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# Capitalism and Dehumanization In Jhon Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*

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# Abstract

*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck is an American classic novel known for its extraordinary descriptive quality. It gained this title for its realistic depiction of American life throughout the great depression and the dust bowl, This Marxist-based research attempts to reveal the socioeconomic complication and implications of the capitalist system; through shedding light on the hardships of Oklahoma families who were expelled from their land and become immigrant farmers in California in the hope of improving their living conditions. However, they found landowners harshness who exploited them to earn more profits, along with the discrimination they faced by Californians because of their prejudice towards the Oklahomans (the okies). Therefore, farmers were oppressed twice, first from the savage capitalist system, and the second from the society; where they were dehumanized and commoditized to something that is less than human. *The Grapes of Wrath* reveals oppressive and unequal power relationships that shaped the social experiences the American individual during the great depression.

## Key Words

The Grapes of Wrath, The Great Depression, The Dust Bowl, Capitalism, Dehumanization

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First of all This thesis is dedicated to my parents for being my first teachers; *My Father* who taught me that learning for the sake of learning is the highest kind of knowledge to have, and *My Mother* who taught me to trust in Allah first and believe in myself. Thank you for believing in me and for everything you did for me. I am so much of what I have learned from you.

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*Aya Dahmani*

## Dedication

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# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

The Great Depression is one of the hardest crises that faced the United States of American over history. The Stock Market Crash of October 1929 triggers the crisis, most commonly known as "the Black Tuesday" combined with the severe drought that hit the American Midwest (Kansas, Colorado, Texas, and Oklahoma). Marked the end of the prosperous decade of American history "the Roaring Twenties"; starting a decade of depression, distress, hardships, and wrath. By the nineteen-thirties, almost a quarter of the population is unemployed (25 percent), most of them suffer from poverty and starvation banks panic is a reality as well. After the stock market crash, most customers pull out their money fearing the loss of their savings because of banking system failure. Furthermore, The Oklahoman farmers' tragedy is the hardest, so they suffered from drought, banks, and landowners because of debts they could never pay back. Therefore, most farmers migrated westward to the promised land of California seeking better economic conditions by working in fruit fields (Pells and Christina)

The Great Depression is a period of suffering, distress, and misery, yet it is an inspiration for writers such as John Steinbeck who published his famous Dustbowl Trilogy (*In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and the Grapes of Wrath*). *The Grapes of wrath* is among them the most controversial works. Thus, it is in the center of interest for many studies, because it reveals the truth about many psychological, sociological and economic issues in the American society during the great depression. But for most, it reveals capitalism influence on dehumanizing the American people among them is the most remarkable issue, that made an end for the ultimate American dream about equality and started new era that is more true and close to reality.

*The Grapes of Wrath* evokes quintessentially American themes of hard work, self-determination as well as hardships of the capitalist society. That is, rich and bank owners are becoming richer, while the majority of populations have faced homelessness and unemployment. It associates with some subjective interest in history and sociology. Furthermore, Steinbeck masterpiece portrays the oppression of the capitalist system that led to social injustice, labor dehumanization and man commodification.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between capitalism and people dehumanization in the American society, by demonstrating individual hardships throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*. As well as, revealing the effect of capitalist oppression on alienating the “Okies” migrants from society and even humanity by using Marxist theory.

The present thesis brings out the following main question:

- What is the relationship between the capitalism and the dehumanization of society?

With other sub Research questions:

- How does the author show the individual’s hardship and social injustice in the novel?
- What are the effects of capitalist oppression in migrants’ alienation from humanity?

This research paper requires the use of Marxist critical theory, since the topic related to socioeconomic topic that is Capitalism and Dehumanization in the *Grapes of Wrath*. In addition, it requires the use of the dialectic materialism approach. Since the novel reveals the historical and political events that contributed in the emergence the social class conflict between wealthy capitalists and the working people because of the capitalist material needs.

There are multiple reasons behind choosing this topic "Capitalism and Dehumanization in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*". First, to show to which extent savage American Capitalism contributed to dehumanizing the society in the time of the great depression. Second, although the *Grapes of Wrath* has received many critics, and has been the central subject for many scholars; who consider it as a new critic for the American social, political and economic system during the depression. Most scholars tackled the novel only from a historical and social lens. Yet, only few have used Marxist lens while conducting their

researches. such as Amroune Ikram and Baali Wafa thesis "*The Portrayal of Economic and Political Aspects of the Great Depression in America Through Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath*" claimed that *The Grapes of Wrath* is proved to be a depiction of the economic and Political Aspects of the Great Depression in America. However In 2017, Daddi Ouameur Salah in his thesis entitled "*The Impact of Emigration on the American Society in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath*" says that *The Grapes of Wrath* captures the humiliations and hatred faced by migrants in California that contributed to creating hatred and wrath between the okies and Californian people. Nevertheless; works such as "The American society During the Great Depression in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*" written by Merada Mohamed claimed that; the American working class and families are hunted by both wealthy capitalists and the authorities.

The dissertation will be consist of two major chapters, the first chapter is (Twenties Century America: Between Prosperity and Depression) is divided into two parts. The first part tackles the historical context of the novel. starting from the golden age of prosperity and dream during the roaring twenties, to the tragic end that stated with the stock market crash creating a new decade of economic depression and environmental disaster (before and after 1929). The second apart, is dedicated to theoretical aspects of the Marxist theory. The second chapter is entitled (The Portrayal of Capitalism and the Dehumanization of Society in *the Grapes of Wrath*) is dedicated to the thematic analysis. The first part analyzes the representation of capitalism in the novel by conducting different aspects such as bank greediness, individualism. As well as, industrialization contribution to the replacement of man by machines, and to the massive unemployment issue. While the second part focuses on the human commodification as the effect of Capitalism. Moreover, it deals with social Darwinism, labor exploitation and low wages as well as California camps and the abuse of "Okies" migrant, besides man alienation from humanity as a final point.



**Chapter one**  
**America before and**  
**after 1929: between**  
**Prosperity and**  
**Depression**

## 1.1 Introduction

Each era has what is called zeitgeist<sup>1</sup> which ineluctably forms the life of human beings who live in it, their behavior, their appearance, and their sense of life. Thus, the first part of this chapter explores and investigates the characteristics of the period between 1920s and 1930s in America, from prosperity of 20's to the depression of 30's, in order to understand the meaning Steinbeck communicates within the novel. The second part introduces the fundamental perspective of Marxism, the theory of historical materialism, and human alienation, which are suitable for the interpretation of the novel.

## 1.2 Historical Background

The 1920's in America are a dynamic decade called “The Golden Age”. The era characterizes with prosperity, leisure, and technological advancements consumerism and major shifts toward modern life; this sudden acceleration of life led to vibrant consumer culture. It appears very clearly in the extraordinary increase of financial activities; thanks to the innovative ways of advertising and selling products. Masses become more eager to own new items for comfort and luxury life. By the end of the 20's, America goes through economic transitions and shifts from prosperity to depression due to banking crisis and poor policies, and lasted for a decade known as “The Great Depression” this is the worst economic crisis in the history of America, a decade of hardships and despair. It is not only limited to economic crisis but also natural disasters. The series of droughts and non-sustainable agricultural practices resulted in creating dust storms hitting several areas in America, the affected areas is called "The Dust Bowl", this caused a lot of families to leave their homes in search of work, food and decent life.

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<sup>1</sup> A German term means the spirit of time; it is the invisible force that dominates the characteristics of a given era

## 1.2.1 The golden age

The era that followed the First World War often called the “Roaring Twenties” or “Jazz Age”, it has marked by significant cultural and social upheaval in the American history. The period witness tremendous prosperity and rapid change in various fields, it is also known as the progressive era, which represented the beginning of the 20th century, a time when technological and scientific progress made and shaped the world over time. The Roaring Twenties is also a fruitful period of arts, music, and literature.

Not surprisingly, the theme of Modernism is evident in the decade’s art, music, and literature, authors and artists experimented with new techniques and topics, pushing the bounds of creativity, art and popular culture in the 1920s are all about challenging the status quo and creating something fresh and exciting. Themes of sexuality, technology, and societal growth dominate the decade’s art and culture (American art, pop culture & literature of the 1920s).

During this revolutionary era, a new style of art, music, and literature has emerged including Art Deco, a new movement in the world of decorative arts and modern architecture. The Jazz<sup>2</sup> music is all the rage at the time, as for literature, two popular movements emerge The Lost Generation<sup>3</sup> and The Harlem Renaissance<sup>4</sup>. The 1920’s is also a revolutionary age for women who represents the “New Woman” an independent wild women with short “bob” hairstyle and short skirts called “flappers”, the appearance of flappers—women known for their flashy style of clothing, and modernized morals()

Women’s fashion of 1920’s is both a trend and a social statement. These ambitious women who embraced a new lifestyle with more freedoms have more chances in their social

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<sup>2</sup>Emerged in the 1920s and has characterized by new music and dance styles. African Americans have credited with employing new musical techniques along with traditional, became increasingly popular in speakeasies.

