

# The Representation of the American Dream in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and John Ford's Film Adaptation

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti –  
nastavnički smjer i filozofije

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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this paper is to show the similarities and the differences in the portrayal of the American Dream in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and John Ford's film adaptation. The American Dream is the national creed that highlights ideas like freedom, individualism, and equality of opportunity as supreme. James Truslow Adams gives expression to this long-lasting idea that stems from the Puritans and is further influenced by the Founding Fathers, multitudes of entrepreneurs, and momentous events like the Gold Rush. By analysing the two media's depictions of the American Dream it is shown how their dissimilarities result in two contrasting schools of thought. This paper suggests that the reasons for the migrants' predicament can be attributed to the Dream's emphasis on monetary success and private ownership. Furthermore, the family's otherness shows the discrepancy of the Dream's ideals and its harsh reality; their otherness stems from their lowly economic status, and it excludes them from the promises of the Dream. Consequently, a link is established between the two media and the Un-American idea of communism to give the deconstruction of the Dream. Finally, the different outcomes of the novel and the adaptation are highlighted, as their endings provide two distinct solutions to the problems indicated: the author necessitates a spiritual change to bring about an outer change, in contrast to the survival and the importance of moving forward as suggested in the adaptation.

**Keywords:** American Dream, *The Grapes of Wrath*, otherness, deconstruction, John Ford.

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## Introduction

John Steinbeck was an American author, a Nobel laureate, best known today for his novels *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and *East of Eden* (1952). *The Grapes of Wrath*, the crown jewel of his writing career, is a realist novel that revolves around the Joads, a poor family driven from their farm due to the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma, causing them to pursue the American Dream in California. The American Dream is the belief in equal and easily accessible opportunities to all, which promulgates hard work as the key to success. Steinbeck's novel is adapted for film, television, and theatre due to its vast popularity and influence. Arguably, the most popular adaptation of the novel is John Ford's 1940 adaptation, considered by many as one of the best American films of all time. By comparing the novel and the film apropos their depiction of the American Dream, this paper shows how their differences, in the portrayal of the Dream's tropes, create two independent narratives and present two different schools of thought. It will be shown that the aforesaid differences bring about two different resolutions to the issues indicated in the two media; the novel emphasizes an inner change to bring about an outer change, in comparison with the film's emphasis on moving forward despite the obstacles.

In the first chapter, the origins and the particularities of the American Dream are elucidated. The first subchapter titled "The Dream of California," deals with the Dream's particular extension, which is predominant in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The second and the third subchapters deal with the portrayal of the "The Dream of California" in the two media. The final subchapter introduces the last extension of the Dream that will be discussed in this paper, and it is titled "The Dream of Home Ownership in the Novel and the Film." The second chapter has to do with the idea of "otherness" and its effects on the American ideal of unity. The first and the second subchapters analyse the portrayal of otherness in the novel and the film while the third subchapter shows the term's neutralization in the government camp. The third chapter deals with the political implications found in the novel, namely the author's individualist and communist sympathies, and their portrayal in Ford's adaptation. The deconstruction of the American Dream will be given in the second and the third subchapters, through the (un)revolutionary sentiment found in the two media.

## 1. The American Dream

In order to comprehend the portrayal of the American Dream in *The Grapes of Wrath*, it is indispensable to elucidate the origins of the American Dream. According to Jim Cullen, “the term was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* which was written in 1931” (4). In the aforementioned book, Adams concisely defines the term as follows:

The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (404-405)

While it remains unclear whether Adams invented the term or if he took it from someone else, Cullen elaborates its use: “In any event, Adams invoked it over thirty times in *The Epic of America*, and the phrase rapidly entered common parlance as a byword for what he thought his country was all about, not only in the United States but in the rest of the world” (4). Although the term is relatively young, the idea of the American Dream has existed from the very beginning of American history. Some of the tenets of the American Dream, like the urge to succeed, hard work, and the cult of money, can all be traced to the Pilgrims arriving on the American soil in 1620. The Pilgrims, initially named the Separatists as they represented an extremist faction that wanted to break all ties with the Church of England, encountered harsh conditions upon arriving in America, and therefore had to work extremely hard to acclimatize to the newly discovered conditions (Runtić). Cullen accentuates the fear the Puritans felt for their children as the main reason for their emigration from England to America (16). The Puritans feared that their children would get corrupted by staying in England and thus: “From the very beginning a notion that one’s children might have a better life has been a core component of the American Dream” (Cullen 16). The aforesaid notion can be observed in *The Grapes of Wrath*, as the Joads, whose migration is caused by more concrete existential reasons, also want to provide a better future for their children. Ma and Pa Joad want their

offspring to have a fair slice of the pie, that is, to participate in the widely promulgated promises of the American Dream.

Another important cornerstone that helped shape the American Dream is the Declaration of Independence, adopted on 4 July 1776. The appeal of the American Dream, as portrayed in the Declaration of Independence, rests in its sense of collective ownership, that is to say, the possibility that (almost) anyone can get ahead (Cullen 60). The famous words of the Declaration – “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” (US 1776) – are recognized today by many as the foundation of the modern United States. Cullen suggests:

The fact that we have such an explicit basis for our actions – most vividly “the pursuit of happiness,” a phrase that more than any other defines the American Dream, treating happiness as a concrete and realizable object – obscures the degree to which, in the larger scheme of history, our notion of common sense would have been viewed as neither especially common nor sensible, even by earlier Americans like the Puritans. (38)

Thus, while the Puritan notion of happiness is intrinsically linked to the divine, the notion of happiness mentioned in the Declaration of Independence becomes a more secular, concrete object. Gina Vega suggests that the ideas of happiness and success, in the context of the American Dream, are inextricably tangled with the belief that attaining success requires hard work (4). Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American essayist of the nineteenth century, emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and originality in his works. Emerson refines the idea of individuality as he suggests the following: “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles” (*Self-Reliance*). Thus, Emerson emphasizes individual agency and lessens the influence of the external forces. The previously mentioned belief in individual agency is a prerequisite for the migration of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*. They believe that they can redirect the course of their future by moving to the Golden State, which they see as the archetypal example of the American Dream. As Vega further suggests about Americans: “We are a nation of individualists, driven to prove our competencies and talents and to reap the rewards thereof” (4). Therefore, Vega excellently sums up the essence of the American Dream; it is all about self-reliance and hard work, after all, God helps those who help themselves.

Many years passed since the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and therefore the concepts outlined in the Declaration are understood differently today than in 1776. For example, the notion of “liberty” in the Declaration is meant in a narrower sense compared to today, and it has undergone many changes throughout the years. The most flagrant example of the change is the 1857 Supreme Court ruling known as *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, according to which “liberty means: the right of whites to own blacks” (Cullen 57). Many liberties of today were not initially accessible to everyone, as they were the prerogative of predominantly white men and excluded women, people of colour, and other various minorities. However, due to the emergence of many social justice and civil rights movements, the notion of liberty today extends to various groups that had been disenfranchised for a long period. A glance at the history of the United States shows a continual effort to rectify past mistakes and uphold the principles written in the Declaration, thus perpetually expanding the purview of the American Dream. Cullen claims: “If there is one constant in the Declaration of Independence, it lies in the way no version of the status quo is ever completely acceptable” (58). He remarks that the Declaration: “provides us with (often imperceptibly shifting) standards by which we measure success but simultaneously calls attention to the gap between what is and what we believe should be, a gap that defines our national experience”( 58). Such changes in the perception of the fundamental notions of the Declaration help maintain the appeal of the American Dream to multifarious groups of people. Its strength and longevity lie in its promise that everybody is eligible for the American Dream. Cullen suggests: “This allows us to believe we live in a reasonably fair country that bears some relationship to its founding ideals – in this case, that “all men are created equal”, as usefully ambiguous as the phrase is – and gives us the hope that our own dreams are not impossibly out of reach” (108). The Joads are a poor, numerous family that loses everything in the Dust Bowl. However, they do not lose faith in their eligibility for the American Dream, which is the underpinning for their migration to the West Coast. Despite the impoverished conditions they find themselves in, the Joads believe in the American Dream, and thus they leave Oklahoma to achieve its promises. Frederic Carpenter indicates that while in the majority of Steinbeck’s novels the characters remain dreamers, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the characters are integrating the Dream with action by seeking their fortune in California (3). The family sees California as a dreamlike place: “Course it will be all different out there – plenty work, and everything nice and green, and little white houses and oranges growing around” (Steinbeck 114). Such a stance leaves the reader with a lingering question: what makes the Joads see California as the Promised Land?

## 1.1. The California Dream

The dominance of the American culture makes it nearly impossible for the large portions of mankind to remain ignorant of the existence of the two most-populated US cities, and their respective states: Los Angeles, California, and New York City, New York. Cheded argues that while New York City was the landing stage for plenty of immigrants: “... for those seeking to “go West” and find their fortunes, California is the natural, terminal destination in their quest; the furthest spot on the horizon that a dreamer could set their sights for without skidding into the Pacific” (Chedded). While still sparsely populated by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the California Gold Rush in the mid-nineteenth century starts to attract flocks of migrants from all over. Cullen claims the following: “The California gold rush is the purest expression of the Dream of the Coast in American history. The notion that transformative riches were literally at your feet, there for the taking, cast a deep and lasting spell on the American imagination” (170). Consequently, California’s gold rush is responsible for adding another layer to the myth of the American Dream, the possibility of swiftly becoming rich. Besides the gold mining, many new settlers found farming to be increasingly attractive due to their familiarity with it, and soon California becomes the nation’s breadbasket (Cullen 171). Cullen indicates the advent of refrigerated rail cars for shipping fruit over long distances and the creation of the new trademark Sunkist, for individually wrapped oranges, as important milestones for the formation of this particular extension of the American Dream, the California Dream (171). Due to the refrigerated rail cars for shipping fruit, the farmers could export their products throughout the whole of the United States, thus significantly increasing their profit margin. Additionally, thanks to the advertising agency of the California Fruit Growers Exchange: “Millions of Americans became devotees of fruit most had never seen a few years earlier. In a sense, they became even more devoted to the image that Sunkist promoted” (Cullen 171). It becomes clear that the advertising agency used various illustrations to promote a lifestyle rather than just fruit. The advertising agency exploited the human psyche by representing California in a dreamlike, almost promised-land manner. For example, “[c]rates containing the oranges were illustrated with vivid, idyllic lithographs of southern California landscapes” (Cullen 171). Such widely distributed illustrations made the California Dream seem more widespread and tangible than ever. The message that the illustrations consequently conveyed is that the viewer did not need to be in California to partake in the advertised Dream; for one’s participation it was simply sufficient to buy the product. However, the hardships of the Dust Bowl era caused many to

lose their homes and basic income, consequently reducing their prospects for the future and forcing them to pursue the Dream by moving to the Golden State.

