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The Dustbowl, Grapes of Wrath, and Great Depression

The great depression was a great American catastrophe which tested the resolve of the nation, and all of its people and families. The grave financial situation of the country, coupled with the destruction of the dust bowl presented many challenges for all Americans to overcome, most of all in the American midwest. Works of music, literature, film and photography support the idea that American families exhibited a great deal of perseverance in this era in the face of poverty, injustice, and uncertainty.

During the great depression, many families suffered through poverty, some of which is captured in forms of media. For example, in photo two, one can see the living conditions of the family. They are confined to a small tent, with holes and an open front. There is very little space for the few possessions they *do* have which can be seen all in one or two boxes, and the integrity and protection of the tent is quite questionable. One sees a large collection of these types of tents in the movie adaptation of "The Grapes of Wrath." Also in this film, one can hear Tom Joad mention that he believes "...[his] people [are] living like pigs." This idea is further reinforced by two gas station attendants who share a similar idea, commenting that the "Okies" must be animals, for only animals could live in conditions such as that. Timothy Engan adds to this as well in his book *The Worst Hard Time*, where he says that "Nesters crawled out of their dugouts and shanties..." clearly stating that their living conditions were horrible, but also

implying that they were nothing more than small burrowing animals trying to escape the elements. Nonetheless all of the displaced Okies, and victims of the dust bowl pressed on and remained determined to find work and better themselves, despite whatever their financial and living situation may be.

Injustice against many people affected by the dustbowl and depression could also be seen, especially in "The Grapes of Wrath." In "The Grapes of Wrath" the police are often associated with injustice. Most of their actions are rude, unjustified, and violent. They give the Joad family a hard time in many instances, harassing them at unnecessary checkpoints, making them leave towns, and even attacking Tom, and killing Casey. Tom Joad and his relationship with the police is symbolic, he exhibits this by exclaiming "Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there" meaning that the way the police treat him, translates to Okies everywhere. In spite of this, Tom Joad and his family outrun the police, in, also, an almost symbolic way. always staying one step ahead of the injustice that they bring with them.

Additionally, everybody affected by the great depression and dust bowl had to face uncertainty. The lyrics in the song "This Land is Your Land" by Woody Guthrie illustrate this, as his repeated line "This land is made for you and me," at the end of every stanza, morphs into "Is this land made for you and me?" towards the end of the song, which is an indicator to the uncertainty and distrust Guthrie was feeling towards the United States at the time. In "The Grapes of Wrath" the Joad family is mostly uncertain for the entire film. This feeling is expressed by Casey when he explains why he can't be a preacher anymore, he mentions: "Preachers gotta know. I don't know. I gotta ask." Which implies that he himself has no idea of his future and can only ask God. In picture three, it is clear that there is a measureable amount of

worry and uncertainty in the woman's face, as she contemplates what she will do next for her family, and her baby.

Even so, despite these circumstances, almost all of those who felt the repercussions of the great depression and dust bowl, were able to persevere, looking anywhere they could for work, and taking any type of work they could, even when the law may not be on their side, their living conditions were less than ideal, or their future was uncertain. These people pressed on and that is why they were able to survive.