<sup>3</sup>a group of American authors who came of age during World War I and rose to literary success in the 1920s, including Ernest Hemingway; who used this term in his 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*, F. Scott Fitzgerald and his most brilliant novel “ *The Great Gatsby*

<sup>4</sup>: the most significant literary movement in African-American literature's history, which occurred in the twentieth century and set the path for all subsequent African-American literature

life, particularly in the entertainment business and helped normalize the presence of women in pubs, clubs, and other public places in American and Western society defying social norms.

Women's most far-reaching change is political, the Nineteenth Amendment of the American constitution grants American women the right to vote ending almost a century of protest, by the end of the decade, they are represented on local, state, and national political committees and are influencing the political agenda of the federal government (Benner).

However, some freedoms are expanded while others are restricted; as a result of the rise of several issues among the American society. Some believes that banning alcohol would make the country more peaceful. The argument led the Anti-alcoholic activists to work hard for establishing a case against alcoholism. On January 16<sup>th</sup> 1920, the American Constitution announce the Eighteenth Amendment that prohibits the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors, unfortunately, the situation persisted, and the condition grow worse. More than just Prohibition causes this social unrest. A widespread nativist, and anti-immigrant hysteria are fuelled by an anti-Communist "Red Scare"<sup>5</sup>. In 1919 and 1920 which led to the passage of an extremely restrictive immigration law (History.com Editors 2021). That came into effect in 1924 to limit the number of immigrants permitted to enter the United States.

The 1920's are a booming decade for American culture, not just in terms of aesthetic and social trends, but also in terms of economic growth, the American nation's wealth has doubled between 1920 and 1929, moreover unemployment in the 1920s never raises above the natural rate of around 4%. Thomas A. Bailey in his book "*THE AMERICAN PAGEANT*" states that the roaring twenties brought substantial benefits to Americans, with rising earnings and living conditions for many, the era are fueled by new technologies, consumer goods, and new kinds of leisure and amusement (720).

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<sup>5</sup>the first anti-Communist alarm, occurred between 1917 and 1920

After the world war I, the American economy expands by 42% and produces almost half of the world's total output. New consumer items flood the market as a result of mass manufacturing including the automobile, radio and the born of aviation industries.(Amadeo).

Financial innovations are one of the reasons behind the boom. Customers are allowed to purchase stocks “on margin” from stockbrokers. Brokers would lend between 80% and 90% of the stock's value while investors are required putting down 10% to 20% of their money, if the stock price increased they became millionaires (Amadeo) almost everyone became investors.

The United States went from having a traditional to a free market economy. Farming has dropped from 18% to 12.4% and the taxes increased by 40%, agricultural income decreased by 21%. Meanwhile, new technologies propelled consumer goods production to greater levels (Amadeo). The economic growth and the technologic developments drag most Americans into an affluent but unfamiliar “consumer society” thanks to the nationwide advertising (History.com Editors 2021).

Acquisition and consumption as ways of gaining happiness are the defining characteristics of this civilization. Therefore, cultural consumption is more noticeable than it has ever been before. Because of the easy availability of finance, people are purchasing far more than they actually need or afford, like automobiles, washing Machines, sewing machines, radios, and many quantities of products. It causes many people to struggle financially because they are relying on their next incoming salary to pay for the products they are buying. However, the rapid expansion of credit in the 1920s and the consequent crunches trig a significant banking crisis. By the end of 1920s, America experienced the world's longest and most severe depression, a period of economic recessions lasting from the stock market crash of 1929 to 1939.

## 1.2.2 The American Dream

The American Dream is the belief that everyone, regardless of where they are born or what social class they came from, may achieve their own version of success in a society where everyone has the opportunity to advance (Barone).

The concept of the American Dream has first derived from the Declaration of Independence, which states: “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, which among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” White landowners are the first to offer the American Dream. However, the concept of inalienable rights is so powerful that laws have enacted to extend these rights to former slaves, women, and non-owners of property. In this way the American Dream, altered the direction of American history (Amadeo).

Throughout the years, the Dream built up new concepts, freedom and happiness are shaped by Modern life. During the 1920s the American Dream is limited to the material achievement. That is to say, the pursuit of material goods and wealth take precedence over people’s pleasure. In this period, America is at the highest of prosperity, which means that most of the people are living the dream. In 1931, the writer coins the term American Dream and historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, according to him the dream is:

That American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it (1931).

Adams emphasize that worshipping material success is not the definition of the American dream. He does not mean “richer” materially, but rather spiritually. He

distinguishes the American Dream from aspirations of prosperity to a dream of social order (Churchwell).

However, the state of economic conditions throughout the world has shifted. The American Dream has never designed to bring world dominance or a guarantee of a decent life. The Declaration of Independence says nothing about a certain way of life, or how happiness should be defined (Amadeo).

### **1.2.3 The Great Depression**

The Great Depression is a worldwide economic downturn. According to Christina D. Romer and Richard H. Pell the great depression is “worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted about 1939. It is the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized western world, sparking fundamental changes in economic institutions, macroeconomic policy, and economic theory”. It is the most devastating, and long lasting economic crisis that has been experienced by not only America, but also the completely industrialized world .Therefore, has made an end to the ultimate American dream.

The United States' economy increased rapidly during the 1920s, and the country's total wealth doubled between 1920 and 1929, due to the booming economy and the explosion of consumerism. By that time, Banks start making loans for unnecessary reasons just to guaranty the golden standers of the people. In fact, the majority of the borrowers cannot pay back because of low wages and the high factories and farms productions of goods more than what people can buy. Consumer debt is widespread, and many people are forced to curb their extravagant lifestyle. These irresponsible deeds of banks found a weak economy that can make a potential failure in the banking system (Pells, and Romer).

However, life is not that easy for all Americans. Farmers and the agriculture sector experience the full force of the depression. Through which they are struggling to overcome the significant agricultural debt that is partly due to high goods prices during World War I. As a result, it led farmers to borrow heavily, seeking to enhance production through investments

in land and machinery. After the war, the drop in prices of agricultural commodity makes it difficult for farmers to maintain loan payments. Therefore, Reeves said about farms life conditions:

Between 1929 and 1932, farm incomes dropped from almost \$13 billion to \$5.56 billion. As many as a third of all farmers lost their land through foreclosure or eviction. And nature made things worse. Beginning in 1933 and lasting for as long as a decade, the farm belt experienced one of the worst droughts in the nation's history. On the Great Plains hundreds of dust storms known as "black blizzards" blew away the soil. Intense heat killed livestock. (103)

During the summer of 1929, the American economy has suffered severely from the recession of consumer spending and unsold goods. However, stock values continue to increase, reaching stratospheric levels by the fall of that year. The stock market located on the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street in New York City is a center of reckless speculation. Where everyone wants to be a millionaire in which people from different fields start recklessly gambling their savings and investing beyond their needings 1929, Reeves said that "it is strictly a gambling casino with loaded dice. The few sharks taking advantage of a multitude of suckers" (Reeves 102). Therefore, it led to the fast development of the stock market, which reaches its peak in August 1929 (Great Depression History 2021).

The stock market crash is considered to be the real beginning of the great depression because of the great loss of investors and the panic caused to banks. According to Zinn Howard "The stock market crash of 1929, which marked the beginning of the Great Depression of the United States, comes directly from wild speculation which collapsed and brought the whole economy down with it" (361). On October 24, 1929 the stock market crash, that some had anticipated occurred as anxious investors began trading overvalued shares in great masses. Bryn O'Callaghan says in his book on the beginning of the market crash panic: "A panic began On Thursday, October 24, 1929-black Thursday -13 million shares are sold" (79). Nevertheless, Five days later, on October 29<sup>th</sup> or "Black Tuesday"; almost 16 million

shares are traded as another wave of fear hit Wall Street. Millions of shares are considered worthless, and investors who had bought stocks “on margin” with bank loans are entirely wiped out by the end of 1929 (Great Depression History 2021).

