovementlibrary-woodyguthrie-islaingtonmill>

Review essay on Italian translation of *Woody Guthrie, American Radical: La Repubblica* (Magazine *La Domenica*), 1 July 2012 (see pp. 34-35): <http://download.repubblica.it/pdf/domenica/2012/01072012.pdf>