CHAPTER - II

EXQUISITE LITERARY SENSIBILITY AWAKENED BY CONTEMPORARY ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

This chapter is conceived to take account of the genius of literary sensibility of John Steinbeck which found its full vent in the wake of contemporary economic depression of 1930s accounting for massive exodus of migrant workers from Oklahoma and other neighbouring states to relatively prosperous state like California. The Grapes of Wrath is the manifestation of his exquisite literary sensibility with focus on socio socio-economic survey of the time with the degree of consciousness of the workers to demand for wages, commensurate with their work force. It takes on account of economic survey a particular area with a view to propounding a theory of revolution to secure to rightful place of the workers in the market oriented economy where these migrant works are relegated to the back sheet.

In order to appreciate the genius and craftsmanship of phenomenally sensitive novelist of the highest order like John Steinbeck. It is immediately relevant to have a glance over contemporary economic depression through which United States underwent in 1930s which provided material to John Steinbeck.
It is a novel of the agricultural depression of the 1930’s and that memory of the folly and failure of man, the dust bowl. Yet it is a novel not about conditions but about people, the commonplace people of a Howells—even though Howells would have been shocked at the novel itself. Steinbeck’s despair and indignation too great for a Howells, and his characters are far from the familiar society of a Howells. Like Anderson and Faulkner, in contrast to Howells, he even questions the assumption of free will in the individual. Yet his people must meet the commonplace problems of life—food, shelter, clothing, medical aid—and their desires are the desires of the commonplace man—happiness, love, family unity, self-respect, a feeling of belonging. In another sense, however, the novel is not about commonplace man but about a special, often grotesque group of men, the Okies, the dispossessed of the dust bowl, the new itinerant farm labourers of California. And one of the successes of the novel is the manner in which it conveys simultaneously the impression, almost an epic impression, of a whole people migrating westward and the familiar view of one particular family facing its particular problems. The Joad family, even though unique, is a part of a whole people; and this novel, unlike most of the novels of the previous century, is as much about a people as it is about a few central people. In the midst of a blighting depression the concern for the individual begins to give way to the concern for the people, even
though paradoxically it was this novel, probably more than any other, that
Convinced America that the group scornfully called Okies was after all made
up of familiar and commonplace individuals.

The Great Depression began in the United States of America and quickly
spread worldwide. It had severe effects in countries both rich and poor.
Personal income, consumption, industrial output, tax revenue, profits and
prices dropped, while international trade plunged by more than 50%. The
memory of the Depression also shaped modern theories of economics and
resulted in many changes in how the government dealt with economic
downturns, such as the use of stimulus packages, Keynesian economics and
Social Security. It also shaped modern American literature, resulting in
famous novels such as John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath and Of Mice and
Men.

The Great Depression began in August 1929, when the United States
economy first went into an economic recession. The market crash marked the
beginning of a decade of high unemployment, poverty, low profits, deflation,
plunging farm incomes, and lost opportunities for economic growth and
personal advancement. Although its causes are still uncertain and
controversial, the net effect was a sudden and general loss of confidence in the economic future.

The usual explanations include numerous factors, especially high consumer debt, ill-regulated markets that permitted overoptimistic loans by banks and investors, and the lack of high-growth new industries, all interacting to create a downward economic spiral of reduced spending, falling confidence and lowered production.

Industries that suffered the most included construction, agriculture as dust-bowl conditions persisted in the agricultural heartland, shipping, mining, and logging as well as durable goods like automobiles and appliances that could be postponed. The Depression caused major political changes in America. Three years into the depression, President Herbert Hoover, widely blamed for not doing enough to combat the crisis, lost the election of 1932 to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in a landslide. Roosevelt's economic recovery plan, the New Deal, instituted unprecedented programs for relief, recovery and reform, and brought about a major realignment of American politics.

It also resulted in an increase of emigration of people for the first time in American history. For example, some immigrants went back to their native countries, and some native US citizens went to Canada, Australia, and South
Africa. It also resulted in the mass migration of people from badly hit areas in the Great Plains and the South to places such as California and the North, respectively. Racial tensions also increased during this time. By the 1940s immigration had returned to normal, and emigration declined. A well-known example of an emigrant was Frank McCourt, who went to Ireland, as recounted in his book Angela's Ashes.

Crop failures beginning in 1921 began to impact this poorly regulated system, the expansion areas of corn and cotton suffered the largest due to the dust bowl era resulting in real estate value reductions. In addition, the year 1921 was the peak for banking expansion with roughly 31,000 banks in activity, however, with the failures at the agricultural level 505 banks would close between 1921 -1930 marking the largest banking system failure on record. Regulatory questions began to hit the debating table around banking qualifications as a result; discussions would continue into the [Great Depression] as not only were banks failing but some would disappear altogether with no rhyme or reason. The panic of financial crisis would increase in the Great Depression due to the lack of confidence in the regulatory and recovery displayed during the 1920s, this ultimately drove a nation of doubts, uneasiness, and lack of consumer confidence in the banking system.
Great Depression is still heavily debated due to many other attributing factors. However, it is evident that the banking system suffered massive reductions across the country due to the lack of consumer confidence. As withdraw requests would exceed cash availability banks began conducting steed discount sales such as fire sales and short sales. Due to the inability to immediately determine current value worth these fire sales and short sales would result in massive losses when recuperating any possible revenue for outstanding and defaulted loans. This would allow healthy banks to take advantage of the struggling units forcing additional losses resulting in banks not being able to deliver on depositor demands and creating a failing cycle that would become wide spread. The federal government would run additional policy changes such as the Check tax, monetary restrictions (including reduction of money supply by burning), High Wage Policy, and The New Deal through the Hoover and Roosevelt administration.