As consumer confidence decreases in the aftermath of the stock market crash, the downturn in spending and investment force factories and other business to limit their productivity, therefore fire their workers. Thomas C. Reeves in his book “Twentieth Century America: A brief history” argues that:

Between 1929 and 1932, the national income dropped from over \$82 billion to \$40 billion. Corporate profits plummeted; by 1932, 369,000 companies reported deficits. Industrial production declined by 48percent. Industrial construction dropped from \$949 million to \$74 million. Five thousand banks went under in three years, wiping out nine million savings accounts. (102)

Therefore, Wages and spending power drop even for those who are fortunate enough to keep their jobs. Yet, according to Reeves employed people because of Laissez-Faire<sup>6</sup> economical system suffer from the lack of the social welfare<sup>7</sup> state. According to Reeves”in 1932; three-fourths of the unemployed throughout the nation are without public aid” (103). Despite promises from President Herbert Hoover and other leaders that the crisis would end, conditions continue to worsen over the next three years. By 1930, 4 million Americans hoping for employment are unable to find any. By 1933, the amount of unemployment has increased to almost 15 million that is 25 percent of the population (Great Depression History 2021).

Because of the stock market panic, people are becoming increasingly concerned about the safety of their money. Wealthy people are pulling their financial assets from the economy, and consumers are spending even less money over time. Bankruptcies are becoming more widespread, and people's trust in financial institutions like banks is rapidly decreasing. In 1929, 650 banks collapse. This trauma in bank runs has not stopped at that level; numbers

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<sup>6</sup> The idea that governments and law should not interfere with business, finance, or life conditions of people.

<sup>7</sup>System offers assistance to individuals and families in need, with such programs as health care assistance, food stamps, and unemployment.

continually keep increasing to more than 1,300 by the following year. In 1933, half of country's banks have failed (Great Depression History). In which, Reeves says "Banking practices were often irresponsible, and failures were common. In the first six months of 1929, 346 banks closed their doors. The federal government chose to look the other way and to continue to assure the public that all was well." (102). Moreover; On March 12, 1933, Roosevelt gives the first speeches broadcast over the radio in which he addresses the American people directly what would become known as the "fireside chats". Roosevelt speaks about financial crisis and explains his strategies to overcome the crisis known as The New Deal<sup>8</sup> plan. In which he states that your government does not intend that the history of the past few years should repeated. We [the government] do not want and will not have another epidemic of bank failures". In attempt to convince his people with the benefits of his ideas about The Bank Holidays<sup>9</sup> "I can assure you, my friends," Roosevelt continued, "that it is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than it is to keep it under the mattress". Therefore, Roosevelt's actions and statements contributes to the process of rebuilding public trust, is not the only reason that contributes in the recovery of economy but the World War II is another significant reason. because by the engaging the united states of America to the war Roosevelt succeed in turning attention to the global conflict of World War II. Therefore, people's attention is no longer focus on the economic situation that has helped in reducing the social tension. In the end, led to the banks re-opened in which many depositors arrive ready to invest their money or gold, marking the end of the nation's great financial crisis (Great Depression History 2021).

The Great Depression is one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Millions of people suffer from unemployment, starvation, and homelessness. The great depression leaves people frightened from the weak banking system and worried about their

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<sup>8</sup>The New Deal is a series of programs, public work projects, financial reforms, and regulations enacted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States between 1933 and 1939.

<sup>9</sup>On March 6, 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Emergency Banking Act provides for shutting down the entire U.S. banking system for more than a week.

financial future. Therefore, it contributes to broken the confidence of the American people as well as their leaders. The economy's future is unclear because of the shaky strategies are used to recover. Yet, many Americans continue to have faith in their nation (Great Depression History 2021)

### **1.2.4 The Dust Bowl**

In the 1930s, the Dust Bowl is a natural disaster that affected the Midwest as described by Donald Worster in his book "The Dust Bowl "the darkest moment in the twentieth-century life of the southern plains"(4). It is North America's worst drought in 1,000 years. Worster adds that the dust bowl is “one of three worst manmade ecological disasters” (4) because of man extensive usage of machinery. Farmers used Unsustainable farming techniques that worsened the drought's impact caused ruining the crops that maintained the soil in place. When the winds blew, they created massive dust clouds. It dropped tons of dirt on everything inclusive houses; Dust killed livestock and caused children pneumonia<sup>10</sup>. The storm at its worst can push the dust into Washington, D.C. Drought and dust destroyed a large part of agricultural production in the United States. Therefore, it worsened the Great Depression. (Amadeo)

According to Amadeo the Dust Bowl has harmed the Midwest as a whole. The panhandle of Oklahoma is the worst devastated. Two-thirds of the north of the Texas panhandle is also damaged. It extends to the northeast of New Mexico, the southeast of most of Colorado, and the western third of Kansas. In a surface of 500 kilometers by 300 miles. It covers 100 million acres. Four waves of droughts occur, one after the other. They have took place from 1930-1931, 1934, 1936, to 1939-1940. Before the next storm, the damages regions could not recover. It starts in 1930 and lasts approximately ten years, but its long-term economic impact on the region last far longer. The Midwest and Southern Great Plains suffer

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<sup>10</sup>Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs with a range of possible causes. It can be a serious and life-threatening disease.

severe drought in 1930. In 1931, massive dust storms start. For several years, the drought follow and the ecological catastrophe becomes worst. By 1934, an estimated 35 million acres of formerly cultivated land had been render useless for farming, while another 125 million acres—an area roughly three-quarters the size of Texas—is rapidly losing its topsoil (Dust Bowl 2009).

The Dust Bowl has been a caused of various economic and agricultural causes such as federal land policy, regional weather variations, agriculture economics, and other cultural influences. Donald Worster claims that:

The Dust Bowl took only 50 years to accomplish. It cannot be blamed on illiteracy; or overpopulation or social disorder. It came about because the culture was operating in precisely the way it was supposed to. Americans blazed their way across a richly endowed continent with a ruthless, devastating efficiency unmatched by any people anywhere. (2)

By the end of The Civil war, a succession of government land acts encourage settlers to go west by supporting agriculture on the Great Plains. Following the Homestead Act of 1862, which grants settlers 160 acres of public land, come the Kinkaid Act of 1904 and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909. This legislation result in a massive migration of unskilled and new farmers throughout the Great Plains. Many of these late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century settlers believed in the myth that "rain followed the plow." Owning land and agriculture, according to emigrants, land speculators, politicians, and even some scientists, would radically affect the climate of the semi-arid Great Plains region, making it drier(Dust Bowl 2009). According to Donald Worster, the Dust Bowl is just like the great depression; a crisis makes by man's greed and reckless deeds. Worster says the Dust Bowl in another face of American savage capitalist ideology. Rather than economical, one the dust bowl is environmental capitalism (Worster 5-8)

During the Laissez-Faire, expansionist 1920s the plains are extensively plowed and put to wheat turned into highly mechanized factory farms that produced unprecedented harvests

plains operators, however, ignored all environmental limits in this enterprise, just as Wall Street ignored sharp practices and top-heavy economy. (Worster 6-7)

The Great Plains have blown through catastrophic dust storms during the Dust Bowl period, sometimes refers to as the “black blizzards”. Some of them bring Great Plains to the east as far as Washington, D.C, New York City and covers boats with dust in the Atlantic. Dust would darken the sky, billowing clouds, perhaps at times for days. The dust has drifted like snow in several spots, and the people have had to brush it clear. Dust works through the gaps of even well closed homes and leaves its dirt everywhere on food, clothes and skin. There have been persons living with "dust pneumonia" with chest discomfort and trouble breathing. The massive number of persons who died of the illness is uncertain. It is likely for the dust storms to be the reason. The immense cloud of dust, two miles high, fell to the East Coast for 2000 km, blocks landmarks like Liberty and the U.S. Capitol on May 11, 1934. On April 14, 1935, the worst dust storm has happened. The Black Sunday incident has dubbed by the news sources. In the Oklahoma Panhandle, a wall of sand and dust blowing starts and extends eastward. On Black Sunday, it has been believe that up to three million tons of topsoil blasted the Great Plains (Dust Bowl 2009).

During the 1930s, almost 2.5 million people leave the Dust Bowl states of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. It is one of the greatest migrations in American history, with Oklahoma alone losing 440,000 people. Many of them are unemployed, come west in search of jobs. Between 1935 and 1940, over 250,000 Oklahomans migrate to California in which they become known as "the Okies"(Dust Bowl 2009). All these consequences led Franklin. D Roosevelt to start agricultural reform by imposing many act in order to support agriculture sector and farmers who are forgotten in the middle of the economic and environmental trauma.