## **1.2. California Dreamin' in the Novel**

After the Joads lose almost the entirety of their possessions in Oklahoma, they decide to follow in the footsteps of many others going west, who experience the same plight. In one of the intercalary chapters, Steinbeck vividly portrays the exodus:

And the dispossessed, the migrants, flowed into California, two hundred and fifty thousand, and three hundred thousand. Behind them new tractors were going on the land and the tenants were being forced off. And new waves were on the way, new waves of the dispossessed and the homeless, hardened, intent, and dangerous. (244)

Notwithstanding the improbability that any of the family members visited California before, it is noticeable that almost every one of them has a preconceived conception of what California is like. In a conversation with Tom, Grandpa Joad reveals his preconceived idea of the Golden State: “Jus’ let me get out to California where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There’s a thing I ain’t never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch a grapes off a bush, or whatever, an’ I’m gonna squash ‘em on my face an’ let ‘em run offen my chin” (Steinbeck 87). Thanks to the overtly mythologized image of the Golden State and the widespread idea of success awaiting anyone willing to work hard enough, the grandfather sees California in an Eden-like manner. Many migrants expect California to be a warm, welcoming place for anyone fleeing the unfavourable circumstances of their own homes. In a similar vein, it is worth repeating Pa Joad’s expectation of California: “We had hard times here. Course it’ll be all different out there – plenty work, an’ ever’thing nice an’ green, an’ little white houses an’ oranges growin’ aroun’” (Steinbeck 114). Thus, it can be said that the image of California is inextricably tangled with the various illustrations of fruit produced by the beginning of the twentieth century. Grandpa Joad dreams of indulging in the sundry fruit native to the Golden State, which he sees as readily available at every corner. Pa Joad’s view of California reminds of the Sunkist illustration mentioned above portraying idyllic orange grove landscapes. On the road, the family encounters many others rushing to California in their jalopies, among them Ivy and Sairy Wilson. The Wilsons are also under the spell of various ads and handbills and hence they sincerely hope California to resemble some of its more idyllic illustrations:

Why, I seen han'bills how they need folks to pick fruit, an good wages. Why, jus' think how it's gonna be, under them shady trees a-pickin' fruit an' takin' a bite ever' once in a while. Why, hell, they don't care how much you eat' cause they got so much. An' with them good wages, maybe a fella can get hisself a little pice a land an' work out for extra cash. Why, hell, in a couple years I bet a fella could have a place of his own. (Steinbeck 154)

Ivy Wilson thus mentions another layer of the American Dream which will be elaborated later on, the Dream of Home Ownership. Those traveling carry many hopes and dreams with them, but the bare minimum of what they expect is the possibility to work and to earn decent wages.

On the way to California, the Joads stop in a small camp near the road to spend the night. The Joad men interact with others travelling the same way; except one man who is travelling in the opposite direction. Steinbeck describes the man: "Near the edge of the porch a ragged man stood. His black coat dripped torn steamers. The knees were gone from his dungarees. His face was black with dust, and lined where sweat had washed through" (196). The ragged man speaks condescendingly and laughs at the family's plans to find work with good wages in California: "The ragged man stared while Pa spoke, and then laughed, and his laughter turned to a high whinnying giggle. The circle of faces turned to him. The giggling got out of control and turned into coughing. His eyes were red and watering when he finally controlled the spasms" (Steinbeck 196-197). Simply put, the author describes the man as having a neglected appearance and in poor health, which gives credibility to his story. The account of his utter disappointment with the California Dream represents one of the most poignant parts of the novel.

Somepin it took me a year to find out. Took two kids dead, took my wife dead to show me. But I can't tell you. I should of knew that. Nobody couldn't tell me, neither. I can't tell ya about them little fellas layin' in the tent with their bellies puffed out an' jus' skin on their bones, an' shiverin' an' whinin' like pups, an' me runnin' around tryin' to get work – not for money, not for wages! . . . Jesus Christ, jus' for a cup a flour an' a spoon a lar. An' then the coroner come. 'Them children died a heart failure,' . . . Put it on his paper. Shiverin', they was, an' their bellies stuck out like a pig bladder. (Steinbeck 199)

He tries to inform the campers of the fallacy of the Dream; the fallacy of the promise of equal opportunities and decent wages, but he just manages to enrage and scare the campers.

Ultimately, the man understands the importance of first-hand experience and disappears into the night.

On their journey west, the Joads and the Wilsons stop before crossing the desert and the men decide to go for a swim in the river. According to Ibars, the swim in the river alleviates both physical and spiritual aches of the family, and she argues that the river symbolizes a change of attitude (38). Thus, it is in the river that Tom reflects on the Mohave mountain range and has the premonition: “Never seen such tough mountains. This here’s a murder country. This here’s the bones of a country. Wonder if we’ll ever get in a place where folks can live thout’ fighting hard scrabble and rocks” (Steinbeck 213) that California is not the New Canaan they envision. Additionally, it is also in the river that Noah decides to abandon the family: “Like to jus’ stay here. Like to lay here forever. Never get hungry an’ never get sad. Lay in the water all life long, lazy as a brood sow in the mud” (213). Furthermore, the Joads are joined in the river by a father and a son whom Pa engages in a conversation. Pa asks if they are going west, to which he receives another piece of demoralizing information: “Nope. We come from there. Goin’ back home. We can’t make no livin’ out there” (Steinbeck 213). The Joads listen carefully to the father’s story which almost completely destroys their hopes of the California Dream. The pinnacle of their conversation happens when Tom asks: “S’pose a fella got work an’ saved, couldn’t he get a little lan?” (215) to which the disillusioned man answers: “You ain’t gonna get no steady work. Gonna scrabble for your dinner ever’ day. An’ you gonna do her with peole lookin’ mean at you. Pick cotton, an’ you gonna be sure the scales ain’t honest. Some of ‘em is, an’ some of ‘em ain’t. But you gonna think all the scales is crooked, an’ you don’t know which ones” (Steinbeck 215). Vega suggests that: “Above all, the American Dream is an economic dream“(4) and the man’s story portrays its extension, the California Dream, quite critically as the possibility of a steady job is, almost entirely, out of the question. Furthermore, his story about the scales indicates an idea of a crooked system that does not allow individuals to succeed despite their best efforts, an idea that will be expanded upon afterwards. Like mentioned above, one of the tenets of the Dream is personal agency and the belief that an individual can make a difference, contrary to the man’s belief: “Ain’t nothin’ you can do about her anyways” (Steinbeck 215), thus almost completely dismantling the myth of the Dream. Additionally, it is mentioned above that the California gold rush adds an extension to the American Dream, namely the possibility of becoming rich fast. However, the man’s confession makes it abundantly clear that wealth and luxury are out of reach for the



overwhelming majority of the migrants: “Sure, nice to look at, but you can’t have none of it. They’s a grove of yella oranges – an’ a guy with a gun that got the right to kill you if you touch one” (Steinbeck 215). The Dream seems virtually shattered but, having said that, the importance of first-hand experience is again accentuated; the family needs to experience the fallacy of the myth on their own skin.

As a result, the family continues their journey west through the formidable Mojave Desert, passing through the town of Tehachapi, after which they finally see the green pastures that they hoped to see since the beginning. Al is astonished by the beauty he sees and stops in the middle of the road to marvel at the spectacular view. Steinbeck goes on to inform the reader of what they see: “The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses” (237); “The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, and the morning sun, golden on the valley” (238). Shortly, other members of the family start to leave the car to stand in awe of the view. Pa remarks: “I never knowed they was anything like her” (Steinbeck 238). Steinbeck further illustrates the landscape: “The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges” (238). Furthermore, the landscape assuages their fears for a moment, and it reminds of the Sunkist illustrations mentioned earlier that showcase the splendour of California. Winfield and Ruthie are also mentioned to be struck in awe: “Ruthie and Winfield scrambled down from the car, and then they stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley” (Steinbeck 238). Winfield confirms the fulfilment of his innocent expectation aloud: “There’s fruit” (Steinbeck 238), as it is promised that the fruit is abundant and found everywhere in the state. Ma informs the family that Grandma died, and although the family thins out as they lose another family member, Ma finds a silver lining: “She can get buried in a nice green place, . . . Trees aroun’ an’ a nice place. She got to lay her head down in California” (Steinbeck 239). Thus, it can be observed that even dying in California is superior to dying somewhere else.

The family continues with their journey and arrives at the transient camp known as Hooverville. The image of the camp portrayed in the novel sharply contrasts with the image of white houses in orange groves depicted in the previously mentioned illustrations: “Tom looked about at the grimy tents, the junk equipment, at the old cars, the lumpy mattresses out in the sun, at the blackened cans on fire-blackened holes where the people cooked” (Steinbeck 256). The story of the young man they encounter parallels the stories of other men they meet on the road. He mentions the continuous conflicts with the police to which Tom responds: “We ain’t no bums...We are looking for work. We’ll take any kind a work” (Steinbeck 255).

Tom's response angers the young man: "So you are looking for work. What ya think ever'budy else is lookin' for? Di'monds? What you think I wore my ass down to a nub lookin' for?" (Steinbeck 255). Parini sheds more light on the men's quarrel by suggesting that it is particularly distressing for migrants coming from the Bible Belt to be referred to as "lazy and immoral" (66). The young man goes on to tell them the same story they heard before; the rationale behind the putting of large quantities of handbills is further explained. Thus, the specious appearance of the Dream at first lures and then ensnares the thousands of migrants seeking a better life.

### **1.3. California Dreamin' in the Film**

Films expand the plot of the adapted novel by adding a multitude of visual and stylistic choices that depict the plot in a manner unavailable to the literary text. Thus, while the novel elaborates on the image of California and the sentiment it evokes in the Joads, Ford's adaptation shows the viewer its mountains, groves, and illustrates the frame of mind of its characters. The first explicit mention of California in the film happens while the family is eating as uncle John reads the handbill promising a good life in California: "Good wages. Tents and houses furnished free. Store on camp ground" (23:19). The shot of the handbill is immediately followed by the medium shot of Grampa and Granma placed next to each other, rejoicing at the content of the handbill. Grampa pauses eating for a moment and says: "Wait till I get to California. I am gonna reach up and pick me an orange whenever I want it. Or some grapes. Now there's something I ain't never had enough of" (00:23:28 – 00:23:38). It can be observed that Grampa's words are almost verbatim transposed into the film, which will occur in many other scenes as well. Shortly after the grandfather's speech, Ma Joad sees Tom arriving and rushes towards him. Tom asks Ma if it is true that they are moving to California, to which Ma responds: "Oh, we've gotta go, Tommy, but it's gonna be all right. I seen the handbills about how much work there is, and high wages too" (00:25:12 – 00:25:19). Ma thus also gives her opinion of their upcoming relocation, which is overwhelmingly optimistic and positive. After the family climbs aboard their jalopy, they invite the former preacher Casy to join their undertaking, to which Casy responds: "I would like to. There is something going on there in the West and I would like to try and learn what it is" (00:35:30 – 00:35:38). The director uses a close-up shot to show the former preacher's wrinkly and worried face that gives the impression that something, possibly sinister, might happen on their journey. Soon follows a medium-shot of Ma, Granma, and Al sitting in the front seat of the car depicting both Granma and Al exuberantly smiling as they commence their trip.