One of the visible effects of the depression was the advent of Hoovervilles, which were ramshackle assemblages on vacant lots of cardboard boxes, tents, and small rickety wooden sheds built by homeless people. Residents lived in the shacks and begged for food or went to soup kitchens. The term was coined by Charles Michelson, publicity chief of the Democratic
National Committee, who referred sardonically to President Herbert Hoover whose policies he blamed for the depression.

Consequently, unemployment in the U.S. reached 25 percent and in some countries rose as high as 33% in the worst days of 1932-33, but it was unevenly distributed. Job losses were less severe among women, workers in nondurable industries (such as food and clothing), services and sales workers, and those employed by the government. Unskilled inner city men had much higher unemployment rates. Age also played a factor: young people had a hard time getting their first job, and men over the age of 45, if they lost their job, would rarely find another one because employers had their choice of younger men. Millions were hired in the Great Depression, but men with weaker credentials were never hired, and fell into a long-term unemployment trap. The migration that brought millions of farmers and townspeople to the bigger cities in the 1920s suddenly reversed itself, as unemployment made the cities unattractive, and the network of kinfolk and more ample food supplies made it wise for many to go back. City governments in 1930-31 tried to meet the depression by expanding public works projects, as president Herbert Hoover strongly encouraged.
Steinbeck has extensively shown sympathy in his writing for the working class and their struggles. Steinbeck notably responded to the Great Depression through his novel The Grapes of Wrath. In The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck focuses on a poor family of sharecroppers who struggle to adjust to the shifting economy, the drought, and other hardships created by the Great Depression. He tells the story of the harsh realities of life for poor unskilled workers displaced by the Great Depression – the greatest economic decline and high unemployment in Western industrialized nations.

There are isolated and lonely and even grotesque individuals in the novel. Uncle John, the “lonest goddamm man in the world,” who let his wife die of appendicitis, thinking it only a stomach ache, is forever after lost in his sense of guilt, a marked and isolated man in his own mind. Casy, the former preacher who has lost his old faith, is a lonely man looking for some new faith. And Muley Graves, who stays behind in Oklahoma, is only a lonely ghost haunting an empty land:

“I’d tell myself, I’m lookin’ after things so when all the folks come back it’ll be all right.’ But I knowed that wan’t true. There ain’t nothin’ to look after. The folks ain’t never comin’ back. I’m jus’ wanderin’ aroun’ like a damn ol’ graveyard ghos’.”

(Muley Graves 69)
Comparatively, Casy and Muley are parts of a larger pattern, the isolation of a people. Casy is to be their spokesman, finally to give words to their deepest feeling, and Muley is a result of the people’s migration and a sign of their departure. For the central isolation of the novel is that of a whole people. Driven from home and land, they have lost the sense of belonging: “Place where folks live is them folks. They ain’t whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car. They ain’t alive no more.” At home they had been a part of the land, had belonged to it and had felt their roots go down. Then came the drought and the banks and the tractors, and suddenly there was a home no longer, there was no place to belong to. And without a country there is only lonely wandering. The young and the strong can bear the isolation, but for the old, too long rooted it is like leaving life itself. Grampa dies before they can even carry him out of the state.

The people have lost their old home and cannot find a new one. No one somewhere else wants them to belong; no one wants them at all. On the migration west, California shines ahead as a newer and greener home. But along the way, prophetically, they are meet only with hatred and suspicion and contempt, tempered occasionally with a touch of human pity. California does not even have the pity. On first arrival at the California line a fellow Okie had offered the Joads a warning not believed then but soon to prove too true:
“People gonna have a look in their eye. They gonna look at you an’ their face says, ‘I don’t like you, you son-of-a-bitch.’ Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an’ they’ll push you aroun’. You camp on the roadside, an’ they’ll move you on. You gonna see in people’s fact how they hate you.” (Ibid 280)

There the people are scared for fear their country in turn will be taken from them by this new horde of hungry and landless and homeless, and they try to drive them away by fair means of foul. The Californians are willing to use them for gain, to demand the greatest work for the least pay, knowing the hungry cannot refuse, but never to offer them permanence or a home, never a country of their own. The Joad and their kind, the new migratory people are an isolated from this country as from their own far behind, unable to live there, unwanted here. If they settle for a moment, they are soon driven off by hunger or by pick handles. And if they complain or protest, they are reds or agitators or dangerous vagrants, and the police and the mobs are eager for violence. There is no immediate solution—whatever history with its slow movement may later have provided—and the lonely people seem destined to wander forever in isolation. It is fitting that the novel ends with the Joads wiser and more experienced, but still with no sense of belonging, no permanence in the country, no home of their own.
With no sense of belonging to anything outside, the people must turn within their own group for comfort and strength and loss of loneliness. The family is all all-important unit, as it was in My Antonia, as it must be when there is nothing else to which to belong with any meaning. Before the migration the Joad family had been scattered about their region, but it comes together for the great trek, and its unity is a large part of its strength. Ma, at the center of the family, soon becomes the accepted leader and the source of unity and confidence and will; and her one unvarying demand is for the family to stay together no matter what happens: “All we got is the family unbroken. Like a bunch a cows, when the labos are ranging, stick all together. I ain’t scared while we’re all here, all that’s alive, but I ain’t gonna see us bust up.”(231) And she is right. Like the Lapham family, although so different in surface and in circumstance, as long as the family is together there is no isolation for the individual member, whatever his weakness and his failure. Ma can be fierce in her determination, and she can even back up her demands with a jack handle when necessary, for she knows that the family is all that they have left to depend upon: “What we got lef’ in the worl? Nothin’ but us. Nothin’ but the folks.”(230) But despite her wisdom and her determination the family unity does begin to crumble, and it is the nearest to a real defeat that the Joads ever reach. Gramma and Granma die along the way, Noah leaves the family at the
California border, Connie abandons Rosasharn and the family. Tom is driven away by the sheriffs and by his conscience, and at the end of the story Al is about to leave with his new promised wife. Some of these losses are inevitable and unavoidable, others are the result of too great an individual and will that carry the Joads through their trials and their loneliness. If the Joads are ever broken- and even in their reduced numbers it is hard to imagine – it will be because the family itself is broken. But affairs never reach that desperate a state and never will as long as Ma is there to hold the rest of the family together in defiance of the hostile world.