American Twenties or the roaring Twenties is known to oscillate between its prosperous beginning and its disastrous end, which lasts for more than another decade. That is the beginning of the twenties marked by a massive economic booming; that has been call "the

golden age"; where people witness the emergence of "the American dream." However, the late decade marked by an economic decline known as "the great depression" in addition to a devastating environmental disaster called "the dust bowl" both crises are human-made, but in the end, Americans paid back for their selfish decisions, irresponsible deeds, and reckless gambling in banks and nature at the time of prosperity.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

Marxism is a materialist philosophy, named after the philosopher Karl Marx, the founder of the theory; its focus is to examine the problematic nature of Capitalism on the economy by explaining power dynamics and class conflict, which makes this theory suitable to interpret Steinbeck's work "Grapes of Wrath" according to its social, historical, and political conditions. This part will tackle the founding ideas of Marxism, mentioning the two major theories related to it, the historical materialism theory and Marx's alienation theory, in order to explain the applicable theory in this research paper.

#### **1.3.1 The Origins of Marxism**

Karl Marx, a German radical philosopher and economist, creates Marxism, with substantial contributions from his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* is written by Marx and Engels (1848); a booklet presenting their historical materialism theory and predicting the industrial proletariat's ultimate downfall of Capitalism. After Marx's death, Engels edits the second and third volumes of Marx's analysis and criticism of Capitalism, *Das Kapital*. (McLellan 2021) Enlightenment ideas, German philosophy, French socialists, and English and Scottish political economists are all key intellectual influences on Marx to create a new system of thought (Ormerod).

In the twentieth century, the "Russian Revolution Architects," lead by Leon Trotsky, adapt Marx's principles to literary works. However, Stalin has exiled Trotsky, and Theodor Adorno is instrumental in forming the core of early Marxist criticism. After that, the Frankfurt

School seeks to reform the theory in order to make it more resistant to authoritarian corruption. The criticism hit its peak during times of economic crisis and gradually faded following the Great Depression. Marxism resurfaces again in the 1960s, during a period marked by politically tumultuous events such as the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Marxist Literary Theory 2021).

### **1.3.2 Marx's historical materialism theory**

Marx's historical materialism theory is a materialistic view of society's history; materialism refers to society's materialist structure. It is how the legal and political superstructure of society is based on economic infrastructure (Rashmi 2014). Marx's historical materialist theory attempts to explain human nature and progress in terms of empirically observable material circumstances (Baur 2017). Marx says that the hypothesis that serves him as the basis for his analysis of society has been subsequently called historical materialism; he has applied it to capitalist society in his both manifests der kommunistischen Partei the Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital "Capital", as well as other publications. For him, social reality is based the social consciousness and the economic structure (Chambre 2020).

Marx's theory of historical materialism argues that, human societies and their cultural institutions, such as religion, law, and morality, are the result of collective economic activity. Hegel's dialectical technique inspired Marx's thought greatly. While Marx agreed with Hegel's basic dialectical theory of social evolution, he rejected the idea that abstract thoughts were the driving factor. Marx, on the other hand, claimed that the dialectic of change was driven by material, economic force or our relationship to the natural, biological, and physical world. The internal contradictions in the system of material production, in particular, are the engine of history. (Historical Materialism 2012)

### **1.3.3 Marx's Alienation Theory**

Karl Marx's theory of alienation explains people's social alienation from their human nature (species essence) as a result of living in a stratified society. Therefore, self-alienation is caused by being a mechanized part of society that led humans to be isolated from their humanity. The theoretical basis of alienation within the capitalist economic system is that; the worker loses the ability to determine life, and destiny when deprived of the right to think of themselves as the director of their actions. in order to determine the character of actions. to

describe relationships and to own those items of value from goods and services, produced by their labor. Although the worker is an independent, self-aware human being, as an economic unit, the working class is directed to activities defined by the bourgeoisie—the owners—to extract the maximum amount of profit from the worker.( Alienation2021)

In his book *“The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 1844”*, Karl Marx separates six main types of alienation of workers under capitalism. These six elements are closely related. The worker's alienation from his or her product is the most simplified element of alienation and, in some ways the conceptual sense is the starting point of the idea of alienation. A worker's product does not belong to the worker under capitalism. It belongs to the capitalist who employs the worker. Which is the objectification of workers' creativity, (the worker's activity converted into an object and therefore a part of his or her person) is taking away from his or her control or alienated. Furthermore, the alienated product serves the capitalist acquires more dominating power over the workers (Graff). Marx says: “the alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him” (Marx 108).

The second element that Marx mentioned is the worker's productive activity alienation. Marx says: the worker's relationship to his own activity has been ignored, that is it does not belong to him; therefore the worker's own physical and mental energy have been taking away from him and turned against him. Thus, it does not belong to him anymore but rather it belongs to the capitalist system (111). That is, because the product is not for the worker, therefore the activity that produces it also belongs to the capitalist system, and the worker's power over his or her activity is therefore alienated (Graff)

The third aspect of alienation is the worker's alienation from nature (Graff). Marx claims “Thus the more the worker by his labor alienates the external world, hence sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of means of life in a double manner: first, in that the sensuous external world more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labor---to be

his labor's means of life; and secondly, in that it more and more ceases to be means of life in the immediate sense, means for the physical subsistence of the worker". (Marx 108)

The worker's alienation from other humans is the fourth element. The source of this alienation is found in the fact that it is, of course, another human being, the capitalist, who takes away the worker's output and controls his or her productive activity by different means of dominating. Marx said "If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it might be delight and life's joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man" (Marx 115). In other words, the worker and the capitalist have a connection that prevents them from seeing each other as human beings (Graff).

The fifth element is the worker's alienation from their actual needs. This is the basis for the American consumerism phenomena that is built on many commercials and advertisement that directed to different classes seeking to impose control on minds, therefore, directing human thoughts, feelings, and needs (Graff). According to Marx: "Every person speculates on creating a new need in another, so as to drive him to a fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of gratification and hence economic ruin... The increase in the quantity of objects is accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new possibility of mutual swindling and mutual plundering" (Marx 147)

The final element is the alienation of the worker from himself or herself; Marx claims that: "...the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself---his inner world-- becomes, the less belongs to him as his own" (Marx 108). In other words, workers immediate degradation from their needs and powers make them loose themselves and forget to realize their possibilities (Graff).

Capitalism's rise promotes alienation and materialism in society. Therefore, Karl Marx rejects capitalism because it harms human and it destroys them by using their work against them. Human beings develop themselves and achieve specifically human fulfillment via working, but working under capitalism turns people into slaves and destroys their powers for job satisfaction. In other word, capitalism reduces people to commodities or anything that is less than human (Graff).

## **1.4 Conclusion**

The roaring twenties industrial development brings massive changes to the American society and culture by offering job opportunities to everyone who seeks to reach their ultimate American dream through hard work, regardless of their economic or social background, making the United States the greatest country in the world.

However, this golden age of prosperity evokes a catastrophic end. starting from banks failure that is a result of the Stock Market Crash in 1929 which paves the way to almost a decade of the great economic depression combined with the natural disaster that hit the great plains known as the dust bowl, where millions of Americans are left behind to struggle with unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. The next chapter tackles the effects of Capitalism on dehumanization the American society, in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* on the light of Marxist theory.

**Chapter two**  
**The portrayal of**  
**capitalism and**  
**dehumanization in**  
***the grapes of wrath***

## **2.1 Introduction**

The *Grapes of Wrath* is an American realist novel written by John Steinbeck who has published it in 1939 a time of great economic and environmental crisis. The book wins the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and then the Nobel Prize in 1962. The novel might be interpreted through different critical lenses, but the Marxist interpretation is the most common. Steinbeck's literary work depicts the hardships that the capitalist system produces for working-class people, that is his realistic piece of art was meant to truth about the historical events inspired him to write his masterpiece the *Grapes of Wrath* according to Haslett Moyra "Realism is the form in which the interaction between literature and society appears to be most obvious. In realist text, literature might be seen to reflect society or history" (86). Therefore this chapter will be discussing two major themes in the *Grapes of Wrath*; that is, the first part of the chapter aims to portray capitalism representation in the novel. While the second part, will be dedicated to investigate the implications, and complication of capitalist system and leads the United States of America to a socio-economic crisis that alienates the workers from their society and even from their humanity.

## **2.2 capitalism representation in the grapes of wrath**

Capitalism is an economic and political system in which private owners or private market controls the industry rather than the state, this system has different definitions

"Capitalism" means the sector of an economy in which markets determine prices and quantities. In a "capitalist" system, both the market for goods and the market for inputs are based on voluntary action within the constraints of governmental interventions, namely taxes, subsidies, restrictions, and mandates (Foldvary 2015).

## 2.2.1 Greediness of bank system and landowners

The Grapes of Wrath shows how capitalism system oppression costs the Joads their farm when they are unable to produce crops due to the drought; so they can pay back their loans neither to the bank nor to the landowners. In the novel, Steinbeck is trying to criticize the economic system that drove farmers to homelessness and extreme poverty. Therefore, the conflict between banks and landowners, and the tenant farmers is a central point in the grapes of wrath; which, Steinbeck has shed light on this conflict in the very first chapters.