Soon follows a montage with an ample amount of superimpositions, which Ford uses to convey their journey on screen; he successively supplants the image of their travelling jalopy with the images of fields and the highway signs of the places they pass through. Multitudes of other jalopies are noticeable in the superimposed shots, and according to George Bluestone, the Joads make the same journey as thousands of others leaving for California's greener pastures (163). This segment of the cross-country sequence also includes non-diegetic music that corresponds well with the mood of the whole family; the music indicates an adventurous state of mind, as mentioned above. Bluestone suggests: "These devices have the effect of generalizing the conflicts of the Joads, of making them representative of typical problems in a much wider social context" (163). Thus, their journey represents the journey of many others in their jalopies, and the family's high hopes and dreams indicate those of the majority of migrants travelling to California.

The family stops to spend the night in a camp next to the road and while talking with other campers, they encounter a disillusioned man going in the opposite direction. The Joads, yet again, express their intention to find some honest work and a nice place close to the river to grow various fruit and vegetables. The camera interchangeably shifts between medium shots and close-ups; after Pa Joad finishes explaining their intention, the director uses a close-up of the man's face to show the viewer a more detailed perspective of his facial expression. The man laughs raucously after listening to their hopes and dreams, leaving the family members perplexed. Vivian C. Sobchack, an American cinema critic, notes the influence of the German expressionist movement in the film: "Either through the actual proximity of close-ups or the masking effect of darkness in the medium shots, the abundance of expressionistic cinematography [...] emphasizes the pale faces and glistening eyes of the characters" (15). Ford's adaptation is full of low-key lighting that gives the film a somewhat sinister impression. Consequently, while the aforesaid man laughs raucously, the low-key lighting creates images of shadow and light on the man's face. Such usage of high contrast indicates an ominous atmosphere and foreshadows a misfortunate future for the Joads. Furthermore, the man explains his raucous laugh to those gathered: "I've just been out there. I've been and seen it. I am going back and starve because I'd starve all over at once" (00:43:34 – 00:43:42). Pa tries to persuade the man that there is indeed an abundance of work waiting for them in California by showing him the handbill. Nunnally Johnson, the film's screenwriter, uses a copious amount of the dialogues from the original text making only slight

changes, thus the man's poignant story differs only slightly from the novel. The man forewarns the gathered men:

I tried to tell you folks what took me a year to find out. Took me two kids dead. Took my wife dead to show me. But nobody could tell me neither. I can't tell you about them little fellas laying in the tent with their bellies swelled out and just skin over their bones. Shivering and whining like pups. And me running around looking for work. Not for money, not for wages. Just for a cup of flour and a spoon of lard. Then the coroner come. 'Them children died of a heart failure', he said. He put it down in his paper. (00:44:52 – 00:45:28)

In other words, Ford shows the viewer that the man is not trying to play a trick on his fellow campers, he tries to help them. He uses many close-ups of the man's face to indicate his emotions and emphasize his suffering. The close-ups also show the man's clothes that, besides a couple of torn seams, do not look that different from the other men's clothes, an interesting detail, as the man is described as ragged and dirty in the novel. Although his facial expressions show that he indeed suffered a great deal in California, his physical appearance does not give a strong impression of a gaunt, starving person. Such softening of the man's appearance complements the neutralization of the "political radicalism" in the film, which will be mentioned in more detail later on (Tibbetts and Welsh 163). In addition to the close-up, the director uses selective focus, thus further isolating the man and blurring the background to accentuate his misery. The scene finishes with a long shot of Tom, Pa, and Casy standing on the house veranda contemplating the man's story. Pa wonders if the man is telling the truth to which Casy replies: "He's telling the truth. Truth for him. He wasn't making it up" (00:46:05 – 00:46:11). The family nonetheless goes to California, leaving open the possibility that the truth could be different for them. The director uses the editing technique of dissolves, thus briefly superimposing various images that help create the feeling of time passing and the Joads advancing towards the Golden State.

The first image of California that the family sees is of the inaccessible and unwelcoming Mohave Mountains, further deepening their doubts. The director frames bewildered Connie, Rose of Sharon, John, and Pa in a medium shot looking at the mountain range and then at each other. Pa remarks: "Well there she [California] is, folks. The land of milk and honey" (00:52:56 – 00:52:59). Contrary to his intention of appeasing the family's misgivings, Pa's words create an atmosphere of bemusement as the first sight of California

looks more like a new hindrance for the family than a land of milk and honey. In a similar manner, the mountains do not dishearten Pa in the novel either: “Wait till we get to California. You’ll see nice country then” (Steinbeck 213) to which Tom remarks that they are already in California. Connie is disconcerted by this image and shares his uneasiness with his wife. Rose of Sharon tries to stay optimistic by believing in the prosperity of California and attempts to comfort him: “Well Connie, maybe it’s nice on the other side. Them picture postcards, they was real pretty” (00:53:10 – 00:53:15). Another superimposition follows as the family goes through the Mojave Desert; the image of Pa, Al, and Tom sitting in the front seat is superimposed to the image of the desert. This montage sequence shows the viewer their worried faces in the jalopy’s front window as they enter the Golden State. The superimposition, in combination with low-key lighting, creates a sinister atmosphere as the three men resemble spectral figures.

After the family passes through the desert, they finally get to see the beautiful green pasture of California, which uplifts their spirit and alleviates their fears. Pa exclaims: “There she is. There she is. I never knowed there was anything like her” (01:00:55 – 01:01:00). While the family marvels at the beauties of California, Ma informs Tom of Granma’s death. The report of Grandma’s death is slightly different in the film and the novel. In the film Ma only informs Tom of her death. However, in the novel, Ma first delays reporting about Granma’s death and then informs the whole family. Steinbeck also indicates the bewilderment and admiration after Ma’s confession: “The family looked at Ma with a little terror at her strength” (Steinbeck 239). Similarly to the novel, Ma finds solace in the fact that Grandma will be buried in a beautiful land: “She’ll get buried where it is nice and green and trees and flowers all around and she got to lay her head in California after all” (01:02:20 – 01:02:32). Their excitement is soon extinguished as they head to the nearest gas station where they encounter a police officer. The officer informs them that there is currently no work in the area. It can be noticed throughout the film that Ford erases many indictments of the injustices perpetrated by the police, found in the novel (Bluestone 160). Although the police officer they encounter at the gas station faces them with the harsh reality, he is quite civil and helpful; they can relate to him, as he tells them that he also came from Oklahoma two years ago. Thus, the police officer briefly takes the edge off his uniformed presence and brings a little hope to the family; perhaps they could also have steady jobs and a decent life in two years. Their short-lived friendly exchange is replaced by a warning to leave town: “If I catch you in town after dark, I got to lock you up” (01:03:42 – 01:03:44).

Their fear of encountering adverse conditions in California acquires corporeality when they reach the transient camp on the outskirts of the city. The film rendition of their arrival to Hooverville resembles a documentary depicting the actual conditions found in such camps in the thirties. Gossage claims the following: “By mixing expressionist narrative techniques with documentary cues and content, Ford keeps fiction and reality in constructive connection” (80). The director opts for a tracking shot and a subjective point-of-view to portray what the family sees upon arrival; the camera is moving as if it is one of the family members looking out from the car. In the following medium shot Tom, Rose of Sharon, and Ma sit in the front seats of the car while their disappointed faces can be observed. Tom breaks the silence: “Sure don’t look none too prosperous” (01:51:31). Thus, the family experiences a harsh reality check; there are no jobs, orange groves, nor white houses in places meant for migrants. Not only do they not encounter anything promised by the illustrations and the handbills, but they are also awaited by many hungry children in the camp that corroborate the misgiving that California is no promised land. Shortly after their arrival to the camp, Rose of Sharon’s husband Connie abandons the family. Ma notifies Tom that Connie left: “He lit out this evening. Said he did not know it was going to be like this” (01:14:26 – 01:14:30). Bluestone suggests the following: “When the Joads get to California, they will, of course, find that the grapes which Grampa dreamed of are inaccessible, that the grapes of promise inevitably turn to the grapes of wrath” (155), a process which rapidly accelerates in Hooverville in both media.

#### **1.4. The American Dream of Home Ownership in the Novel and the Film**

Throughout both the novel and its cinematic adaptation, another important layer of the American Dream can be discerned: the Dream of Home Ownership. No extension of the Dream appeals more to the masses than the “American Dream of owning a home” (Cullen 136). The Dream of Home Ownership is seen as the pinnacle of the American Dream, and Cullen argues that: “Wherever they happened to live, Americans seemed united by an exceptional penchant for home ownership” (148). The development of this particular extension can be traced through centuries since the founding of the United States. Today, the end product of this development can be seen in a variety of films which depict suburbs, whose residents live in giant houses, with an almost infinite amount of rooms. Cullen traces the roots of this ideal of home ownership to the Founding Fathers of the United States, most notably Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton:

From the Jeffersonian strain in American history, it drew on widely shared assumptions about the beneficent influence of nature, small communities, and home ownership. At the same time, the suburb reflected Hamiltonian realities about the centrality of cities as the source of Americans' livelihoods, and of commerce, not self-sufficient farming, as the true engine of national development. (144)

Jefferson's influence on the development of the "Dream of Home Ownership" can be seen in his work *Notes on the State of Virginia*:

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who, not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. (*Notes on the State of Virginia*)

Jefferson idealizes those working on land, and he gives spiritual connotations to their work; he emphasizes the value of independence, as it does not cause vice. Krall mentions: "Historians generally agree that his passage offers a vision of a nation of independent farmers who would prove the bedrock on which to build our republic" (Krall 131). Furthermore, Krall emphasizes Jefferson's role in shaping the Dream of Home Ownership: "More specifically, Jefferson helped to put in place the legal basis of land ownership and establish a systematic method of surveying land to augment it" (133).

Jefferson's idea can also be observed in many instances of Steinbeck's novel. As mentioned before, the Joads encounter Ivy and Sairy Wilson on their journey west and Ivy's image of California highlights this ideal: "An' with them good wages, maybe a fella can get hisself a little piece of land an' work out for extra cash. Why, heel, in a couple years I bet a fella could have a place of his own" (Steinbeck 153-154). Thus, Ivy Wilson sees having a house as the terminal goal of their pursuit for happiness, which he hopes to obtain in a couple of years if they get good jobs with high wages. Another occurrence in which Jefferson's idea can be noticed is in Pa's conversation with other men in one of the camps: "We'll get out west

and we'll get work and we'll get a piece a growing land with water" (Steinbeck 196). He sees salvation in animal husbandry and land management, consequently envisioning their promised land as fertile and close to water. The characters' Dream of Home Ownership is also strongly influenced by the various illustrations depicting the sublimity of California, its orange groves, and white houses: "Ma got her heart set on a white house" (Steinbeck 213). The Dream of Home Ownership represents a great deal more than simply owning a beautiful house; it indicates the safety and stability for both the family and the community. Ma continually mentions the importance of having a house as means for protecting the family: "...we got to have a house in the winter. I tell you we got to. Ruthie's awright, but Winfiel' ain't so strong. We got to have a house when the rains come. I heard it just' rains cats aroun' here" (Steinbeck 379). The house can protect the family from both the actual rain and the metaphorical rains of the hostility and unpleasant encounters they continually experience on the road. Having their own land is further emphasized by Ma as she reminisces life before the Dust Bowl: "They was the time when we was on the lan'. They was a boundary to us then. Ol' folks died off, an' little fellas come, an' we was always one thing—we was the fambly—kinda whole and clear. An' now we ain't clear no more" (Steinbeck 411). Ma also says: "Jus' so's it's got a roof an' a floor. Jus' to keep the little fellas off'n the ground" (Steinbeck 379). She wants to have a settled home for the whole family but she calls attention to the youngest children fearing that they will be like wild animals without one. In a similar vein to Ivy Wilson, Ma hopes that finding work will enable the family to get the house: "F we pick plenty peaches we might get a house, pay rent even, for a couple months. We got to have a house" (Steinbeck 383). When the Joads find a job picking peaches, the youngest children are also required to do some work. Ma encourages them by saying: "Be good for you. An' you're helpin' us. If we all work, purty soon we'll live in a nice house. We all go to help" (Steinbeck 390).

