

DUST BOWL REFUGEE(S) (Woody Guthrie) (1938)



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And then the dispossessed were drawn west -- from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas families, tribes, dusted out, tracted out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless -- restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do -- to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut -- anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live....

John Steinbeck, [The Grapes of Wrath](#), New York, NY (Viking Critical Library), 1972, p. 317 (originally published in 1939)

He [Woody Guthrie] wrote a song that summer [1938] called "Dust Bowl Refugees," which was a term he hated.... Often, he introduced the song by saying,

"You know, there are different kinds of refugees. There are people who are forced to take refuge under a railroad bridge because they ain't got noplacel else to go, and there are those who take refuge in public office..."

He had learned not to joke about the people who lived under railroad bridges, but he hadn't lost his sense of humor.

Joe Klein, [Woody Guthrie: A Life](#), London, 1981, p. 115

Lyrics as recorded by Woody Guthrie, RCA Studios, Camden, NJ, 26 Apr 1940, released on "[Dust Bowl Ballads](#)," transcribed by Manfred Helfert.
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I'm a dust bowl refugee,
Just a dust bowl refugee,

From that dust bowl to the peach bowl,
Now that peach fuzz is a-killin' me.

'Cross the mountains to the sea,
Come the wife and kids and me.
It's a hot old dusty highway
For a dust bowl refugee.

Hard, it's always 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 south land and the drought land,
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 whirlwinds 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?