In chapter five, Steinbeck describes the arrival of the bank representatives (owners) with the tractors to evict the farmers, Steinbeck use the word “monsters” to refer to the banks; In which, he said that “he bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control” (Steinbeck 33). That is, bank is man-made but man lost control over it; therefore, banks now control man. Nevertheless; this chapter reveals that bank is in control of the entire situation, a conversation was held by the farmers and the bank owners reveals that the owners themselves hated what the bank is doing; and some are just cold are cold; but in the end, the work they were doing for them is a necessary evil that they can never escape due to the capitalist economic system, and others are proud of being the controlling masters Steinbeck said:

“Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one was cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves. Some of them hated the mathematics that drove them, and some were afraid, and some worshiped the mathematics because it provided a refuge from thought and from feeling. If a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank - or the Company - needs - wants - insists - must have - as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them. These last would take no responsibility for the banks or the companies because they

were men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time. Some of the owner men were a little proud to be slaves to such cold and powerful masters. The owner men sat in the cars and explained. You know the land is poor. You've scabbled at it long enough, God knows.”(Steinbeck 30)

The previous quote reflects the relations under the capitalist system. That it there social classes that control the amount of power people can have, thus the upper class represented in banks and owners have an economic supremacy that allows them to have a political supremacy as well. So that the bourgeoisie has the dominant power to impose their ideology on others such as the working class represented with the tenant farmer (Basuk and Astutiningsih 60) according to Lois Tyson “For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so on. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ideological realities is built. economic power therefore always includes social and political power as well” (50). Furthermore; Steinbeck refers to the bank system as corrupted and immoral thing; thus, their only interest is to make more money regardless the tenants’ situation.in chapter five, the landowner is trying to explain the bank nature to the tenant farmer saying that:

“Man can hold land if he can just eat and pay taxes; he can do that. Yes, he can do that until his crops fail one day and he has to borrow money from the bank. But—you see, a bank or a company can’t do that, because those creatures don’t breathe air, don’t eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don’t get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so” (Steinbeck 35).

This quote shows the bank selfishness and greediness that it refuses to care about others but instead cares about his own interest the grantee him to breathe. Therefore, the tenant no longer has faith in the bank. Therefore, they declare the they should never trust the a monster that cares only about profits he could take from them to get bigger and remain alive (Steinbeck

35).thus if the banks weren't as greedy then it would be possible that so many farmers wouldn't lose their job and have to sell their farm, but the monster choose to ignore those poor farmers, or even worst to take advantage of their desperate need.

The bank greediness is continually growing. In chapter five, Steinbeck reveals the hash truth of the farmers' fate the landowners have decided. That is, the bank (the monster) and landowners want to increase their profits by limiting the working hand by machines invasion, therefore, they no longer care about people's starvation and poverty. This obsessive materialism has caused unprecedented level of immorality and Inhumanity. This means that the bank wants only the land with no farmers and tractors on it (The Grapes of Wrath Great Depression Quotes).

"At last the owner men came to the point. The tenant system won't work anymore. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve of fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take the crop. We have to do it. We don't like to do it. But the monster's sick. Something's happened to the monster"(Steinbeck 41).

Nevertheless, after taking lands and forcing the farmers toward unemployment poverty. Landowners' greed did not stop at this point; they spread rumors about jobs in California with high wages. This was after all a big lie only to reduce wages by using more people in work fields. Thus labor exploitation will allow them increase the level of productivity while decreasing wages, therefore increasing their profits (Diouf). In chapter twenty, the Joad family has been shocked of the landowners' injustice toward the working people. Tom speaking to the landowner says:

"Back home some fellas come through with han'bills—orange ones. Says they need lots a people out here to work the crops." The young man laughed. "They say they's three hundred thousan' us folks here, an' I bet ever' dam' fam'ly seen them han'bills." "Yeah, but if they don' need folks, what'd they go to the trouble puttin' them things out for?" "Use your head, why don'cha?" "Yeah, but I wanta know." "Look," the young man said. "S'pose you got a job a work, an' there's jus' one fella wants the job. You got to pay 'im what he asts. But

s'pose they's a hundred men." He put down his tool. His eyes hardened and his voice sharpened. "S'pose they's a hundred men wants that job. S'pose them men got kids, an' them kids is hungry. S'pose a lousy dime'll buy a box a mush for them kids. S'pose a nickel'll buy at leas' some pin for them kids. An' you got a hunderd men. Jus' offer 'em a nickel—why, they'll kill each other fightin' for that nickel. Know what they was payin' las' job I had? Fifteen cents an hour. Ten hours for a dollar an' a half, an' ya can't stay on the place. Got to burn gasoline gettin' there." He was panting with anger, and his eyes blazed with hate. "That's why them han'bills was out. You can print a hell of a lot of han'bills with what ya save payin' fifteen cents an hour for fiel' work" (Steinbeck 166).

This quote shows the landowners inhuman and injustice deeds toward the poor migrant workers who does not have anything to do only accepting the landowners offer. Furthermore, in chapter seven, Steinbeck gives another example of ownership supremacy that wealthy capitalists have. When the owner of the car dealership trains the Salesmen to make their consumers feel guilty for taking more thinking about the deal (Steinbeck 42). Therefore, Steinbeck represents the domination power of the owners as a bad thing that makes people greedy and selfish. The Salesman says:

“Listen, Jim, I heard that Chevvy's rear end. Sounds like bustin' bottles. Squirt in a couple quarts of sawdust. Put some in the gears, too. We got to move that lemon for thirty-five dollars. Bastard cheated me on that one. I offer ten an' he jerks me to fifteen, an' then the son-of-a-bitch took the tools out. God Almighty! I wisht I had five hundred jalopies. This ain't gonna last. He don't like the tires? Tell 'im they got ten thousand in'em” (Steinbeck 42).

This quote from chapter seven shows how the salesmen before deliver the jalopies, he tries to convince Jim Casy and Tom Joad by covering up the sound by putting sawdust into the engine and replace excellent batteries with damaged ones. The tenants are aware that they have been taken advantage of, but they have no choices. According to Karl Marx “The result of capitalist mode of production produces capitalist private property” (141). Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* dedicated many chapters to portray the truth about the corrupted capitalist

system. Represented in banks or “the monsters”, and the landowners who contributed in making the crisis worse the farmers, by taking advantage from their need to make more profits. Thus, greediness of bank system and landowners is a conflict that drives the events in the novel.

### **2.2.2 Individualism**

American individualism and self-reliance is one of the basic concepts that shape the American dream during the roaring twenties. thus; through self- determinism and hardworking every individual shall have the right to be rich by providing equal opportunities to all individuals. According to William Warner:

Americans – devout advocates of individualism – believe that individualism means that each man has within himself the right to make his own choices and to make or break his life-career on the basis of his own judgment. ... Whenever the American system of equal opportunity and individualism Operates successfully and a man can make his choices and be rewarded when he does well, then Americans believe the system is fair, and their way of life is Understandable to all because they can live and act as individuals and be Rewarded accordingly. (138-139)

The Grape of Wrath is not considered as a celebration neither to the American dream nor to individualism. Steinbeck throughout his novel presented American individualism as a selfish thing that should be stopped. The Grapes of Wrath is a celebration neither of the American dream nor of individuality. He presented Steinbeck throughout his American solo novel as a selfish thing that should be stopped. Moreover, many characters in the novel have been captured as individualists. Al among them is the strongest individualist character in the novel; Al is the youngest member in the Joad family. Yet, he considers his family the biggest obstacle for his self-development "I'm goin' out on my own purty soon. Fella can make his way a lot easier if he ain't got a family." (Steinbeck 361). This strong declaration of

individualism was not the only, Al on several occasions states that he wants to leave the family and work in a garage so that he can leave in a room by his own and eat all what he wants in restaurants he said:

"I'm a-gonna save up. I'll save up an' then I'm a-goin' in a town an' get me a job in a garage. Live in a room an' eat in restaurants. Go to the movin' pitchers ever' damn night. Don' cost much. Cowboy pitchers." (Steinbeck 366)

However, Al is not the only individualist character in the novel. Tom Joad as well has been presented as a person who has forgotten the family meaning after four years jail. Hence, after Tom meets Jim he will come to know that importance of collectivism to change the social injustice and the negative attitudes towards the working class. Nevertheless, Tom realizes that it is impossible for a single 'Okie' to make his way in the Californian community by himself when he has been exploited by the landowners (Steinbeck 166). After the arrival to Hooverville Casy invited tom to join the migrant union. In which, he has explained for him that because of their activism through strikes the labor start to be well-paid (Steinbeck 399-403). Afterwards when, Tom hides in the camp because he has been suspected of murdering a policeman. After Casy's murder, Tom seems to change tendency towards individuality with collectivism thoughts. Thus, Tom declares his belonging to the migrant union by delivers his remarkable speech to Ma:

"I'll be ever'where – wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. [...]... I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' – I'll be in the ways kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the house they build – why, I'll be there". (Steinbeck 439)

This quote shows that Tom will do all what he can to help those in need. That mean Tom decides to be individual rather than being individualist (McElvain199). This communal spirit is important is the most important thing for Ma Joad, she is committed to do everything

in order to keep her family together, she stated that she is afraid of migration while the whole family is gathered(Steinbeck 162). However, in chapter five the tractor driver who has been like a robot on an iron seat is another example of bad individualism he says:

"I got orders wherever there's a family not moved out – if I have an accident – you know, get too close and cave the house in a little – well, I might get a couple of dollars. And my youngest kid never had no shoes yet." (Steinbeck 57)

This quote shows the not only selfishness and self-interest on the driver and landowners but also violence. Therefore, Warner argues that the open class system, and capitalist ideology that is imposed on society; is the main reason of the emerge of this seamy type of individualism; thus, he suggests to reduce the belief in free individualism (138).Steinbeck was like American who have lost their faith in the American dream .that is he writes the grapes of wrath as a form of social protest for changes.