Similarly to the novel, in the film Tom also has a conversation with Ma before he leaves the family. He reaffirms Ma's wish to have a nice house in which the family can settle: "I'd like to see your face when you and Pa get settled in some nice place. I'd sure like to see you then" (01:59:27 – 01:59:34). The director uses selective focus and a medium shot of Ma and Tom sitting next to each other to portray their closeness. Ma's facial expressions are seen as she imagines herself and her family living in a nice place where the family can settle. Besides the aforesaid scene, Ford's adaptation does not bring much material with regards to the Dream of Home Ownership and when it does, the dialogues, which are almost identical to the ones in the novel, are not presented through particularly noteworthy visual elements.



Additionally, many scenes from the novel in which there is an explicit mention of the characters' desire to own a home are omitted from the adaptation.

In later years, the idea of homeownership is further used for political purposes. John Archer argues the following: "The American dream is, and always has been, critically allied with American politics" (8). He further suggests:

This condition was never more apparent than in October 1956, at the height of the Cold War, on the eve of the crisis of the Hungarian Revolution, when House Beautiful issued a 'Report to the World on How Americans Live', pretentiously prepared to be 'distributed, sizable quantities, to all other countries of the world.' Several articles in this volume tellingly focused on the private house, with titles such as "Everybody Can Own a House" and "The People's Capitalism" — both clear rejoinders to Soviet socialist practices. (Archer 8)

Archer indicates the weaponization of the Dream that comes with the Cold War period and he suggests that the idea of homeownership plays a pivotal role in appealing to the masses. The strong influence of the idea of home ownership can be clearly seen in Steinbeck's novel, as it leaves its characters completely under its spell. Although the Dream is exposed as misleading in many instances for the characters, in both the novel and in the film, they nonetheless continue pursuing it. Archer further suggests the following: "Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, when adverse economic or social conditions tested the promise the dream, the myth remained resilient, rebutting or even refuting the challenges confronting it" (6). The Joads are thus archetypal casualties of the Dream taking it as gospel; they continually try to rectify its promises after discovering its defects. By the same token, Cullen points out another compelling example which depicts the strength of the Dream:

When Soviet authorities tried to discredit American capitalism by showing the 1940 film *The Grapes of Wrath* – a movie whose emotional power derives from a story line about the homelessness of displaced tenant farmers – it was yanked out of theatres after six weeks when it became clear that viewers were more impressed by the fact that the impoverished Joad family nevertheless owned a family car. Literally and figuratively, the automobile embodied personal mobility, and as such was the perfect complement for the anchorage provided by a privately owned homestead. (150)

Although the Soviets tried to use Ford's adaptation to show the bankruptcy of capitalism, the film leaves its viewers with a glimmer of hope, coveting to participate in the American Dream. The decision of the Soviets to remove *The Grapes of Wrath* from the theatres indeed speaks volumes on the strength of the American Dream and consequently its extension: The Dream of Home Ownership.

## 2. Otherness and the American Dream

Since the beginning of American history, there is an emphasis on the idea of unity, which can be corroborated by one of the mottos of the United States: *E Pluribus Unum*, meaning “From Many, One.” The motto references the unity of the initial thirteen colonies that came to form the United States, but it can be argued that its meaning also extends to the unity of all of its citizens. Several other mottos indicate the significance that is given to the idea of unity, most notably, Vermont’s “Freedom and Unity”, Kentucky’s “United We Stand, Divided We Fall”, and additionally Mississippi’s “Let the Welfare of the People Be the Supreme Rule”, which highlights the care for every individual’s well-being as the premier value. The idea’s encapsulation in a variety of the country’s mottos, first and foremost, shows the central role of its ideal for the American Society.

Notwithstanding the importance of unity, Patrick Primeaux, blames the American Dream for the “myopic self-absorption so powerful that it would deter us from the consideration of others” (qtd. in Vega 3). Thus, the American Dream’s individualist character frequently diminishes the importance of *unity* and the care for the well-being of others. Many authors of the twentieth century explore the trope of “unity” to show its inconsistencies. Similarly, Steinbeck’s exploration in the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* shows the hypocrisy of the American society in this respect, as experienced by the Joads. Their journey to California depicts the deprecated reality of “unity” through a plethora of hardships they experience. Furthermore, it regularly seems that the Joads are forsaken by the world at large just like the other migrants, who undertake the same perilous journey. The Joads, akin to many of the migrants heading the same way, are seen as “the others” by California’s residents, landowners, and law enforcement officers. By the same token, their human traits are questioned, and they are frequently reduced to subhuman levels. The feature of otherness is accordingly defined by Staszak: “Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in group (‘Us’, the Self) constructs one or many dominated out groups (‘Them’, Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (43). The Joads are signalled out as different from the in-group because they are not from California, that is to say, their home state is Oklahoma, and most importantly, their poor economic status. Their stigmatization shows the distortion of *unity* as one of the ailments of the American Dream. The family’s otherness thus results in their ineligibility to participate in the American Dream.

## 2.1. Otherness in the Novel

The Joads embark on a journey to California to seek their fortune, oblivious of the state's detestable treatment of migrants. While they take respite from their arduous journey next to the river, the father and the son they encounter mention the behaviour they witness in the Golden State: "Won't have a bunch a fellas that hates us to starve with" (213-214). Thus, the two heading in the opposite direction are utterly disillusioned with the California Dream. Furthermore, the father introduces the term "Okie": "You gonna see in people's face how they hate you. An' I'll tell you somepin. They hate you because they are scairt. They know a hungry fella gonna get food even if he got to take it. They know that fallow lan's a sin an' somebody' gonna take it. What the hell! You never been called 'Okie' yet" (Steinbeck 214). Their otherness is best depicted with the aforesaid pejorative term which will be mentioned many more times in the course of the novel. He further expounds on its meaning: "Well, Okie used to mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you are scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it. But I can't tell you nothing" (Steinbeck 215). The term can be observed shortly after its first introduction as it is used by a sort of law enforcement officer, who warns Ma that the family cannot stay at their current location. He indicates that he will arrest them if he finds them there the following day. Ma is outraged by the officer's hostile behaviour, and she remarks that such conduct could never be acceptable in her home state. The feeling of the family's displacement and alienation in the Golden State is evident in the officer's reply: "Well, you ain't in your country now. You're in California, an' we don't want you goddamn Okies settlin' down" (Steinbeck 223).

Before the family crosses the desert, they stop at a service station to fill the gas tank and do the final car check-ups before setting about the desert. One of the service station employees is perplexed by the family's nerve to cross the desert in such a run-down vehicle. Moreover, he shows a lack of empathy and understanding for the migrants as he does not understand that: "It don't take no nerve to do somepin when there ain't nothin' else you can do" (Steinbeck 231). The employee returns inside the station and comments on the family's decision with the helper. The subhuman overtones can be observed in his comment: "Well, you and me got sense. Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas" (Steinbeck 231). Therefore, he confirms that his lack of sympathy for the family's plight stems from his preconceived view that is not based on any factual evidence. Comparing the Joads with gorillas makes it

abundantly clear that he sees them as barely human. However, it also becomes apparent that the root of man's prejudice can be found in fear; it seems that he is justifying the reasons for their misfortune as much to his helper as to himself. He observes: "They're so goddamn dumb they don't know it's dangerous. And, Christ Almighty, they don't know any better than what they got. Why worry?" (Steinbeck 231). While he contends that the reason for their predicament can be attributed to their inherent biological difference, he also appeases their fear that such a predicament might ever happen to them. Thus, more light can be shed on their view of the family with Staszek's claim:

The creation of otherness (also called othering) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us. The out group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in group and its lack of identity. This lack is based upon stereotypes that are largely stigmatizing and obviously simplistic. (43)

The service-station boy indeed evokes the sentiment of "us" and "them" as he concludes: "That's 'cause you know better. They don't know any better" (Steinbeck 231).

Although the "Okies" otherness is rooted in both their displacement from Oklahoma and their poor economic status, the author indicates the importance of the latter several times in the novel. Thus, the Californians' distinction in respect to their material conditions is accentuated in the following intercalary chapters: "And the hunger was gone from them, the feral hunger, the gnawing, tearing hunger for land, for water and earth and the good sky over it, for the green thrusting grass, for the swelling roots" (Steinbeck 242). Their understanding of the migrants' plight is almost non-existent as they do not relate to their problems. The previously mentioned fear of the "Okies" is also found in the intercalary chapter, as the author elucidates the hatred the migrants encounter: "They were hungry, and they were fierce. And they had hoped to find a home, and they found only hatred. Okies – the owners hated them because the owners knew they were soft and the Okies strong, that they were fed and the Okies hungry (Steinbeck 244). Thus, the landowners, but also other large amounts of the population, are scared of the migrants because they know that a man with a hungry stomach, and especially with hungry children, is willing to go above and beyond to feed them, even if he has to resort to violence and theft: "We got to keep these here people down or they'll take the country. They'll take the country" (Steinbeck 247). The aforesaid intercalary chapter continually reiterates the trope of "us" versus "them" and thus intensifies the difference

between the migrants and the Californians: “Sure they talk the same language, but they ain’t the same. Look how they live. Think any of us folks would live like that? Hell no!” (Steinbeck 247). Steinbeck consequently shows the discrepancy between the promise of “One Nation under God” and the harsh reality of the migrants’ isolation. It is further mentioned that the Californians, the dominant in-group, bond over their loathing of the migrants: “And the hostility changed them, welded them, untied them – hostility that made the little towns group and arm as though to repel an invader, squads with pick handles, clerks and storekeepers with shotguns, guarding the world against their own people” (Steinbeck 295). Additionally, to justify their resistance towards the migrant influx, Californians are depicted thinking in the extremes; the migrants are seen as utterly abominable by many, and thus their actions of intolerance are perfectly justifiable: “And the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad, as a man must do before he fights” (Steinbeck 295). The Californians’ prejudice, towards the migrants, results in referring to them with a variety of offensive terms: “They said, these goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They’re degenerate, sexual maniacs. These goddamn Okies are thieves. They’ll steal anything. They’ve got no sense of property rights” (Steinbeck 296), and thus the fear of the migrants manifests itself as the fear of losing their private property. The previously mentioned fear of losing one’s private property seems omnipresent in the novel and will be discussed at length in one of the forthcoming chapters.