An awareness of the value and the comfort of the family is not limited to the Joads but is an element of the entire migration. And under the pressures of a common need the whole people slowly become one large family in themselves. The Joads, the particular example, find themselves losing a few members of the real family but quickly picking up others who are accepted almost as real members. The family in the long run does not diminish but rather expands more and more. Preacher Casy had early been accepted as a member, and along the road Mr. And Mrs. Wilson are added until sickness forces them out again. Others move more quickly in and out. But these are simply examples of a continuous process in which all the people find themselves increasingly drawn into a larger family relationship. Camping
along Route 66 headed west, the process begins: “In the evening a stranger thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream.” (264)

In the West itself in the face of united hostility the process is even stronger, as it must be. Soon the world for the Joads is divided into “our kind of folks” or even just “our folks” and the hostile “them”. And here the larger family, the literal family, is just the starting point. Even Ma recognizes the new fact as she thanks the woman who had shared their temporary housing in a boxcar and helped with Rosasharn’s delivery;

“You been frien’ly,” she said. “We thank you.”

The stount woman smiled. “No need to thank, Ever’body’s in the same wagon. S’pose we was donw. You’d a give us a han.”

“Yes,” Ma said, we would."

“Or anybody.”

“Or anybody. Use’ta be the fambly was fust. It ain’t so now. It’s anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do.” (606)

Among the Okies struggling to exist in an alien land the family of man is more than a sentimental phrase. It is the practical and a necessary fact of existence.
Contemporary economic depression marked vicissitude affecting the life of individual. However, tax revenues were plunging, and the cities as well as private relief agencies were totally overwhelmed by 1931; no one was able to provide significant additional relief. People fell back on the cheapest possible relief, soup kitchens which provided free meals for anyone who showed up. After 1933 new sales taxes and infusions of federal money helped relieve the fiscal distress of the cities, but the budgets did not fully recover until 1941.

The federal programs launched by Hoover and greatly expanded by President Roosevelt's New Deal used massive construction projects to try to jump start the economy and solve the unemployment crisis. The alphabet agencies ERA, CCC, FERA, WPA and PWA built and repaired the public infrastructure in dramatic fashion, but did little to foster the recovery of the private sector. FERA, CCC and especially WPA focused on providing unskilled jobs for long-term unemployed men.

Incidentally, the Democrats won easy landslide victories in 1932 and 1934, and an even bigger one in 1936; the hapless Republican Party seemed doomed. The Democrats capitalized on the magnetic appeal of Roosevelt to urban America. The key groups were low skilled ethnics, especially Catholic, Jewish, and black people. The Democrats promised and delivered in terms of
political recognition, labor union membership, and relief jobs. The cities' political machines were stronger than ever, for they mobilized their precinct workers to help families who needed help the most navigate the bureaucracy and get on relief. FDR won the vote of practically every demographic in 1936, including taxpayers, small business and the middle class. However, the Protestant middle class voters turned sharply against him after the recession of 1937-38 undermined repeated promises that recovery was at hand. Historically, local political machines were primarily interested in controlling their wards and citywide elections; the smaller the turnout on Election Day, the easier it was to control the system. However, for Roosevelt to win the presidency in 1936 and 1940, he needed to carry the electoral college and that meant he needed the largest possible majorities in the cities to overwhelm rural voters. The machines came through for him. The 3.5 million voters on relief payrolls during the 1936 election cast 82% percent of their ballots for Roosevelt. The rapidly growing, energetic labor unions, chiefly based in the cities, turned out 80% for FDR, as did Irish, Italian and Jewish communities. In all, the nation's 106 cities over 100,000 population voted 70% for FDR in 1936, compared to his 59% elsewhere. Roosevelt worked very well with the big city machines, with the one exception of his old nemesis, Tammany Hall in Manhattan. There he supported the complicated coalition built around the nominal Republican
Fiorello La Guardia, and based on Jewish and Italian voters mobilized by labor unions.

In 1938, the Republicans made an unexpected comeback, and Roosevelt's efforts to purge the Democratic Party of his political opponents backfired badly. The conservative coalition of Northern Republicans and Southern Democrats took control of Congress, outvoted the urban liberals, and halted the expansion of New Deal ideas. Roosevelt survived in 1940 thanks to his margin in the Solid South and in the cities. In the North the cities over 100,000 gave Roosevelt 60% of their votes, while the rest of the North favoured Willkie 52%-48%.

With the start of full-scale war mobilization in the summer of 1940, the economies of the cities rebounded. Even before Pearl Harbor, Washington pumped massive investments into new factories and funded round-the-clock munitions production, guaranteeing a job to anyone who showed up at the factory gate. The war brought a restoration of prosperity and hopeful expectations for the future across the nation. It had the greatest impact on the cities of the West Coast, especially Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle.
Economic historians led by Price Fishback have examined the impact of New Deal spending on improving health conditions in the 114 largest cities, 1929-1937. They estimated that every additional $153,000 in relief spending (in 1935 dollars, or $1.95 million in year 2000 dollars) was associated with a reduction of one infant death, one suicide, and 2.4 deaths from infectious disease.

Cities all around the world were hit hard, especially those dependent on heavy industry. Construction was virtually halted in many countries. Farming and rural areas suffered as crop prices fell by approximately 60%. Facing plummeting demand with few alternate sources of jobs, areas dependent on primary sector industries such as grain farming, mining and logging, as well as construction, suffered the most.

Most economies started to recover by 1933-34. However, in the U.S. and some others the negative economic impact often lasted until the beginning of World War II, when war industries stimulated recovery.