### **2-2-3 industrialization**

Industrial revolution was one of the most significant transformations of the time, the U.S economic system transformed from an economy based on farming and handicrafts to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing. The Grapes of Wrath provides a glimpse into America's changing culture during 20th century that is dominating by industrialization; it has described into the novel as a process of exploitation that widened the gap between the wealthy landowners who own the means of production and the helpless tenant farmers who have nothing. In Marxist view industrialization helps the wealthy grow even wealthier and the poor even poorer, which creates huge gap between the two classes the bourgeoisie, and proletariat. Steinbeck creates a setting in Oklahoma that helps him to illustrate the effects of industrialization within the American society of the 1930s during the dust bowl that is this period for his is the machine age (Steinbeck 30). Steinbeck says

“The tenant system won't work anymore. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop” (20)

The previous quote explains greediness of the new system when representatives of the banks have come onto the lands to give orders to the agricultural families that they are no longer permitted to sharecrop the land because banks insist owners to use machines that are more profitable for them by replacing variable capital (tenant farmers) with fixed capital (machines). Everything has summed up in few words the tractor driver says when the angry farmers protest against the new system:

“Times are changing, mister, don't you know? Can't make a living on the land unless you've got two, five, ten thousand acres and a tractor. Crop land isn't for little guys like us anymore.”(Steinbeck 37)

Capitalist industrialization has a negative effects on small lands' owners, who are forced into debt and have become tenants on land that is technically under the bank's authority "A man can hold land if he can just eat and pay taxes; he can do that."(Steinbeck 41-42). With the rise of industrialization, many farmers have lost their jobs and they could no longer sustain the situation due to the lack of financial resources, thus they have been kicked out of their houses, because banks prefer machines over tenant farmers “that’s the bank when it has land – wants tractors, not families on the land” (Steinbeck 193). Steinbeck describes the modern man of industry as mechanized who has no relations, neither with the land nor with his community “The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man...he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat" unnatural beings who lives apart from the soil and in so doing have become dehumanized, raping the land and cutting the earth with blades, the monster has gotten into his head, he consider his interests first and has been able to put more and more agricultural families out of business and out of their lands as well, since a tractor can handle the work of many farming families, he accepts to work for the monster regardless the miserable situation of the poor families, he only cares about himself and the three dollar he gain every day, farmers have nothing to do but to complain about the monsters' machines "But for your three dollars a day fifteen or twenty families can't eat at all. Nearly a hundred people have to go out

and wander on the roads for your three dollars a day. Is that right?"(Steinbeck 25) they suddenly found themselves without food and shelter, they have nothing to take it back, they have been told that the thing they are dealing with is more powerful and out of their reach, deep down they believe that man is the one who has created this power and later it becomes out of his control.

It is true that industrialization enhanced total economic production and has raised the life's standard of the wealthy landowners. Moreover, those who accepts to work for the monster as well, but it makes life hard for the weak, like the Joads and the rest of the Okies farming families who have been alienated from their lands. and because they had no skill other than farming, they continued to struggle poverty and strong unemployment even more after they have migrated to California; the promised land, where they expected to have a decent life but the fact is way different, this experience has helped them to become more conscious about the dehumanized system that has been created by man.

#### **2-2-4 Labor exploitation and law wages:**

Grapes of wrath is set in the era of Great Depression when the American economy as a whole is slumped and the rate of unemployment has reached its peak, within the novel Steinbeck depicts the economic system under capitalism, that based on the exploitation of the weak through spreading unemployment and poverty. In The Grapes of Wrath, The Joads represent all migrant workers with similar situation, who experience inhumanity and dehumanizing behavior from landlords and townspeople.

Steinbeck believe that unemployment has been purposely created to accommodate the owners requirements and serve their interests by putting constant pressure on workers' wage, forcing them to work extra harder at lower prices out of fear of losing their job to someone else who is looking for it, according to Marx, it is the relative surplus population; the unemployed, it is the power to enhance the exploitation and domination of capital. In the

novel, Floyd reveals to Tom the case with the surplus of laborers. When the Joad's family blind faith in the promise of work presented in the orange handbill that grandpa carries in his coat, they may expect to find jobs and earn good wages as soon as they arrive in California. However, the reality is another story:

"Back home some fellas come through with han'bills—orange ones. Says they need lots a people out here to work the crops."

The young man laughed. "They say they's three hundred thousan' us folks here, an' I bet ever' dam' fam'ly seen them han'bills."

"Yeah, but if they don' need folks, what'd they go to the trouble puttin' them things out for?"

"Use your head, why don'cha?"

"Yeah, but I wanta know."

"Look," the young man said. "S'pose you got a job a work, an' there's jus' one fella wants the job. You got to pay 'im what he asts. But s'pose they's a hundred men." He put down his tool. His eyes hardened and his voice sharpened. "S'pose they's a hundred men wants that job. S'pose them men got kids, an' them kids is hungry. S'pose a lousy dime'll buy a box a mush for them kids. S'pose a nickel'll buy at leas' some pin for them kids. An' you got a hunderd men. Jus' offer 'em a nickel—why, they'll kill each other fightin' for that nickel. Know what they was payin' las' job I had? Fifteen cents an hour. Ten hours for a dollar an' a half, an' ya can't stay on the place. Got to burn gasoline gettin' there." He was panting with anger, and his eyes blazed with hate. "That's why them han'bills was out. You can print a hell of a lot of han'bills with what ya save payin' fifteen cents an hour for fiel' work" (166).

The benefits are clearly in the owners' hands. They may be able to dictate wages and push them extremely low, to the point where a labour income is insufficient to feed his family. Steinbeck shows the miserable situation of the migrants as victims of a corrupted

system and land owners' cruelty who have published additional handbills to attract more surplus labour, which can fight for work despite the low wages.

“And the migrants streamed in on the highways and their hunger was in their eyes, and their need was in their eyes. They had no argument, no system, nothing but their numbers and their needs. When there was work for a man, ten men fought for it, fought with a low wage. If that fella work for thirty cents, I'll work for twenty-five. If he'll take twenty-five, I'll do it for twenty. No, me, I'm hungry. I'll work for fifteen. I'll work for food.”(Steinbeck 193)

Through this quote, Steinbeck depict the miserable situation of migrants who fight for jobs despite the low wages, and it is obvious that land owners are happy to cut workers' wages and keep the production price high because it means more profits for them. One of the Marxist economic theories is the concept of surplus value, when the amount of work required to make the goods are unequal to the goods value, that is to say that bourgeois capitalists do not pay wages equal to the goods production value, however, Steinbeck illustrate proletariat exploitation system within the novel he says:

“We come to work there. They says it's gonna be fi' cents. They was a hell of a lot of us. We got there an' they say they're payin' two an' a half cents. A fella can't even eat on that, an' if he got kids—so we says we won't take it. So they druv us off. An' all the cops in the worl' come down on us Try an' tell 'em, Tom. They'll get two an' a half, jus' the minute we're gone. You know what two an' a half is—that's one ton of peaches picked an' carried for a dollar...No—you can't do it. You can't get your food for that. Can't eat for that.” (Steinbeck 383)

this quote describes when the Joads find a work at a fruit farm that pay five cents per box of peaches picked, but Casy warn them that the farm planned on paying two and a half cents per box of peaches picked, the same as they have done before to Casy and his fellows. That is proletariat exploitation system aims to increase their profit, yet they reduce continually

the wages to the extent that it is not enough for workers to afford supper, but Joads and other hungry families agree to work for them because they have no other choice. Throughout the novel Steinbeck draw attention to the selfish nature of materialistic landowners who believe that the only way to exploit migrants is through dehumanizing them. They have not treated as human being that is why Casy has been savagely murdered as he attempts to collect farmers in order to strengthen their efforts. In the novel labour exploitation is not confined to the poor workers and the migrants only but extended to include the small farmers in California after the emergence of the new method:

"And now the great owners and the companies invented a new method. A great owner bought a cannery. And when the peaches and the pears were ripe he cut the price of fruit below the cost of raising it. And as cannery owner he paid himself a low price for the fruit and kept the price of canned goods up and took his profit. And the little farmers who owned no canneries lost their farms, and they were taken by the great owners, the banks, and the companies who also owned the canneries. As time went on, there were fewer farms. The little farmers moved into town for a while and exhausted their credit, exhausted their friends, their relatives. And then they too went on the highways. And the roads were crowded with men ravenous for work, murderous for work." (Steinbeck 449)

The great owners and companies establish new method, through which they acquire more profits and grow even wealthier, and by so doing they could take the small farmers lands and led them to compete with the other migrants for a job in spite of the low price, and poor people will find it difficult, if not impossible, to improve their living conditions.