## **2.2. Otherness in the Film**

It is mentioned before that a variety of novelties can be made in the process of transposing the literary medium into the medium of film; one such innovation is the use of darkness, a feature unavailable to the literary text. The employment of darkness in the film portrays the Joads as the dwellers of the night; they are excluded from the established order of society which brings their otherness into being. Their exclusion from the established order of society also denies them access to the participation in the American Dream. It can be observed that the majority of the noteworthy scenes happen at night which accentuates the importance of such scenes (Sobchack 14). An example can be found in the scene which portrays Grampa’s death; he is buried into the anonymity of the night, which does not seem like the most customary time to perform funerals. However, the family leaves a note explaining the circumstances of Grampa’s death in case someone comes across his corpse. The scene is depicted with the use of low-key lighting, which leaves the viewer with a

somewhat phantasmal impression. Tom further remarks: “Looks like a lot of times the government’s got more interest in a dead man than a live one” (00:39:16 – 00:39:20), which contrasts the country’s mottos praising unity and well-being as supreme. Soon follows the campground sequence, and Connie sings “I Ain’t A-Gonna Be A-Treated This A-way”, while the family and other characters patiently listen. Warren French indicates: “The song . . . is quite appropriate for the situation and would be a good theme song for Steinbeck’s novel” (44). Indeed, the song seems to anticipate the migrants’ future mistreatment and it foreshadows the bad news that follow. After the family leaves the campground, they stop at a service station. Their poor clothing and the jalopy, akin to that of many others going in the same direction, reveal their otherness and thus they have to defend themselves to the contemptuous employee: “Well ask right. You ain’t talking to bums” (00:47:31 – 00:47:33). In a similar vein to the novel the family stops at another service station before crossing the Mojave Desert. There, the service-station boy is seen communicating to the Joad men in a condescending manner. He patronizingly remarks that they have nerve to cross the desert in such a jalopy, and that he has been across: “But never in no wreck like that” (00:55:13 – 00:55:16) He laughs contemptuously and puts his leg on their car. Although Tom briefly mentions their reasoning: “Don’t take no nerve to do something, ain’t nothing else you can do” (00:55:23 – 00:55:26). The closing shot, at the service station, depicts a conversation between two service-station boys, which is framed in a middle shot. They are seen staring at the family’s departing jalopy and gesticulating signs of disapproval, thus emphasizing their lack of understanding of the migrants’ journey. Their conversation is similar to the one in the novel: “You and me got sense. Them Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain’t human. No human being would live the way they do. A human being couldn’t stand to be so miserable” (00:56:32 – 00:56:43). In a similar vein to the novel, the service-station men’s rationalization of the family’s misfortune can be attributed to their fear of ending up like the migrants. Thus, they even deny that such misfortunate people can belong to the same race as them, concluding that their predicament is the result of their otherness, in other words their inherently flawed nature.

As previously mentioned in the paper, the family encounters a somewhat friendly police officer upon crossing the desert. However, after their brief amiable chat, the policeman warns them that they cannot stay in town for long, and he further remarks that he will have to put them in jail if they do. Thus, he portends the lousy treatment that the Joads will experience from both the law enforcement officers and the farms’ security guards; they will inevitably be

discriminated against because of their otherness. Before the family's arrival to the Keene Ranch, they are intercepted on the road by a gang of locals whose unifying hate for the 'Okies' seems to compound them into an unidentifiable force working as one, thus none of their faces are visible in their conversation with Tom. The mob's use of the flashlight, directed at Tom, Ma, and Rose of Sharon, further reinforces their otherness as they are portrayed as criminals; they are guilty for their unprivileged circumstances: "What's more, we don't want no more Okies in this town" (01:17:20 – 01:17:23).

Shortly follows the Keene Ranch sequence and the family joins other run-down cars entering the premises of the ranch. They pass by many disconcerted people, and one of the gathered men jumps in front of the car, screaming: "What are you gonna do, scab?" (01:20:38). The Cambridge Dictionary defines the words scab as: "someone who takes the place of a worker who is striking (= joining in an organized refusal to work)" intimating the film's communist connotations, which will be elaborated further when discussing the political implications of the novel and its adaptation. The family's entrance to the Keene Ranch is another instance of the documentary style, and further use of the subjective point-of-view shot can be observed. Additionally, the shots of children standing helplessly in front of the fence intensifies the feeling that one is watching a documentary as the children are framed in a medium shot (01:21:10), and successively follows a medium close-up which zooms the two children's hapless faces (01:21:14). All the employees at the farm are portrayed as unfriendly, and their abysmal treatment of the migrants is best observed when they distribute the buckets for collecting peaches. The two men distributing the buckets simply throw them on the floor, in front of the family, as if throwing them in front of animals, before they indifferently move on. Next follows: "a sorry-looking procession of emaciated people moving towards the groves as if to a concentration camp" (French 50), and the Joads join this sea of other people who share their fate (01:24:17 – 01:24:44). Warren French further remarks: "their cumulative impact is to reinforce the idea that the California owners and their agents regard the migrants as less than human" (50). The family gathers for dinner following their day at work, and Tom shortly leaves the family to find out what is happening outside the gates of the ranch. He is stopped by the security guard who threateningly aims his flashlight at Tom's face as he warns him to go back: "Do you wanna walk back? Or shall I whistle up some help, and have you taken back?" (01:26:16 – 01:26:20). The scene is similar to the scene where the family's jalopy is intercepted by the angry mob and the flashlight points an accusatory light towards the migrants. Subsequent to their departure from the Keene Ranch, the family arrives at the



Wheat Patch Camp, which diminishes their otherness, and the family members are treated like humans again. The Wheat Patch Camp represents a realistic solution to the ailments of the migrants, and its inclusion of the migrants contrasts their exclusion from the Dream's promise.

### **2.3. Weedpatch Camp in the Novel and the Film**

The government camp sequence in both media emphasizes the importance of *unity*; it portrays a community that functions significantly better when its members organize and help each other. The family leaves the unpleasant conditions of the Keene Ranch, where they face oppression, violence, and low wages, and heads to the government camp. Parini gives the historical context of the government camps: "The only relief for migrants came in the form of government camps, which were the brainchild of Paul S. Taylor, who worked for the California Department of Rural Rehabilitation. Beginning in 1935, these "sanitary camps," as they were called, spread slowly along the Central Valley" (66). The Joads are immediately struck when they find out that the camp has: "Toilets and showers and wash tubs" (Steinbeck 299). More good news follow, as they are informed that there are not any cops in the camp; instead the camp elects its cops from the people staying in the camp. Tom finds out that staying at the camp site costs a dollar a week, but that does not stop the torrent of good news; he is also informed that completing various chores in the camp suffices as a payment. The camp has five central committees, one for each sanitary unit, and its role is to make the laws for the camp's residents. The existence of central committees is a clear reference to communism; central committees are the ruling bodies of a country, and in the same manner the central committees in the novel are the ruling body of the camp. The camp also hosts dances that provide entertainment and respite from hardships for its residents. The government camp chapters are thus an intermission from the continual tribulations that the migrants face throughout the entirety of the novel. Railton remarks: "In the camp happiness is pursued by owning things jointly, sharing responsibilities, making decisions, by democratically elected committees. The camp's weekly square dances provide the book's most attractive image of a communal society: The music belongs to no one individual; the dancers obey the calls in unison and joy" (125). Parini further asserts: "The federally funded camps were meant as examples or blueprints that could be emulated by the owners of large farms, who were encouraged to set up similar facilities on their own land" (67) but it can be concluded from Tom's question that not many farms agree to follow suit: "Why ain't they more places like this?" (Steinbeck 301). On their way to California, the Joads hear many

warnings about California's harsh reality and the limitations of the Dream but the camp provides the family with a glimmer of hope. Tom's first morning in the camp indicates a change from the grasping mindset of the landowners previously observed in the novel. He is awoken by the sounds of cooking, and as he approaches the girl he smells: "frying bacon and baking bread" (Steinbeck 303), indicating a sharp contrast with the food that is eaten in Hooverville: "it was fried dough jus' like ever'body else" (Steinbeck 265). Furthermore, the two men for whom the girl cooks invite Tom to join them for breakfast: "Well, set down with us, then. We got plenty – thank God!" (Steinbeck 304) therefore not showing any signs of reluctance to share what they earned. The men's appearance indicates that they are better off than any of the migrants encountered on the road: "They were dressed in new blue dungarees and in dungaree coats, stiff with filler, the brass buttons shining" (Steinbeck 303) that is again in sharp contrast to the disillusioned men they encounter in the camp near the road: "The knees were gone from his dungarees" (Steinbeck 196). Furthermore, the men tell Tom: "We had twelve days work" (Steinbeck 304), thus indicating that the food and the clothes they buy is a result of their work. That surely presents another optimistic piece of news as it is the only instance in the novel in which the migrants even have a surplus to buy clothes. After they finish their breakfast the men head to work, but they generously invite Tom to join them as they might get him a job. They introduce themselves as Timothy and Wilkie Wallace, a father and son. The duo foreshadows the shortness of the migrants' respite in the government camp: "Yeah, but it ain't gonna las' long. Workin' for a nice fella. Got a little place. Works 'longside of us. But, hell – it ain't gonna las' no time" (Steinbeck 307). Thus, another dissimilarity can be observed from the rest of the novel as the owner of the land where the Wallaces are hired works with them; offering another communist connotation. While the landowners in the rest of the novel are described as almost demonic, their landowner is described: "Nice frien'ly fella to work for" (Steinbeck 307). Railton suggests: "The novel presents life in the camp as a Utopian but practicable antithesis to the selfishness that rules on both the Joad farm and the Hooper Ranch" (125). The novel indicates that the humane treatment of the migrants in the camp is disconcerting to the landowners: "Those folks in the camp are getting used to being treated like humans. When they go to the squatters' camps they'll be hard to handle" (Steinbeck 310). Thus, they try to incite riots inside the camps premises to get the legitimacy to enter the camp, disperse the migrants, and ultimately close the camp. A well-organized plan of action follows, as the committee is notified in advance of the Farmers' Association ploy. Their organized measures seem like a clear intimation of

communist sentiment and a tribute to the togetherness of the people. The camp is mentioned to give a ray of hope to Ma:

“Them a-working and a little money coming in?” Her eyes wandered into space. “Them a-workin and us working here and all them nice people. First thing we get a little ahead and I would get me a little stove – nice one. They don’t cost much. And then we would get a tent, big enough, and maybe second-hand springs for the beds.” (Steinbeck 334)

She strives to fight against pessimism and to reaffirm her hope that the family can succeed if the men find jobs. However, the family soon faces hindrances in the camp as they are unable to find steady work and thus to feed the family. They leave the camp, and indications that a change is coming are intensifying: “They’s a change comin. I don’t know what. Maybe we won’t live to see her. But she’s a-comin” (Steinbeck 360). Casy also hears about the splendour of the government camps, and he enquires about it upon encountering Tom at the Hooper Ranch. Casy sees the camp in the almost promised-land manner, in which the Joads see California: “Casy’s eyes shone with excitement” (Steinbeck 401) Furthermore, he comments on the fact that the camp has no cops: “I tol’ you. Cops cause more trouble than they stop” (Steinbeck 401), adding to the novel’s critique of the system and law enforcement.