There is little agreement on what caused the Great Depression, and the topic has become highly politicized. At the time the great majority of economists around the world recommended the "orthodox" solution of cutting government spending and raising taxes. However, British economist John
Maynard Keynes advocated large-scale government deficit spending to make up for the failure of private investment. No major nation adopted his policies in the 1930s.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929 is often cited as the beginning of the Great Depression. It began on October 24, 1929, and was the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the United States. A lot of the stock market crash can be blamed on over exuberance and false expectations. In the years leading up to 1929, the stock market offered the potential for making huge gains in wealth. As share prices rose, people started to borrow money to invest in the stock market. However, on October 24 (Black Thursday), share prices began to fall and panic selling caused prices to fall sharply. On October 29 (Black Tuesday), share prices fell by $14 billion in a single day, more than $30 billion in the week. The value that evaporated the week was 10x more than the entire federal budget and more than all of what the U.S. spent on World War I.

It is not only affected the business community and the public’s economic confidence, but also it led to the banking system soon after the turmoil. The boom of the US economy in the 1920s was based on high indebtedness, and the rupture of the debt chain caused by the collapse of the bank had produced widespread and far-reaching adverse effects. It is precisely
because of the shaky banking system, the United States was using monetary policy to save the economy that had been severely constrained. The American economist Kindleberger of long-term studying of the Great Depression pointed out that in the 1929, before and after the collapse of the stock market, the Fed lowered interest rates, tried to expand the money supply and eased the financial market tensions for several times, however they were not successful, the fundamental reason was that the relationship between various credit institutions and the community was in a drastic adjustment process, the normal supply channels for money supply were blocked. Later, some economists argued that the Fed should do a large-scale opening market business at that time, but the essence of the statement was that the US government should be quick to implement measures to expand fiscal spending and fiscal deficits, whereas, the essence of this argument was that the US government should be promptly implemented to expand the fiscal spending and the fiscal deficits measures.

Between the 1920s and 1930s, The United States began to try the tight money policy to promote economic growth. In terms of the fiscal policy, the US government failed to reach a consensus on the fiscal issue. President Hoover began to expand federal spending, he set up a governmental financial revitalization company to provide emergency assistance to banks and financial
institutions that were on the verge of bankruptcy. Hoover's fiscal policy had accelerated the recession. In December 1929, as means of showing government confidence of the economy, Hoover reduced all income tax rates by 1% of 1929 due to the continuing budget surplus. By 1930, the surplus turned into a fast-growing deficit of economic contraction. In 1931, the US federal fiscal revenue and expenditure changed from the financial surplus to deficit for the first time (the deficit was less than 2.8% of GDP). By the end of 1931, Hoover had decided to recommend a large increase in taxes to balance the budget; in addition, Congress approved the tax increase in 1932, a substantial reduction in personal immunity to increase the number of taxpayers, and the interest rates had risen sharply, the lowest marginal rate rose from 25% on taxable income in excess of $100,000 to 63% on taxable income in excess of $1 million as the rates were made much more progressive. Hoover changed his approach to fighting the Depression. He justified his call for more federal assistance by noting that "We used such emergency powers to win the war; we can use them to fight the Depression, the misery, and suffering from which are equally great." This new approach embraced a number of initiatives. Unfortunately for the President, none proved especially effective. Just as important, with the presidential election approaching, the political heat generated by the Great Depression and the failure of Hoover's policies grew only more withering.
In terms of the financial reform, since the recession, Hoover had been trying to repair the economy. He founded government agencies to encourage labor harmony and support local public works aid which promoted cooperation of government and business, stabilize prices, and strive to balance the budget. His work focused on indirect relief from individual countries and the private sector, which was reflected in the letter emphasizing "more effective supporting for each national committee" and volunteer service -" appealing for funding" from outside the government.[43] The commitment to maintain the gold standard system prevented the Federal Reserve expanded its money supply operations in 1930 and 1931, and it promoted Hoover's destructive balancing budgetary action to avoid the gold standard system overwhelming the dollar. As the Great Depression became worse, the call raised for increasing in federal intervention and spending. But Hoover refused to allow the federal government to force fixed prices, control the value of the business or manipulate the currency, in contrast, he started to control the dollar price. For official dollar prices, he expanded the credit base through free market operations in federal reserve system to ensure the domestic value of the dollar. He also tended to provide indirect aid to banks or local public works projects, refused to use federal funds to give aid to citizens directly, which will reduce public morale. Instead, he focused on volunteering to raise money. Even
though Hoover was a philanthropist before becoming president, his opponents regarded him as not responsible for the citizens. During the administration of Hoover, the US economic policies had moved to activism and interventionism. In his re-election campaign, Hoover tried to persuade the Americans to claim that the measures they requested seemed to be helpful in the short term, but it would be devastating in the long run. Eventually, he was defeated by Franklin Roosevelt in 1932.