### **2-3 Human Commodification as the Effect of Capitalism:**

Capitalism as a dominant process underlies the transformation of life in all societies. The capitalist need for goods and services led everything that enters into its costs of

manufacturing, whether it is a material good or an activity becomes commoditized. That is to say that capitalism is the main reason behind commodification by converting everything into profit including human, social or cultural value. In addition, labour under capitalism has been sold by workers, and bought by employers. The major driver of commodification is the need to maximize profits and cut labour costs.

According to Marx, Commodities are objects that satisfy human needs and wants. Commodities are the fundamental units of capitalism, a form of economy based on the intense accumulation of such objects. The basic criterion for assessing a commodity's value is its essential usefulness, what it does in the way of satisfying need and wants. This usefulness is its use-value, a property intrinsic to the commodity. Commodities also possess an exchange-value, the relative value of a commodity in relation to other commodities in an exchange situation. Unlike use-value, exchange-value is not intrinsic to a commodity. Exchange-value allows one to determine what one commodity is worth in relation to another commodity, for example how many units of corn one might exchange for a given unit of linen. In a complex market, all sorts of different commodities, although satisfying different needs and wants, must be measurable in the same units, namely money. (Capital "Das Kapital"2005). In grapes of wrath, Human commodification refers to the process through which economic value supersedes spiritual value. Steinbeck tells the story of the oppressed migrants who are obliged to sell their labour force at a low price to provide their own needs to survive.

### **2-3-1 Social Darwinism**

Social Darwinism is the application of Darwin's most popular concepts to human societies, , social classes, and individuals. These included competition, struggle, survival, fitness, and adaptation. The theory believes in "Survival of the fittest" and it has been used to support laissez-faire capitalism, as well as to justify certain political, social, or economic views.

In the world of the novel, Steinbeck build on Darwinian ideas of competition and selection, the Joads and other migrant workers are a species that migrates throughout the country, leaving behind the old ecosystem and being obliged to establish a new one by natural and unnatural forces. They migrate to a more prosperous niches that appears to have plenty of places for them, but competition and repression kill many of them, nevertheless, the survivors have a remarkable ability to adapt. The process of selection begins from the first day of the Joads' migration, for example, Grampa, despite his strength, is unable to adapt to the new environment and dies, he did not want to leave his land because he believe that he belong to the soil, Steinbeck reveals this fact through Casy when he says: "Grampa didn' die tonight. He died the minute you took 'im off the place" (Steinbeck 160).

"Grampa shows the weakness to adapt changing environments, whereas Ma Joad represent the strongest survival because she can adapt every situation "She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position" (Steinbeck 47) Steinbeck paint the character of Ma Joad as the strongest blood who can change and adapt with the new ecosystem, she symbolizes wisdom, by the end of the book she has clearly learned what it means to be the fittest: "We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on—changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right on ... some die, but the rest is tougher" (Steinbeck 467).

Steinbeck illustrate Tom and Ma Joad as strong blood race, both represent the new race with a sense of competition and natural selection, they adapt and fight for the "We"; a superior human being to the old "I" selfish and self-interest. The chapter twenty-eight witnessed the most significant transformation of Tom who build up a high sense of community by devoting himself to his fellow human beings., and guarantee a strong sense of empathy that no sorrow is able to crush through his speech he declares that he will everything to help those in need like Casy(Steinbeck 439). According to social Darwinists, human existence in society is a battle for survival ruled by the principle of "survival of the fittest," a concept used by British philosopher and scientist Herbert Spencer (Social Darwinism 2019),

in *Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck shows that the fittest are the wealthiest because they are the most successful and the dominated group. Wealthy people exist at the top of the capitalist system, they build their way up through exploitation of workers, they lack sympathy and as a logical result, will lose their humanity and, most likely, their existence as a group.

"There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates -- died of malnutrition -- because the food must rot, must be forced to rot. (Steinbeck 364)

The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed. Moreover, they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs have killed in a ditch and covered with quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the hungry, there is a growing wrath. In the souls of people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage. (Steinbeck 449)

The past quote combines the novel's major themes of greed, oppression, suffering, injustice, and dehumanization, Steinbeck unmasks the reality of rich landowners cruelty and selfishness who create a miserable existence for the landless labors, they deprive them of the most basic necessities of existence in order to keep them under their control; as a process to preserve their positions by using their power against the weak and the oppressed. Within the quote Steinbeck, mention the most terrifying power that stands against the power of wealth that is the anger of the oppressed that grows deeper and more powerful, much as the grapes used to produce wine ripen and develop greater flavor.

## 2.3.2 Migrants Discrimination in California

The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl had a massive impact on rural Americans. The dust storms' causes severe environmental impact on lands; it has dried up the land as well as reducing jobs and economic growth. The drought stops crop production, leading to a reducing farmers' income. Furthermore, the tenant farmers have faced the cruelty of banks and landowners who forced them to leave the land that they have been on for generations. Thus; those farmers find themselves obliged leave the homeland and migrated westward to California. Steinbeck starts chapter fourteen saying:

“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 labor unity; striking at new taxes, at plans; not knowing these things are results, not causes. Results, not causes; results, not causes”. (Steinbeck100)

This quote describes the arrival of mass migration to the West. That is, the government and wealthy people in California are terrified of potential changes that could damage their interests. Moreover, the migrants represented in the Joad family are in a big shock because of the bad condition in the government camps (Hooverville), Steinbeck pictures the camp a filthy place full with hungry people Most of them were unable to find work, that is everyone whatever he wants, there is no feeling of togetherness, as well as the lack sanitary services because it is not an official camp. Thus, Children are starving in a camp that is full with negativity and greed

There was no order in the camp; little gray tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random. The first house was nondescript. The south wall was made of three sheets of rusty corrugated iron, the east wall a square of moldy carpet tacked between two boards,

the north wall a strip of roofing paper and a strip of tattered canvas, and the west wall six pieces of gunny sacking. Over the square frame, on untrimmed willow limbs, grass had been piled, not thatched, but heaped up in a low mound. The entrance, on the gunnysack side, was cluttered with equipment. A five-gallon kerosene can serve for a stove. It has lain on its side, with a section of rusty stovepipe thrust in one end. A wash boiler rested on its side against the wall; and a collection of boxes lay about, boxes to sit on, to eat on. A Model T Ford sedan and a two-wheel trailer were parked beside the shack, and about the camp there hung a slovenly despair (Steinbeck 163).

Nevertheless Migrant families “the Okies” have founded themselves in face of prejudice and discrimination. In Chapter Eighteen, a police officer gives the Joads a personal experience with Californians' prejudice toward migrant laborers as he treats the migrants with disrespect. He A police officer abuses Ma Joad, calling her a "Okie," and threatens to run her out if her family does not quit their camp by the morning (Steinbeck 213-214) Californians attempted to discourage the increase of the migrant labor population by all means possible. Discrimination and Prejudice against migrant workers from the Great Plains “Okies” was a big problem that prevents migrants from the Integration into the community.in chapter twenty-one Steinbeck says:

“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 were bad, as a man must do before he fights. They said, these goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate, sexual maniacs. These goddamned Okies are thieves. They'll steal anything. They've got no sense of property rights.” (283)

This quote reveals the different stereotypes that are Californians use as a synonym of being a migrant. Where they are excluded from their right to own a property and their of humanity as well.in which, the work “Okie” itself is a discrimination against the great plane migrants especially Oklahomans.in addition to that, according to Steinbeck Californians

would look in those migrants eyes, and simply say that they don't like them. Thus, they will not hesitate telling them boldly that they are not welcomed to settle down in California (214).nevertheless, Tom use to think that "Okie" means only that he is from Oklahoma, until he meets a man who gives his the real meaning he says:

“Well Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-..... Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it. [Californians] They're so scairt an' worried they ain't even nice to each other” (Steinbeck 205-206).