There are discernible alterations to the Wheedpatch Camp sequence in the film; first of all, the name of the camp changes to Wheat Patch Camp. The name of the camp is first visible in a zoom shot, which moves closer to the sign, and the image dissolves into an image of the family’s jalopy arriving to the camp. The sign also contains the “Department of Agriculture” indicating that the camp is run by the federal government instead of the state government. In the novel, the family arrives at the government camp after leaving Hooverville and before going to the Hooper Ranch, as opposed to the film in which the government camp is the penultimate sequence of the film. The aforesaid change in the narrative’s chronology is perhaps the biggest change between the two media, and it leaves the viewer with a more hopeful outlook on the family’s future. Bluestone suggests another discernible feature of the film: “Beginning with the desolate scene of the dust storm, the weather in the film improves steadily with the fortunes of the Joads, until at the end the jalopy leaves the Government Camp in sunlight and exuberant triumph” (166). The Joads are welcomed by the camp’s caretaker whose neat attire points towards the much better conditions in the camp. The camera goes into a medium shot to portray the caretaker’s polite mannerisms towards the family; he is

helpful, and he treats them with the utmost kindness. The shot shows him shaking Ma's hand and addressing her as "Ma'am", which indicates his politeness and respect. A variety of medium close-ups follow to emphasize the acting, that is, to portray the family's bewilderment at the camp's good shape. Moreover, Tom's conversation with the caretaker is slightly changed; when he hears more about the camp, he asks: "Why ain't there more like it?" (01:43:47) to which the caretaker emphatically responds: "You find out. I can't (01:43:49) differing from the novels: "You'll have to find that out yourself" (Steinbeck 301). Warren French sees the aforesaid line as: "one of the most heavily accentuated lines in the picture" (52), thus carrying: "inescapable implication . . . that the government should provide a paternalistic blanket for people like the migrants, but that it is prevented from doing so by the selfishness of the big owner-exploiters" (53). Migrants' working opportunities improve in comparison with the ones found at the Keene Ranch. Similarly to the novel, Mr. Thomas, the owner of a small farm who hires Tom and others on his property, informs the men of the riot that is supposed to happen at the dance. He wants to help the migrants stating: "Maybe I've talked myself into trouble, but you're folks like us, and I like you" (01:47:18 – 01:47:22). Soon follows the dance scene, and Mr. Thomas is seen arriving with his wife, thus even socializing with the migrants in his free time. These scenes are in sharp contrast with the scenes at the Keene Ranch as it contrasts their inclusion into the community of the government camp with the subhuman treatment they experience at the Keene Ranch.

### 3. Politics in the *The Grapes of Wrath*

Understanding the politics of the novel and the film is indispensable for a thorough comprehension of their tropes. However, due to the ambiguities found in both media, it also represents one of its more complex parts. Steinbeck's novel is largely political and corresponds with the trend of young intellectuals re-examining the American Dream; a trend that gets under way at the beginning of the twentieth century. Professor Alfred Hornung indicates the incentive of many young intellectuals in his essay *The Un-American Dream*: “[They]. . . sensed the discrepancy between the American ideals of the Founding Fathers and the Un-American realities of an industrialized modern nation” (545). The aforesaid young writers and intellectuals witness a shift in interests and values in politics and writing; as the American academic Jay Parini claims: “But the subject of politics was now pushed to the front by the sharp economic and social inequities of American life, and many young writers began to think of themselves as activists” (53). In a similar vein, Steinbeck examines the validity of the promises by travelling to California in the thirties, where he sees many injustices perpetrated against the misfortunate migrants. Parini asserts: “He [Steinbeck] had a peculiar and noble sympathy for those who were cheated out of their natural birthright and dignity” (58). On the road, he sees innumerable camps and multitudes of people living in its deplorable condition; the author's inclination towards the underdogs and his belief in the ability to alter unjust conditions with his writing prompt him to interview many living on the margins of society. The result of his sojourn in California is *The Grapes of Wrath*; his novel that is meant to give visibility to the migrants through the Joads. Parini suggests: “Like so many writers of this era, he considered it part of a writer's responsibility to bear witness, to address a social crisis with the hope of effecting some kind of change” (66). Although *The Grapes of Wrath* is a critique of the American system and therefore also of the Dream, Steinbeck's political views are not clear-cut. *The Grapes of Wrath* contains an eclectic mix of ideas from various, seemingly incompatible philosophers and revolutionaries. Thus, Railton reports: “. . . Winthrop, Edwards, Emerson, Whitman (128)” as influences juxtaposed to the names found in the novel: “. . . Paine, Marx, Jefferson, Lenin. . .” (158). The aforesaid eclectic mix of influences leads to many contemporary discussions on the political implications of the novel. Burns claims:

Thus, we are led to the conclusion that the contradiction illustrates, not Steinbeck's control of his material, but a fundamental and irreconcilable ambivalence in his philosophy: his sympathy for communism combined but not compatible with his

nostalgic admiration for Jeffersonian agrarian individualism; his trust in “the people” and his equal distrust of any kind of organization. (56)

Alfred Hornung expounds on the role of many writers and intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century: “Their critique of the emptiness and dangerous hostility of the American Dream resulted in a deconstruction of the dream quality to chart a new American reality which held similar hopes for people at home and abroad who were willing to realize their personal dream in the context of American society” (545-46). Through his two aforesaid sympathies, communism and individualism, Steinbeck manages to do exactly that; to give a deconstruction of the Dream to expand its accessibility to the unprivileged and the impoverished. Because of the novel’s critical overtones towards the system and American capitalism, many ideas expressed in the novel are omitted from Ford’s cinematic adaptation. For example, his communist sympathies which are, to a great degree, portrayed in the novel are mostly extinguished in the film through a multitude of alterations made by the whole production crew and thus: “The film may . . . be considered entirely on its own merits” (French 21) as its narrative gives a different viewpoint on the plight of the Joads. Thus, the film’s resolution provides its unique solution to the insufficiencies of the American Dream.

### **3.1. Steinbeck’s Contradictions: Individualist and Communist Implications**

The novel contains a copious number of occurrences affirming self-reliance, which is a highly characteristic principle of the American Dream. The parable of the turtle, at the beginning of the novel, provides the most prominent affirmation of self-reliance. Despite the prevalent observation of the similarities between the family’s plight to the turtle’s, Burns emphasizes the contrast the parable creates between the two: “For the affirmative parable of the turtle provides a contrast, not a parallel, to the tragic story of the Joads” (53). The third chapter of the novel depicts the parable as the author mentions the turtle’s intent to continue its journey: “And over the grass at the roadside a land turtle crawled turning aside for nothing, dragging his high-doomed shell over the grass” (Steinbeck 16). The turtle’s persistence is further mentioned: “As the embankment grew steeper and steeper, the more frantic were the efforts of the land turtle” (Steinbeck 16). The turtle’s tenacity is continually accentuated by the author as the turtle repeatedly tries to escape captivity to continue its journey, therefore Burns claims: “And while one cannot know for certain where the turtle is going or what it intends to do when it gets there, the context clearly implies that it will get there and accomplish whatever it has instinctively set out to do” (54). The similarities between the turtle

and the family become obvious upon closer inspection; both are travelling southwest, and the highway represents a daunting hindrance on both journeys (Burns 54). The turtle is last seen by Tom and Casy heading southwest, as it originally intended before being picked up by Tom, relentlessly moving, as if towards a specified goal. It can be concluded from the text that the turtle survives because it invests the entirety of its energy in its own personal interest (Burns 55).

The parable of the turtle is consequently linked to Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy, which highlights the importance of perseverance and self-reliance. While the Joads emphasize the importance of the family, they have a hard time coping with the challenges coming their way. It seems that it would be easier to grapple with the challenges of the road without the responsibility for others. There are several depictions of character's self-reliance in the novel, notably the examples of the brothers Noah and Al. Noah is the family's eldest child, and he is shown as a bit strange in the novel: ". . . Noah the first born, tall and strange, walking always with a wondering look on his face, calm and puzzled" (Steinbeck 82). On their journey west, the family takes a short break before crossing the desert, and they decide to swim in the river to freshen up. When it is time to continue the journey, Noah decides that he does not want to go with the family; he prefers staying next to the river. Tom is utterly baffled by Noah's decision and he tries to persuade him to join the family on the rest of their journey, to which Noah responds: "Get myself a piece a line. I'll catch fish. Fella can't starve beside a nice river" (Steinbeck 217). He indicates that he was never that close to the family: "But they don't really care for me" (Steinbeck 218). It can be concluded that his emotional detachment enables him to abandon the family and start a new life. Like the turtle wrestled Tom's entrapment, Noah wrestles Tom's persuasion to stay with the family: "How 'bout the fam'ly? How 'bout Ma?" (Steinbeck 218). Noah insists on deciding for himself and resolutely departs in an unspecified direction: "He turned abruptly and walked downstream along the shore. Tom started to follow, and then he stopped. He saw Noah disappear into the brush, and then appear again, following the edge of the river. And he watched Noah growing smaller on the edge of the river, until he disappeared into the willows at last" (Steinbeck 218). Thus, the individual's survival in the United States is shown incompatible with the needs of a group, especially when the group consists of helpless individuals such as children, the ill, and the elderly. Burns further suggests:

If there is one character in the novel who seems most likely to survive and make a decent life for himself, that would have to be Al Joad. But Al will succeed only if he

has the callousness to wrest himself free of family dependence on him – he is the only remaining member who can drive the truck – and get himself that dreamed-of job in a garage. That is to say, he can survive by joining the side that owns and runs the machines, by acting in short, a little less like a decent human being and a little more like the turtle. (55)

It is obvious that Al, akin to Noah, wants to leave the family and go on his own; he is young, capable, and willing to wander on his own to find contentment. Burns characterizes the turtle parable as a “statement in praise of rugged individualism” (56), but it is only a piece of the puzzle necessary for a better understanding of the author’s political views. Although a “nostalgic admiration for Jeffersonian agrarian individualism” (56) is noticed, it seems that Steinbeck deconstructs individualism to express a critique of the system that requires one to sacrifice everything to obtain success. As much as the author admires their individualist tendencies, he is aware that a rigorous change of American society is necessary to chart a more equitable reality for those excluded.

Although it is hard to identify Steinbeck’s definitive political affiliation, there is plenty of proof of his communist sympathies. While at the time as Cullen claims: “Any assertion that people should be more equal than they theoretically already were smacked of socialism” (107), its ideas can unequivocally be found in the novel; symbols such as the peasantry, the labour strikes, the “reds”, class struggle, the revolution, and others. The communist ideas are shown as quite appealing to the masses of starving migrants that move to California:

The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. Here is the anlage of the thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here “I lost my land” is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate - We lost our land”. (Steinbeck 157)

Communism is thought to promulgate ideas conflicting to those of the American Dream consequently its ideas are even characterized as subversive and are later on investigated by the Un-American Activities Committee. Alfred Hornung concisely indicates the task of many writers akin to Steinbeck, dealing with the topic of the disadvantaged “to chart new ways for the regeneration of the American system which stressed a core of American values based on the ideals of the Founding Fathers in conjunction with non or Un-American ideas” (548). It can consequently be argued that Steinbeck incorporates its sundry symbolism to show the



need for extending the Dream's promises and to advocate for a change, which will be further explained below.