At the beginning of 1933, the last few weeks of Hoover's term, the American financial system was paralyzed. The Great Depression was extended by the interventionist policy for four years. Bank crisis caused the serious deflationary pressures. For this phenomenon, Hoover still wanted to stop it. In fact, the worst period of 1932 - the Great Depression had passed, but the recovery was slow and weak. During the financial crisis of 1933 that culminated in the banking holiday in March 1933, a lot of gold flowed out from the Fed, some of them flow out to individuals and companies in the United States. This domestic loss occurred because individuals and businesses like to deposit metal gold into bank deposits or banknotes, some gold flows to foreign countries, and this external loss occurred because foreign investors were worried about the depreciation of the dollar. Roosevelt understands that the traditional political and financial policy cannot save the United States from
the "disaster years", he pursued the "New Deal" to attempt to make up for the United States by administrative means. In the spring and summer of 1933, the Roosevelt government suspended the gold standard. The Emergency Banking Act gave the President the power to control international and domestic gold sports. It also gave the treasury secretary the power to surrender of gold coins and certificates. On April 20, President Roosevelt issued a formal announcement of the moratorium on the gold standard. The announcement prohibited gold exports, and prohibited financial institutions from converting money and deposits into gold coins and ingots. The action prevented the gold outflow. Soon, the Roosevelt government weakened the connection with gold once again. Thomas amendment to the Agricultural Relief Act to the gave to the President power to reduce the dollar's gold content by as much as 50%. The President Roosevelt also used the silver standard instead of gold to exchange dollars, it determined by the price of the bank. In April 1933, Roosevelt decided to abolish the gold standard through the New Deal. He abandoned this traditional monetary policy is mainly due to the big crisis to the original monetary policy failure. And the purpose of his action is to prohibit all exports of gold except for foreign countries, so that the United States can maintain an equal monetary base with the vast majority of countries. The Hoover government stubbornly insisted on using the "sound money" policy who
against deficit spending and state relief that only make the economic crisis worsen. Because of this situation Roosevelt forced the implementation of inflation, and used the federal deficit spending to promote employment to enforce relief. The abandon of the gold standard made the Wall Street stock prices quickly increased, Wall Street's stock trading was exceptionally active, with a total of 5 million shares delivered on a day, which is the most active day in the past six months.

The Dust Bowl, also known as the Dirty Thirties, was a period of severe dust storms that greatly damaged the ecology and agriculture of the American and Canadian prairies during the 1930s; severe drought and a failure to apply dryland farming methods to prevent wind erosion (the Aeolian processes) caused the phenomenon. The drought came in three waves, 1934, 1936, and 1939–1940, but some regions of the high plains experienced drought conditions for as many as eight years. With insufficient understanding of the ecology of the plains, farmers had conducted extensive deep plowing of the virgin topsoil of the Great Plains during the previous decade; this had displaced the native, deep-rooted grasses that normally trapped soil and moisture even during periods of drought and high winds. The rapid mechanization of farm equipment, especially small gasoline tractors, and widespread use of the combine harvester contributed to farmers' decisions to convert arid grassland
(much of which received no more than 10 inches (250 mm of precipitation per year) to cultivated cropland.

During the drought of the 1930s, the unanchored soil turned to dust, which the prevailing winds blew away in huge clouds that sometimes blackened the sky. These choking billows of dust - named "black blizzards" or "black rollers" - travelled cross country, reaching as far as the East Coast and striking such cities as New York City and Washington, D.C. On the Plains, they often reduced visibility to 1 metre (3.3 ft) or less. Associated Press reporter Robert E. Geiger happened to be in Boise City, Oklahoma, to witness the "Black Sunday" black blizzards of April 14, 1935; Edward Stanley, Kansas City news editor of the Associated Press coined the term "Dust Bowl" while rewriting Geiger's news story. While the term "the Dust Bowl" was originally a reference to the geographical area affected by the dust, today it is usually used to refer to the event, as in "It was during the Dust Bowl".

The drought and erosion of the Dust Bowl affected 100,000,000 acres (400,000 km²) that centered on the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma and touched adjacent sections of New Mexico, Colorado, and Kansas. The Dust Bowl forced tens of thousands of families to abandon their farms. Many of these families, who were often known as "Okies" because so many of them
came from Oklahoma, migrated to California and other states to find that the Great Depression had rendered economic conditions there little better than those they had left.

The Dust Bowl has been the subject of many cultural works, notably the novel The Grapes of Wrath (1939) by John Steinbeck, the folk music of Woody Guthrie, and photographs depicting the conditions of migrants by Dorothea Lange.

In 1935, many families were forced to leave their farms and travel to other areas seeking work because of the drought (which at that time had already lasted four years). Dust Bowl conditions fomented an exodus of the displaced from Texas, Oklahoma, and the surrounding Great Plains to adjacent regions. More than 500,000 Americans were left homeless. Over 350 houses had to be torn down after one storm alone. The severe drought and dust storms had left many homeless, others had their mortgages foreclosed by banks, and others felt they had no choice but to abandon their farms in search of work. Many Americans migrated west looking for work. Parents packed up "jalopies" with their families and a few personal belongings, and headed west in search of work. Some residents of the Plains, especially in Kansas and Oklahoma, fell ill and died of dust pneumonia or malnutrition.
"Broke, baby sick, and car trouble!" - Dorothea Lange's 1937 photo of a Missouri migrant family's jalopy stuck near Tracy, California. The Dust Bowl exodus was the largest migration in American history within a short period of time. Between 1930 and 1940, approximately 3.5 million people moved out of the Plains states; of those, it is unknown how many moved to California. In just over a year, over 86,000 people migrated to California. This number is more than the number of migrants to that area during the 1849 Gold Rush. Migrants abandoned farms in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico, but were often generally referred to as "Okies", "Arkies", or "Texies". Terms such as "Okies" and "Arkies" came to be known in the 1930s as the standard terms for those who had lost everything and were struggling the most during the Great Depression.

Not all migrants traveled long distances; some simply went to the next town or county. So many families left their farms and were on the move that the proportion between migrants and residents was nearly equal in the Great Plains states. Historian James N. Gregory examined Census Bureau statistics and other records to learn more about the migrants. Based on a 1939 survey of occupation by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of about 116,000 families who arrived in California in the 1930s, he learned that only 43 percent of southwesterners were doing farm work immediately before they migrated.
Nearly one-third of all migrants were professional or white-collar workers. The poor economy displaced more than just farmers as refugees to California; many teachers, lawyers, and small business owners moved west with their families during this time. After the Great Depression ended, some moved back to their original states. Many others remained where they had resettled. About one-eighth of California's population is of Okie heritage.