This quote shows the hatred Californians had for the migrant families who were looking for hope. Therefore, Californian people and government have seen migrant as a heavy burden on their society. Though, wealthy Californian landowners are the main cause for migration phenomena. According to Marxism, the wealthy capitalist (bourgeoisie) creates different stereotypes as a kind of propaganda in order to prevent the proletariat from seeking self-development. Thus, keep dominating social classes (Rummel). That is the case for the okies families; Californian landowners' uses prejudice discrimination in order to keep migrants under control. Thus, from Marxist perspective the poor are obliged to fight for survival throughout their lives to prevents them from engaging in political and social activism, so that wealthy capitalist are able to protect their interests (Tyson 53).

### **2.3.3 Man Alienation from Humanity**

John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* reveals the beliefs and moral values of Californian society in the 1930s. Tom and his family have been evicted from their houses by the bank because the drought has reduced the income of the farm. Thus, they join plenty of other migrants on Route 66 in their quest for a better life in California. Both wealthy Californian landowners and Californian workers alienate migrant families by ignoring their humanity and life worth in search of protecting only their own interest (Mathes).

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, capitalist wealthy landowners and bank system alienates the farmers at the beginning from their land. That is, the farmers have a strong bound with their land; they use to serve their corps as if they are a part of their existence

"Sure, cried the tenant men, but it's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's a paper with numbers on it. What makes it ours—being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it." (Steinbeck 33)

This quote shows the emotional attachment between the farmer and land.. That is, the farmer cries and speaks about his land as a living thing. Therefore, in chapter nine Steinbeck explains that when the bank forces farmers to leave their land, he is not only taking their property rights away he also alienates them of their past and the memories they have made there (112).

The second type of alienation the farmers faces is their alienation from the own identity by giving them new name to be called with. The Californian refers to the great plain migrants with the name "Okie", Tom thought this name means he is from Oklahoma. However, the name rather is a whole description of their desperate condition, and another type of prejudice and discrimination. According to Mathes by identifying migrants as "Okies", Californians alienated and dehumanized them. The assumption that a migrant is a "dirty son-of-a-...." further dehumanizes migrants by associating them to filthy street dogs. The term "scum" is also offensive, and connecting migrants to dirt is insulting as well (Mathes). Steinbeck in chapter eighteen demonstrates that Californians believed the migrants were worthless; when the Joad family buy gas and after leaving the station, the worker at the gas station says:

"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 aint a hell of a lot better than gorillas." (Steinbeck. 221)

The previous quote embodies strong words of human degradation from humanity. Thus, the sparker here blames the Okies to their situation as if they are responsible for all the misery they have faced. Therefore, he alienates them from their human being. Nevertheless, workers alienation was another type of human degradation. As mentioned in chapter one; Karl Marx considers workers alienation from their production as a serves the capitalists to further domination over the workers Marx says:

The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. (Marx 108)

It means that workers alienation from his creative product is kind of ignorance to the worker existence.as well as being alienated from human being en general. According to Marx labor have always the sense of being external to their work field, that is, the worker in his job does not prove himself but denies himself. Therefore, instead of being satisfied the worker becomes miserable, thus, he does not develop freely his physical and mental potentials, but traumatizes his body and damages his mind. Moreover, the worker feels his existence only outside of his work. that is the worker under capitalist system is alienated from his product and work place; as well as himself and even his human being (110). .Therefore, in the grapes of wrath migrants have been dehumanized throughout the novel, so that they have suffered from capitalism injustice treatment, in which they faced alienation from their lands work identity and even their humanity.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The Grapes of Wrath has written in time of major crisis. Steinbeck by his literary work reveals the ugly truth about capitalist system and the huge gap it creates between social classes. Thus, Steinbeck offers a realistic depiction of life during the depression, through

picturing misfortune of poor migrants who have been discriminated and dehumanized by wealthy capitalist.

# General Conclusion

## **General Conclusion**

The golden age is an era of economic prosperity and cultural changes between 1920 and 1929, the American nation's wealth doubled and unemployment in the 1920s never rose above the natural rate by providing potential jobs to everyone who wanted to achieve their ultimate American dream through hard work, regardless of their economic or social background. This period remarks the emergence of new inventions that have contributed to shaping the modern life of the American society, and helps in the rise of the consumer culture. By the end of the 20's; America went through economic transitions and shifts from prosperity to depression, and has experienced the worst economic downturn in the U.S history starting with the Stock Market Crash in 1929 which resulted in the failure of almost half of the country's banks, and a lot of Americans have lost their jobs. It has been a decade of poverty combined with a natural disaster hits the great plain called the dust bowl. These two crises have caused by humans' greediness and selfishness.

Steinbeck's masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the story of an Oklahoma Dust bowl family. who have lost their land during the great depression, and because of the industrial capitalism, where they have been replaced by machines, the Joad's family have experienced strong poverty and starvation due to the lack of employments. thus, they have decided to migrate westward to what has been called the promised land of endless opportunities, but the reality is way different from what they have been told. Where they face oppression, discrimination, and injustice treatment from the wealthy landowner capitalists.

Steinbeck writes his realistic novel in order to depict the harsh conditions Oklahoman migrants have faced throughout their survival journey. Steinbeck harshly criticizes the injustice of the capitalists system. *The Grapes of Wrath* has contributed to uncover the truth of the dehumanizing behavior towards the "Okies" migrants in California.

The main aim of the research is to investigate the relationship between capitalism and dehumanization and how Steinbeck has portrayed them throughout his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

By the end of this study, we could reach the answer to our questions. First, capitalism has contributed to creating social and economic oppression that led to migrant laborers dehumanization through brutal behaviors that have practiced on them by the wealthy capitalists. Second, within the novel, Steinbeck has portrayed the individual hardship by revealing the struggles, discrimination, and prejudice that faced the Joad's family. Moreover, he describes the greediness of banks and landowners that resulted in labour exploitation and low wages that have imposed on the Okies migrants under the capitalist system. Third, capitalist system during the Great Depression caused man alienation from humanity by abolishing their identity like when Californian people refer to them as Okies, as well as ignoring their existence as human beings, that is they have consider them as less human as Californians. However, through the deep analyses of Steinbeck's *grapes of wrath* we have come to answer the capitalism effect on dehumanizing the American society.

The disability to get access to free online sources such as journals, books, magazines has been the main obstacle that limited our accessibility to data as well as limiting our research process.

This study could be a valuable source for both literature and civilization students as well as researchers because it provides clear information about different elements, starting with the historical background of *The Golden Age* and *The Great Depression* to the socioeconomic implications of capitalism and dehumanization of the American society in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. On the light of this research, we shall propose the following topic for future dissertation: *Human Commodification in the grapes of wrath*.

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## ملخص

**عناقيد الغضب** للكاتب **جون ستاينبيك** هي رواية أمريكية كلاسيكية معروفة بجودتها السردية المميزة حيث اكتسبت هذا الوصف بسبب تصويرها الواقعي للحياة الأمريكية طوال فترة الكساد العظيم ووعاء الغبار. يحاول هذا البحث القائم على الماركسية الكشف عن التعقيدات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية المترتبة عن النظام الرأسمالي من خلال تسليط الضوء على معاناة عائلات أوكلاهوما الذين تم طردهم من أراضيهم، حيث أصبحوا مزارعين مهاجرين في كاليفورنيا على أمل في تحسين ظروفهم المعيشية: لكنهم لم يجدوا سوى قسوة ملاك الأراضي الذين استغلواهم لتحقيق المزيد من الأرباح ، كذلك واجهوا التمييز من قبل سكان كاليفورنيا بسبب عنصر يتهم تجاه القادمين أوكلاهوما (الاوكتيس). وبذلك يكون الفلاحون تعرضوا للاضطهاد مرتين ، الأولى من النظام الرأسمالي الهجري والثانية من المجتمع حيث تم تجريدهم من إنسانيتهم وتسليعهم إلى شيء أقل من يكون انساني. رواية **عناقيد الغضب** كشفت عن قمعية العلاقات وعدم تكافئها أدت إلى تشكل التجارب الاجتماعية للفرد الأمريكي خلال فترة الكساد الكبير .

الكلمات المفتاحية:

عناقيد الغضب, الكساد العظيم, وعاء الغبار, الرأسمالي, التجرد من الإنسانية.