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[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



James Campo Mrs. Schaffer APES 4/23/2012 Essay #16 John Steinbeck, born in Salinas, California, was the author of many novels: The Pearl, East of Eden, Of Mice and Men, and In Dubious Battle. One in particular though was one of the most controversial books written in the 20th century. The Grapes of Wrath, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel written in 1939, and Steinbeck's second best novel, second only to East of Eden, was the most eye opening book I've read since Lies My Teacher Taught Me by James K. Loewn. The Grapes of Wrath was able to picture the life of a family traveling to California from Oklahoma in such great manner, that the book is on the fine line between fiction and non-fiction. Steinbeck grew up in California and was able to see the injustices and troubles these migrant workers had to endure. With the background knowledge of the event that took place and the writing skills of Steinbeck combined, The Grapes of Wrath spoke the truth that people in America were afraid to speak about. Many see The Grapes of Wrath as a novel that is blasphemous, dirty, and that it advocates a communist society. This couldn't be more wrong. In capitalism, any individual can go out and sell goods or services at his own price, and can sell as much as he wants too. Whereas, in a communist state, the goods are services are provided by the government and priced by the government. To be an entrepreneur you have to be able to take risks, work hard and be able to handle the outcome whether you lose or win. You don't have to worry about losing in a communist country because you are assigned everything and given everything from money for school and college to medical care to food and shelter. In fact, in a communist country everyone is treated the same and it doesn't matter if you are a doctor or a janitor, everyone is equal. You do not

have to worry about the market failing and you losing everything you have because everything is provided for you. A capitalist environment you have to be prepared at any second, although highly unlikely, for a terrible recession and that when it happens, the country will divide into elites and poor folks. Steinbeck was pointing out this flaw in the US because it was a major flaw in the current time period he was living in. People were afraid to point it out because of the repercussions they would have to live with for the rest of their life that include: being on the government's list, being watched by the FBI, being antagonized by your neighbors. Steinbeck wasn't promoting Communism or Socialism or Marxism for that nature, rather he was promoting change, justice, and equality for migrant workers in the way that they lived, were paid, and were treated. Steinbeck created the banks as the antagonists in the story, not FDR or President Hoover. The book did not oppose the government, but just showed the hardships the migrants had to overcome on their way to California and while in California. To say something is blasphemous would mean that the "something" is a contemptuous or profane act, utterance, or writing concerning God. In the case of calling *The Grapes of Wrath* Blasphemous, this couldn't be farther from the truth. It amazes me with the audacity and ignorance people can have to go out and call a novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* blasphemous. These "people" claim the book is blasphemous because of the way it involved the bible. *The Grapes of Wrath* parallels with the bible many times in the novel. An example of this Parallelism is at the end of the book when Rose of Sharon's dead baby is put in a casket and floated down the river, this parallels with the story of Moses. Another example of this and perhaps the

most obvious is how Jim Casy is viewed. Jim Casy is perceived to be like Jesus Christ in the way he acts for others. Jim taught Tom how to be selfless and speak out against the injustices and changes Tom's way of life. In a way, Tom was like one of the apostles because after Jim was murdered he took up Jim's way of life in fighting for what was right. Christians see the allusion to Jim Casy being Jesus as extremely blasphemous because that Jim was an ex-preacher that left the church because of his relations with a young woman. The thing is that it wasn't Jim Casy's old way of life that alluded to the bible, but his new way of life which Steinbeck went out of his way to make it seem that he was the modern day Jesus. The Grapes of Wrath does a good job with the biblical allusions and should make the book appeal to Christians instead of being opposed by them. Just when you thought that you digested the book's injustices and once you've felt that you were actually there and took the trip with the Joads to California, Steinbeck throws in a curveball and starts making you think about the Bible!

What I love most about Steinbeck is that he always has to add a little something extra to his writing, and this something extra in my opinion would have to be the characters. The heroes of the book aren't the regular people that you can relate with when you read; The heroes are people you have no relations whatsoever with. Steinbeck made the Joads and the people that accompanied them as helpless as can be. The way that they acted may not have been the way an ordinary American at the time would have acted, but they had to act that way. Steinbeck added realism when he added the personalities of the characters in the book. Society at the time would look at an okie treat them as a leper like they did in Jesus' time. This wasn't right and Steinbeck was

trying to show that the Characters had to do what they did to survive. It is not as if the Joad's just decided one day to randomly sell all of their possessions and head over to California for the fun of it. The bank caused this family to get out and whatever happened to them next did not matter. Steinbeck wanted to show the banks that the people they put on the streets were normal human beings with a tenacity to survive. The Okies had nowhere else to go other than California and were strongly misconceived that there were jobs for everyone there. Many people may see the book as dirty for a couple of reasons. For example, at the end of the book when Rose of Sharon breast feeds the stranger. The mere fact that she went from acting like a selfish teenage girl to a selfless woman that even in a time after losing her baby she breastfeeds a dying stranger is amazing. She resembles the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, in this scene. Another example may be how the people in the book used profane language much of the time. Again, this just adds to the realism. Along with the intercalary chapters describing how life was like, Steinbeck goes more in detail and takes the dialogue and molds it into the language they spoke during the time. The audience should admire the realism in the novel instead of speaking against it. Overall this book was a great read and everyone should read it before they are done with high school. The book teaches morals and values like " family comes first", while at the same time showing that the people in America are very materialistic and Steinbeck wasn't afraid to show this. The book offers not only an excellent tale about the Joad family, but gives the reader a historical connection with a make-believe family that felt so real. Banning the book on the basis of realism is out of the question, now that would be truly

advocating communism. I wish Steinbeck was alive and still writing today because I would love to see how he would write about the controversial topics today and I would love to see how the audience and world would react. Steinbeck may have created the " perfect" allegorical, historical, semi non-fiction novel ever when he wrote The Grapes of Wrath.