The work of independent artists was also influenced by the crises of the Dust Bowl and the Depression. Author John Steinbeck, borrowing closely from field notes taken by Farm Security Administration worker and author Sanora Babb, wrote The Grapes of Wrath (1939) about migrant workers and farm families displaced by the Dust Bowl. Babb's own novel about the lives of the migrant workers, Whose Names Are Unknown, was written in 1939 but was eclipsed and shelved in response to the success of the Steinbeck's work, and was finally published in 2004. Many of the songs of folk singer Woody Guthrie, such as those on his 1940 album Dust Bowl Ballads, are about his experiences in the Dust Bowl era during the Great Depression when he travelled with displaced farmers from Oklahoma to California and learned their traditional folk and blues songs, earning him the nickname the "Dust Bowl Troubadour".
Migrants also influenced musical culture wherever they went. Oklahoma migrants, in particular, were rural Southwesterners who carried their traditional country music to California. Today, the "Bakersfield Sound" describes this blend, which developed after the migrants brought country music to the city. Their new music inspired a proliferation of country dance halls as far south as Los Angeles.

The 2014 science fiction film Interstellar features a ravaged 21st-century America which is again scoured by dust storms (caused by a worldwide pathogen affecting all crops). Along with inspiration from the 1930s crisis, director Christopher Nolan features interviews from the 2012 documentary The Dust Bowl to draw further parallels.

The family of man is more even than a necessity for the Joads; it is an ideal of the novel. At the lowest level it appears in a form familiar during the depression, the hopeful ideal of men working together in some form of unity to protect their economic and social rights. Only organized resistance of many can demand a fair wage, for instance, and the idea is illustrated in the strike led by Preacher Casy against the peach growers. When he is liked for his efforts he is a martyr to a worthy ideal, although most of the people do not even recognize the fact. Or when the migrants band together to run the camp at
Weedpatch, a camp that is clean, decent, orderly, and without deputy sheriffs from outside, the people are beginning to move toward a social ideal. These are ideals that present themselves immediately to the people, for they are caught in a life-or-death struggle in which money and living conditions are of vital concern, and on the surface at least are the only concerns. But in the novel as a whole they are simply corollaries of a greater concern with the ideal of the family of man, of the moving, as Steinbeck puts it, from “I” to “we.” (206) Here Preacher Casy is the spokesman for the idea, stating it directly, and the one who attempts as well to live it, although he ends by dying for its.

When Casy first appears in the novel he is a troubled man who has lost his first sure faith, but, unlike the Reverend Gail Hightower, he has never lost the spirit of a faith or the sure desire of a faith. He is lost and lonely man wandering in the wilderness to questions his own mind and to define just what it is that he does believe. But whatever his doubts, he knows he still has a mission to perform: “Here I got the spirit sometimes an’ nothin’ to preach about. I got the call to lead people, an’ no place to lead’em.” (29) In the trek to California he finds a place to lead the people, and along the way he finds a faith to preach. The faith is a love of people themselves and a belief in a total soul of humanity and is participated in by all men, a commonality of man in
the sight of God that makes one man alone an incomplete creature: “not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang-that’s right, that’s holy.”(110) Then when his halfunderstood philosophy is brought up against the injustice of the world his way ached is clear. His first change to put his belief into dramatic action comes when he offers himself to save Tom and a friend from a bullying sheriff. His second comes when he leads the strike against starvation pay in the peach orchard. There is killed by the representatives of a harsher and a more selfish law. But his preaching will go on through the lips of Tom Joad, who has inherited his belief and, thinking back to Casy’s words, can say,” But I know no a fella ain’t no good alone.” (570) There is the central point of the novel, and there is the conviction on which the overt social protest of the novel is based.

Casy believes that his new faith is not Christianity, even though he finds texts in Ecclesiastes to make his point. Perhaps it is not, although in effect it reaches the same belief in the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. Certainly it is not the hell-fire, damnation, washed-in-the-blood, shout-to-the Lamb religion that Casy and most of his flock had known before. It is perhaps nearer to a moral humanism with the Christian tradition behind it. But whatever it is, it teaches that a man cannot live by and for himself alone. When
early in the novel Tom Joad says, “I’m just tryin’ to get along without shovin’ nobody around,”(13-14) he suggests, too, another paradoxical aspect of the same thought. The moral assumption is that a man must lead his own life as best he can, and others must allow him to if possible: “On’y one thing in this worl’ I’m sure of, an’ that’s I’m sure nobody got a right to mess with a fella’s life. He got to do it all himself. Help him, maybe, but not tell him what to do.”(306) The only demand is that his life must not hurt others. The common belief lying behind both assumptions, the need for a feeling of the mutual ties of humanity and the need for allowing a man to lead his life unmolested is the belief in the value of the individual life. And both the cause and the result of this belief are the ideal of love of humanity or the human spirit. Casy, in hesitantly defining his beliefs, must inevitable work through the point: “Maybe... it’s all men an’ all women we love; maybe that’s the Holy Sperit- the human sperit- the whole shebang.”(32-33) The life of all humanity is holy, and so must be the life of the individual within it. With the love of others, the love of humanity given and taken, loneliness is impossible, even in the midst of isolation. The trouble is that not all men are so morally committed, and those who are must often suffer isolation from the others.

In 2017, Americana recording artist Grant Maloy Smith released the album Dust Bowl – American Stories, which was inspired by the history of the
Dust Bowl. In a review, the music magazine No Depression wrote that the album’s lyrics and music are “as potent as Woody Guthrie, as intense as John Trudell and dusted with the trials and tribulations of Tom Joad – Steinbeck and The Grapes of Wrath.”

The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression that took place during the 1930s. The timing of the Great Depression varied across nations; in most countries it started in 1929 and lasted until 1941. It was the longest, deepest, and most widespread depression of the 20th century. In the 21st century, the Great Depression is commonly used as an example of how far the world's economy can decline.