### **3.2. Revolutionary Sentiment in the Novel**

The tone of the novel indicates a feeling of urgency; an impending change that is necessary for the betterment of American society. Such tone can be largely attributed to the intercalary chapters which give comprehensive expositions of the system's insufficiencies, thus necessitating the change. The necessity and imminence of the forthcoming change are perhaps best depicted in chapter fourteen, an intercalary chapter, of the novel:

The western land, nervous under the beginning change. The Western States, nervous as horses before a thunder storm. The great owners, nervous, sensing a change, knowing nothing of the nature of the change. The great owners, striking at the immediate thing, the widening government, the growing labour unity; striking at new taxes, at plans; not knowing these things are results, not causes. (Steinbeck 156)

In addition to the aforesaid, Ma Joad also portends the forthcoming change: "A different time's a-comin' (Steinbeck 294). She is unable to provide any reasoning for her prophetic claims; she simply knows that the change is coming. Furthermore, it is mentioned before that the feeling of an impending change intensifies at the end of chapter twenty-four; Pa is heard saying: "They's a change a-comin'. I don't know what. Maybe we won't live to see her. But she's a-comin'. They's a res'less feelin'. Fella can't figger nothin' out, he's so nervous" (Steinbeck 360). This impending change is further portrayed through communist symbolism, namely labour strikes and the revolution that underlie this feeling of imminence. Its communist character further enhances the novel's anti-capitalist sentiment, namely it highlights the inadequacy of the American economic system and the Dream's limitations. Railton suggests: "He [Steinbeck] wrote the novel in the belief to which the trauma of seeing the homeless, wretched families had converted him: that American society had to change quickly and profoundly" (127). For a better understanding of the change the author anticipates, it is important to elucidate the meaning of the aforesaid symbolism and the anti-capitalist sentiment found in the novel.

As mentioned before, a momentous event, that starts the family's disillusionment, happens in the near-road camp where the family stops for the night. The Joad men, upon joining a circle of others discussing their future plans, meet a "ragged" man who tells them

about the dismal conditions in California. He explains the utility of the widely spread handbills: “This man wants eight hundred men. So he prints up five thousand of them things an’ maybe twenty thousan’ people sees ‘em. An’ maybe two-three tousan’ folks get movin’ account a this here han’bill” (Steinbeck 198). The ragged man points out that the only concern employers have is profit, thus they exploit the large numbers of migrants in California by making them compete for work; the one who wants to do the job for less gets the job. Therefore, the high number of migrants leads to the diminishing of wages and ultimately culminates in: “five hundred that’s so goddamn hungry they’ll work for nothin’ but biscuits” (Steinbeck 198). The ragged man’s exposition makes the Joads’ dreams and desires all the more poignant; Connie’s dream of earning enough money to open a store seems extremely far-fetched. The ragged man concludes: “You see now? The more fellas he can get, an’ the hungrier, less he’s gonna pay” (Steinbeck 198). In a similar way, the man that the family encounters while swimming in the river further emphasizes the limitations of the American Dream. He accentuates the supreme value of private ownership: “An’ you’ll pass lan’ flat an’ fine with water thirty feet down, and that lan’s layin fallow. But you can’t have none of that lan’. That’s a Lan and Cattle Company. And if they don’t want ta work her, she ain’t gonna git worked. You go in there an’ plant a little corn, an’ you’ll go to jail” (Steinbeck 214). This image of the supreme rule of private ownership is further intensified in the man’s speech: “They’s a grove of yella oranges – and a guy with a gun that got the right to kill if you touch one. They’s a fella, newspaper fella near the coast, got a million acres” (Steinbeck 215). The staggering economic inequality is further portrayed as the author contrasts the great landowners with the million acres and the hapless migrants who cannot even have a peach to alleviate hunger. Thus, both men convey the message that the Dream is not available to everyone; it indeed has: “insurmountable limitations in terms of competition” (Hornung 545). Chapter nineteen, another intercalary chapter, draws the reader’s attention to the never-ending number of people arriving in California: “Three hundred thousand in California and more coming. And in California the roads full of frantic people running like ants to pull, to push, to lift, to work. For every manload to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it; for every stomachful of food available, five mouths open” (Steinbeck 249). The American system with its dearth of opportunities resulting in starvation of many shows the American Dream and its tenets, the accumulation of wealth, and its accessibility to everyone, as just a myth. Steinbeck’s critique of the system is further discerned: “Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten. And the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow” (364) once again necessitating a change of the system.

Railton investigates the possibility of redefining the Dream and he remarks: “The American Dream of individual opportunity has clearly betrayed “the people” (118) indicating Steinbeck’s redefining of its boundaries as both compulsory and inevitable (119).

Although a cruel economic and political system seems entirely at fault for the appalling discrepancies between the poor and the rich, the following intercalary chapter indicates ceaseless human avarice as culpable:

Once California belonged to Mexico and its land to Mexicans; and a horde of tattered feverish Americans poured in. And such was their hunger for land that they took the land – stole Sutter’s land, Guerrero’s land, took the grants and broke them up and growled and quarrelled over them, those frantic hungry men; and they guarded with guns the land they had stolen. They put up houses and barns, they turned the earth and planted crops. And these things were possessions and possession was ownership. (Steinbeck 242)

It can be argued that Americans are by no means unique in this respect which can be corroborated by the stories of the men he mentions: John Sutter and Vicente Guerrero. It is mentioned that the German-born, Swiss immigrant, John Sutter, was particularly cruel towards the Native Americans he encountered in California; he used ruthless and violent schemes to obtain the land from the Indians and to create New Helvetia (Lamar 100). Furthermore, Vicente Guerrero was a Mexican president of African, Indian, and Spanish heritage who abolished slavery (Vincent 148). Although he indeed accomplished a great deal of good during his presidency, Guerrero still presided over a country that was founded on “stolen” land. Steinbeck’s reference to Sutter’s land and Guerrero’s land consequently shows the acquisitiveness of those inhabiting California before the Americans, in addition to an overabundance of similar instances in the recorded history. Railton further suggests: “The Sooners took their land by force from the Indians, just as the large owners in California took theirs from the Mexicans. In both places, what prevailed was the right of the strongest – or say, the greediest” (117). Even the Joads, with whose plight the reader empathizes, share the inclination towards private ownership with the landowners, who are demonized in the novel: “The Joads even stole the house they are evicted from. Grampa hangs onto the pillow he stole from Albert Rance with the same fierceness that the owners display in defence of their ill-gotten profits” (Railton 117). Steinbeck once again accentuates the difference between the owners and the migrants: “And the owners not only did not work the farms any more, many

of them had never seen the farms they owned” (244). The owners’ only connection to the land they own is monetary and their only dreams revolve around increasing profit whilst the migrants dream of owning the land to feed themselves and their families:

And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians wanted only two things – land and food; and to them the two were one. And whereas the wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined, the wants of the Okies were besides the roads, laying the good green fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew, until the sharp sweetness was in the throat. (Steinbeck 245)

For the great landowners, farming is an industry and it is noted that to pursue higher profits the owners inadvertently create a new kind of slavery: “They imported slaves although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the business men said. They don’t need much. They wouldn’t know what to do with good wages” (Steinbeck 243). Additionally, the constant fear of deportation for non-American immigrants entraps them, and they are not able to voice their discontent. Parini asserts that the trouble for big owners starts with the arrival of Americans expecting to participate in the promises of the American Dream: “One of the many consequences of this influx of white Americans citizens accustomed to the workings of democracy was that protests about low wages and poor working conditions were inevitable” (65). Furthermore, the intercalary chapter explains the appeal of socialist ideas and the revolutionary sentiment that is found in the novel. Steinbeck portrays the landowners inadvertently working on their demise:

And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed. The great owners ignored the three cries of history. The land fell into fewer hands, the number of the dispossessed increased, and every effort of the great owners was directed at repression. (249)

Moreover, Steinbeck points out that the “the line between hunger and anger is a thin line” (297) and it is the hunger that incites the prophesized protests. When the family arrives at the Hooper ranch, they notice throngs of people, some police officers, and the majority reminiscent of migrants they see everywhere in California, similar in appearance to the Joads: “These here is our own people, all of ‘em” (385). The police officers are unwilling to give an

explanation to Tom's incessant inquiries about the nature of the situation in front of the ranch. Later on, Tom sneaks out of the ranch to find out what is happening outside. To his bewilderment, he finds the ex-preacher Casy amongst other men who informs him of the demands of the gathered men and his relationship with the cause. Casy lets Tom know of the change he experiences whilst in jail: "Here's me, been a-goin' into the wilderness like Jesus to try find out somepin. Almost got her sometimes, too. But it's in the jail house I really got her" (Steinbeck 399). In other words, Casy informs Tom that he finds purpose in helping the migrants organize and act for the betterment of their own class (Railton 121). Casy talks about his fellow inmates to once again evoke the topic of private ownership. He traces the root of all evil and the reason for the inmates' misdeeds in the desire to own something: "Well, they was nice fellas, ya see. What made 'em bad was they needed stuff. An' I begin to see, then. It's need that makes all the trouble" (Steinbeck 400). Casy further sheds light on the reasons for the protests in front of the Hooper's ranch; one migrant's revolt against the sour beans given to the migrants for their meal leads others to revolt as well. Their unified revolt results in improvement of their meals but also in the realization of the strength of their unified efforts. It becomes clear that the men are striking to obtain better wages and escape serious privations to which they are constantly exposed to. The initial success of their organized efforts is seen in some previous instances as well, namely the success of the men's organized efforts in the Weedpatch camp to stop the riots and the Black Hat's story. By the end of chapter twenty-four, Black Hat's story is noted as he also portends a change coming: "I don't know. She's a-comin' awright, like you say" (Steinbeck 360). He then goes on to mention the success of the workers' unionizing in Akron, Ohio. Although all three stories mentioned depict a clear communist sentiment by presenting their combined efforts in an adulatory manner, it seems that by yet again drawing the reader's attention to the intrinsic human desire to own, the author does not merely argue for one economic system in favour of another. Casy's explication points towards the intrinsic human desire to own as the culpable party for the migrant's predicament, thus necessitating an inner change for the alteration of the material conditions of the American society. Moreover, Railton suggests the following: "Despite the narrative's persistent attention to external forces – natural, historical, economic, social – it ultimately points to what its own representation excludes, to an inward "act" of consciousness or spirit, as the only place the revolution can begin" (126).

This conclusion can further be corroborated by Steinbeck's belief in humans' ability to change: "For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments" (156).