The depression originated in the United States, after a major fall in stock prices that began around September 4, 1929, and became worldwide news with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (known as Black Tuesday). Between 1929 and 1932, worldwide gross domestic product (GDP) fell by an estimated 15%. By comparison, worldwide GDP fell by less than 1% from 2008 to 2009 during the Great Recession. Some economies started to recover by the mid-1930s. However, in many countries, the negative effects of the Great Depression lasted until the beginning of World War II.
The Great Depression had devastating effects in countries both rich and poor. Personal income, tax revenue, profits and prices dropped, while international trade plunged by more than 50%. Unemployment in the U.S. rose to 25% and in some countries rose as high as 33%.

Cities all around the world were hit hard, especially those dependent on heavy industry. Construction was virtually halted in many countries. Farming communities and rural areas suffered as crop prices fell by about 60%. Facing plummeting demand with few alternative sources of jobs, areas dependent on primary sector industries such as mining and logging suffered the most.

Economic historians usually attribute the start of the Great Depression to the sudden devastating collapse of U.S. stock market prices on October 29, 1929, known as Black Tuesday. However, some dispute this conclusion and see the stock crash as a symptom, rather than a cause, of the Great Depression.

Even after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 optimism persisted for some time. John D. Rockefeller said "These are days when many are discouraged. In the 93 years of my life, depressions have come and gone. Prosperity has always returned and will again." The stock market turned upward in early 1930, returning to early 1929 levels by April. This was still almost 30% below the peak of September 1929.
Together, government and business spent more in the first half of 1930 than in the corresponding period of the previous year. On the other hand, consumers, many of whom had suffered severe losses in the stock market the previous year, cut back their expenditures by 10%. In addition, beginning in the mid-1930s, a severe drought ravaged the agricultural heartland of the U.S.

Unemployed men outside a soup kitchen opened by Al Capone in Depression-era Chicago, Illinois, the US, 1931. By mid-1930, interest rates had dropped to low levels, but expected deflation and the continuing reluctance of people to borrow meant that consumer spending and investment were depressed.\textsuperscript{16} By May 1930, automobile sales had declined to below the levels of 1928. Prices in general began to decline, although wages held steady in 1930. Then a deflationary spiral started in 1931. Conditions were worse in farming areas, where commodity prices plunged and in mining and logging areas, where unemployment was high and there were few other jobs. The decline in the U.S. economy was the factor that pulled down most other countries at first; then, internal weaknesses or strengths in each country made conditions worse or better. Frantic attempts to shore up the economies of individual nations through protectionist policies, such as the 1930 U.S. Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act and retaliatory tariffs in other countries, exacerbated the collapse in global trade.
By late 1930, a steady decline in the world economy had set in, which did not reach bottom until 1933.

Since economic mainstream turned to the new neoclassical synthesis, expectations are a central element of macroeconomic models. According to Peter Temin, Barry Wigmore, Gauti B. Eggertsson and Christina Romer, the key to recovery and to ending the Great Depression was brought about by a successful management of public expectations. The thesis is based on the observation that after years of deflation and a very severe recession important economic indicators turned positive in March 1933 when Franklin D. Roosevelt took office. Consumer prices turned from deflation to a mild inflation, industrial production bottomed out in March 1933, and investment doubled in 1933 with a turnaround in March 1933. There were no monetary forces to explain that turn around. Money supply was still falling and short term interest rates remained close to zero. Before March 1933 people expected further deflation and a recession so that even interest rates at zero did not stimulate investment. But when Roosevelt announced major regime changes people began to expect inflation and an economic expansion. With these positive expectations, interest rates at zero began to stimulate investment just as they were expected to do. Roosevelt's fiscal and monetary policy regime change helped to make his policy objectives credible. The expectation of
higher future income and higher future inflation stimulated demand and investments. The analysis suggests that the elimination of the policy dogmas of the gold standard, a balanced budget in times of crises and small government led endogenously to a large shift in expectation that accounts for about 70–80 percent of the recovery of output and prices from 1933 to 1937. If the regime change had not happened and the Hoover policy had continued, the economy would have continued its free fall in 1933, and output would have been 30% lower in 1937 than in 1933.

The recession of 1937–38, which slowed down economic recovery from the Great Depression, is explained by fears of the population that the moderate tightening of the monetary and fiscal policy in 1937 would be first steps to a restoration of the pre-March 1933 policy regime.

Theorists of the "Austrian School" who wrote about the Depression include Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek and American economist Murray Rothbard, who wrote America's Great Depression (1963). In their view and like the monetarists, the Federal Reserve, which was created in 1913, shoulders much of the blame; but in opposition to the monetarists, they argue that the key cause of the Depression was the expansion of the money supply in the 1920s that led to an unsustainable credit-driven boom.
In the Austrian view it was this inflation of the money supply that led to an unsustainable boom in both asset prices (stocks and bonds) and capital goods. By the time the Fed belatedly tightened in 1928, it was far too late and, in the Austrian view, a significant economic contraction was inevitable.\(^{45}\) In February 1929 Hayek published a paper predicting the Federal Reserve's actions would lead to a crisis starting in the stock and credit markets.

According to Rothbard, government support for failed enterprises and keeping wages above their market values actually prolonged the Depression. Hayek, unlike Rothbard, believed since the 1970s, along with the monetarists, that the Federal Reserve further contributed to the problems of the Depression by permitting the money supply to shrink during the earliest years of the Depression. However, in 1932 and 1934 Hayek had criticized the FED and the Bank of England for not taking a more contractionary stance.

Hans Senholz argued that most boom and busts that plagued the American economy in 1819–20, 1839–43, 1857–60, 1873–78, 1893–97, and 1920–21, were generated by government creating a boom through easy money and credit, which was soon followed by the inevitable bust. The spectacular crash of 1929 followed five years of reckless credit expansion by the Federal Reserve System under the Coolidge Administration. The passing of the
Sixteenth Amendment, the passage of The Federal Reserve Act, rising government deficits, the passage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act, and the Revenue Act of 1932, exacerbated the crisis, prolonging it.