Additionally, interpreting the revolutionary sentiment as an indication of a necessary spiritual change can also be supported by the novel's final chapter; Pa persuades other migrants to jointly build a dam which would protect their campsite from flooding. However, their efforts are not triumphant, they do not manage to build the dam, and the camp is flooded. The novel's final act thus contradicts the previous unsubdued praises of the peoples' organized efforts; the emphasis shifts from the togetherness. On top of that, Steinbeck mentions the children's propensity towards private ownership to make his point clearer. Ruthie finds a flower next to the road and puts its petal on her nose, which makes her brother Winfield want to put the petal on his nose as well. He tries taking the flower from her grasp to which Ruthie responds by hitting him in the face. Ruthie finds violence sensible to protect something that is hers: "He tried to grab my fl'ar" (Steinbeck 473). She indicates that the flower belongs to her and that she has no intention of sharing it: "Leave him find his own. This here's mine" (473). Such contradictions result in an "essentially religious and mystical solution to the economic and political problems that inspired him to write the novel in the first place" (Railton 126) which does not crystalize the author's political view. However, they give a sufficient explanation about the author's use of revolutionary symbolism. The author is not in favour of armed conflict to alter the American economic and political system; he promulgates the need for an inner change which would result in a more equitable system. Steinbeck postulates that the need for a revolution is essentially American: "If you could separate causes from results, if you could know that Paine, Marx, Jefferson, Lenin, were results, not causes, you might survive. But that you cannot know. For the quality of owning freezes forever into "I" and cuts you off forever from 'we'" (158). He places Thomas Paine, an American political activist and philosopher, and Thomas Jefferson, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, in the company of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin to "reassure the American reader by linking socialism with our own revolutionary tradition" (Railton 114). Socialist sentiment can most clearly be felt in Steinbeck's blunt critique of private ownership; he claims that it disconnects individuals from the "we" of humanity. Railton further remarks: "Steinbeck's emphasis on inner change as the basis of social salvation has its roots in the Puritan belief that the New Jerusalem is identical with the congregation of converted saints, and in the Transcendentalists' credo that, as Emerson put it, 'The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul'" (128). Consequently, Steinbeck's revolutionary sentiment can perhaps be seen as complementary to the idea of the American Dream. The established connection between the need for an inner "revolution" with the Puritans and Transcendentalists relates the necessary inner change of every individual

with the American Dream and its tenet of self-betterment. Furthermore, the transformation of the “I” into a “We” ultimately needs to result in a more equitable system which will extend the Dream’s promises of democracy, liberty, and opportunity to everyone; however, an inner change of each “I” seems necessary to form the “We”. Thus, Railton argues: “And once Tom has been brought home to this sense of “selflessness,” it seems that the revolution is effectively over as well” (Railton 126).

### **3.3. (Un)Revolutionary Sentiment in the Film**

Steinbeck’s novel and Ford’s adaptation considerably differ in many aspects, but their differences are almost insurmountable when it comes to the variety of communist symbolism, and the meaning of the revolutionary sentiment portrayed in the novel. Bluestone reports the rationale for many alterations occurring in the film: “It was precisely this fear of criticism, of giving offense to vested interests that was responsible for muting the film’s political implications” (158). The film is created in a politically precarious time so the crew’s decision to omit many allusions to socialism, revolution, and various instances of political criticism does not seem all too unreasonable. Warren French remarks: “The emphasis [of the film] is not on *change*, but *survival*” (27). Consequently, the entire moral lesson of the novel is changed in the film and John Ford presents a new outlook on the Joads. French argues: “...they are very different works, expounding different philosophies and presenting the same basic social situation, the plight of migrant farm workers in California in the late 1930s, in quite different ways” (21).

The “ragged” man’s speech of the injustices he encounters in California is condensed, and certain harrowing details portrayed in the novel are omitted, for example: “You see now? The more fellas he can get, an’ the hungrier, less he’s gonna pay” (Steinbeck 198). However, the scene establishes its momentous character as it is the first scene in the film, which points out that: “the Joads may have set out for California under an illusion” (French 44). The scene of the Joad men conversing with two unnamed characters while swimming in the river is completely omitted, leaving the aforesaid scene as the only warning. While in Hooverville, a contractor arrives in a luxurious car, accompanied by an officer, and he offers work to everyone gathered. One of the gathered men named Floyd asks to see his credentials, which the contractor refuses falsely, indicating that it is not the man’s right to ask for them. The man however reports having similar experiences before: “Maybe he needs 1,000 men. So he gets 5,000 there and he’ll pay 15 cents an hour. You guys will have to take it because you’ll be hungry” (01:10:12 – 01:11:22). The scene indicates criticism towards the exploitative system

and once again reminds of the Dream's fallacy. The following medium shot of the smug faces of both men evokes a feeling of oppression, as the deputy deliberately charges the man with a non-existent crime. Additionally, a revolutionary sentiment can be felt as the man hits the deputy; he retaliates against the injustices of the system. The Keene Ranch sequence contains a scene that most vividly insinuates a revolutionary character. In a similar vein to the novel, Tom sneaks out of the camp, and he comes across a tent in which he finds Casy and others. Casy informs Tom that they are striking against the deplorable working conditions on the farm. Casy explains the group's experience on the farm: "We come here to work. They tell us it's gonna be 5 cents, but there's a whole lot of us. So the man says 2 and a half cents" (01:28:00 – 01:28:08). As Casy sheds light on the mistreatment of the workers, the film shows the preacher's face transitioning from darkness to light to postulate the morale of his story: "A fella can't even eat on that and if he's got kids . . . . So we says we won't take it" (01:28:10 – 01:28:15). Thus, the viewer empathizes with the workers as the film gives their rebellion legitimate reasoning. Casy's exposition is portrayed through a low-angle shot, which emphasizes the preacher's significance in the strikes. Additionally, he sits on a box and is placed at a higher level than other members of the group, who sit on the ground. Casy wants Tom to persuade others in the camp to join the strikers, but Tom is doubtful of the possibility of such a scenario because the family found means to provide food on the family table: "You think Pa's gonna give up his meat on account of some other fellas?" (01:29:20 – 01:29:23). The low-key lighting particularly enhances the menacing atmosphere in this scene; Casy moves to and fro on his box, and the interchange of shadow and light is at play in the scene. The group members become restless as the sounds they hear give the impression of people approaching. The anti-system sentiment is noticeably diminished in the scene as the film frequently tries to absolve law enforcement officers of the sins committed in the novel. Hence the novels: "Them cops been sayin' now they're gonna beat the hell outa us an' run us outa the county. They figger I'm a leader 'cause I talk so much (Steinbeck 403) undergoes a careful alteration and becomes: "Cops been telling us how they're gonna beat us up and run us out of the country. Not them regular deputies but them tin-seal men. The ones they got for guards" (01:30:01 – 01:30:08). Next follows a scene of the group's escape; the men move furtively towards the source of light, and their silhouettes are seen. They unsuccessfully try fleeing when the guards approach but are soon surrounded. Casy tries to reason with the guards to no avail as one of them shortly clubs the ex-preacher to death. Casy's death causes Tom's act of vengeance, he kills one of the guards and makes a run for it. The killings are poorly-lit and barely visible which French explains: "John Ford, who usually makes his points



visually, was probably frightened by the incendiary effect of this scene and deliberately tried to mute it, so that the impact of the event is conveyed through the dialogue rather than visual images” (51). Moreover, another interesting alteration of the socialist connotations happens with the mention of the word “reds.” The word appears several times in the novel, appearing for the first time in Hooverville as the contractor offers work to the gathered men in the camp. As the contractor refuses to show his license and to specify the wages, one of the gathered men named Floyd shares his experience with other similar contractors to warn others of a ploy. A verbal altercation ensues, and the contractor says: “You fellas don’t want ta listen to these goddamn reds. Troublemakers – they’ll get you in trouble” (276). Although the contractor assigns a subversive character to the word “reds,” by attributing it to Floyd it is obvious that it represents those fighting for more just conditions.

Later on, the family leaves the Keene ranch and settles in the government camp for a short while. Tom finds work around the camp and discusses the meaning of the term “reds” with the other men. The colour red bears many political connotations but since 1917, it is also strongly associated with the revolution and socialism. The novel makes it clear that the term “reds” signifies those fighting for worker’s rights, namely better wages: “A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we’re payin’ twenty-five!” (Steinbeck 312). The film however obscures its meaning: “Every time you turn around, somebody’s calling somebody else a red. What is these reds anyway? Oh, I ain’t talking about that, one way or the other” (01:47:00 – 01:47:07). Warren French remarks wittily: “He speaks here for the filmmakers” (Steinbeck 29) as the related symbolism is, almost entirely, omitted from Ford’s adaptation. The biggest change made in the film is found in the adaptation’s ending scene, which is diametrically opposed to the novel’s closing scene (French 26). The film’s last scene emphasizes the importance of persistence and encourages one to keep on going despite the obstacles, in comparison with the novel, which necessitates a change. Pa observes that the family continually faces obstacles to which Ma responds: “That’s what makes us tough. Rich fellas come up and die and their kids ain’t no good, and they die out. But we keep coming. We are the people that live. They can’t wipe us out. They can’t lick us. We’ll go on forever, Pa, because we are the people” (02:07:42 – 02:08:01). Furthermore, the last image seen is of many other jalopies driving through California, and there is an obvious contrast between: “the sorry-looking trucks and the neatly-manicured landscape of the 1940s” (French 56), the image nonetheless seems to depict the strength of people’s character to continue their pursuits.

## Conclusion

The American Dream is the national creed that promulgates the belief in the inevitable success of any individual willing to work hard to obtain it. The term was coined by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, however, he merely gives expression to an idea which develops from the earliest times of American history. The American Dream originates from the Puritan era, and thenceforth passes through various stages of development; it is influenced by the Founding Fathers, Paine, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and others. Today a great many of the Dream's variations and extensions are known, such as the California Dream and the Dream of Home Ownership.

John Steinbeck's novel and John Ford's cinematic adaptation are shown to share many similarities since both are based on a similar narrative, however, the alternations rendered in the film adaptation are a sufficient justification to consider the film independently. Both media depict the contrast between the ideals of the American Dream and its harsh reality, as seen through the Joads, Oklahoma natives who flee their home due to devastations of the Dust Bowl. The Joads try to seek their fortune in California, akin to many other migrants who imagine it as the land of infinite opportunities. They experience many hardships on their journey west, and their Dream starts to disintegrate when they arrive in California.

The Great Depression and the treatment they receive due to their otherness disillusion them from the myth of the American Dream. Its belief in the eligibility of everyone ends up showing its limitations; there simply are not enough opportunities and resources for everyone to succeed.

The author gets the idea to write about the plight of the migrants after his sojourn in California, where he meets many migrants driven from their homes. He believes that writers are like literary activists in that they are obliged to write for the betterment of the world. His writing is consequently teeming with communist symbolism, which deconstructs the Dream's tenets, and indicates the necessity of a change. However, Steinbeck is not in favour of an armed revolution; the revolution he promulgates in *The Grapes of Wrath* is of a spiritual kind. He redefines the boundaries of the American Dream by highlighting an inner change of every individual as the prerequisite for the creation of a fairer and more equitable system. In a similar vein, John Ford's adaptation exposes the discrepancies of the American Dream through the film medium, thus creating a dialogue on rectifying its insufficiencies. However, there is no indication that Ford is advocating for a spiritual change as Steinbeck. He offers a

more temporal and upbeat resolution to the plot; the Joads go on, continuing their pursuit, akin to many others before them, and many others to come.

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