Ludwig von Mises wrote in the 1930s: "Credit expansion cannot increase the supply of real goods. It merely brings about a rearrangement. It diverts capital investment away from the course prescribed by the state of economic wealth and market conditions. It causes production to pursue paths which it would not follow unless the economy was to acquire an increase in material goods. As a result, the upswing lacks a solid base. It is not a real prosperity. It is illusory prosperity. It did not develop from an increase in economic wealth, i.e. the accumulation of savings made available for productive investment. Rather, it arose because the credit expansion created the illusion of such an increase. Sooner or later, it must become apparent that this economic situation is built on sand."

Karl Marx saw recession and depression as unavoidable under free-market capitalism as there are no restrictions on accumulations of capital other than the market itself. In the Marxist view, capitalism tends to create unbalanced accumulations of wealth, leading to over-accumulations of capital which inevitably lead to a crisis. This especially sharp bust is a regular feature
of the boom and bust pattern of what Marxists term "chaotic" capitalist development. It is a tenet of many Marxist groupings that such crises are inevitable and will be increasingly severe until the contradictions inherent in the mismatch between the mode of production and the development of productive forces reach the final point of failure. At which point, the crisis period encourages intensified class conflict and forces societal change.

Two economists of the 1920s, Waddill Catchings and William Trufant Foster, popularized a theory that influenced many policy makers, including Herbert Hoover, Henry A. Wallace, Paul Douglas, and Marriner Eccles. It held the economy produced more than it consumed, because the consumers did not have enough income. Thus the unequal distribution of wealth throughout the 1920s caused the Great Depression.

According to this view, the root cause of the Great Depression was a global over-investment in heavy industry capacity compared to wages and earnings from independent businesses, such as farms. The proposed solution was for the government to pump money into the consumers' pockets. That is, it must redistribute purchasing power, maintaining the industrial base, and re-inflating prices and wages to force as much of the inflationary increase in purchasing power into consumer spending. The economy was overbuilt, and
new factories were not needed. Foster and Catchings recommended federal and state governments to start large construction projects, a program followed by Hoover and Roosevelt.

Other economic downturns have been called a "great depression", but none had been as widespread, or lasted for so long. Various nations have experienced brief or extended periods of economic downturns, which were referred to as "depressions", but none have had such a widespread global impact.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the breakdown of economic ties which followed, led to a severe economic crisis and catastrophic fall in the standards of living in the 1990s in post-Soviet states and the former Eastern Bloc,[176] which was even worse than the Great Depression. Even before Russia's financial crisis of 1998, Russia's GDP was half of what it had been in the early 1990s, and some populations are still poorer as of 2009 than they were in 1989, including Moldova, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

The causes of the Great Recession seem similar to the Great Depression, but significant differences exist. The previous chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, had extensively studied the Great Depression as part of his doctoral work at MIT, and implemented policies to manipulate the money
supply and interest rates in ways that were not done in the 1930s. Bernanke's policies will undoubtedly be analyzed and scrutinized in the years to come, as economists debate the wisdom of his choices. Generally speaking, the recovery of the world's financial systems tended to be quicker during the Great Depression of the 1930s as opposed to the late-2000s recession.

If we contrast the 1930s with the Crash of 2008 where gold went through the roof, it is clear that the U.S. dollar on the gold standard was a completely different animal in comparison to the fiat free-floating U.S. dollar currency we have today. Both currencies in 1929 and 2008 were the U.S. dollar, but in an analogous way it is as if one was a Saber-toothed tiger and the other is a Bengal tiger; they are two completely different animals. Where we have experienced inflation since the Crash of 2008, the situation was much different in the 1930s when deflation set in. Unlike the deflation of the early 1930s, the U.S. economy currently appears to be in a "liquidity trap," or a situation where monetary policy is unable to stimulate an economy back to health.

In terms of the stock market, nearly three years after the 1929 crash, the DJIA dropped 8.4% on August 12, 1932. Where we have experienced great volatility with large intraday swings in the past two months, in 2011, we have not experienced any record-shattering daily percentage drops to the tune of the
1930s. Where many of us may have that '30s feeling, in light of the DJIA, the CPI, and the national unemployment rate, we are simply not living in the '30s. Some individuals may feel as if we are living in a depression, but for many others the current global financial crisis simply does not feel like a depression akin to the 1930s. 1928 and 1929 were the times in the 20th century that the wealth gap reached such skewed extremes; half the unemployed had been out of work for over six months, something that was not repeated until the late-2000s recession. 2007 and 2008 eventually saw the world reach new levels of wealth gap inequality that rivalled the years of 1928 and 1929.

In The Grapes of Wrath there are plenty of “others” to hold the Okies in isolation. Sometimes they act out of the brutality and hatred born of fear, as the deputies who destroy the Hooverville camps. Sometimes they act out of selfishness and desire for personal gain, as the orchard owners who break up the strike against starvation wages. But whatever the immediate motivation, all deny the humanity and the individual worth of the Okies. The service-station boy on Route 66, even though he takes no direct action, is representative in this thought:

“Well, you and me got sense. Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain’t human. A human being wouldn’t live
like they do. A human being couldn’t stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain’t a hell of a lot better than gorillas.” (301)

Against the isolation imposed by such an attitude the Okies see no recourse beyond banding together more solidly in mutual aid and understanding. If at times they believe too much in mere organization for its own sake—defended in part by the assumption of the common nature of man—their longing can be understood in terms of the times and their situation. The “others,” after all, have banded together, not out of a desire to serve their common humanity, but rather out of a selfish desire to exploit the unorganized. For the individual to fight back alone may be heroic, but it is fatal. As an extreme case of the isolated individual against the world the story of Pretty Boy Floyd is mentioned again and again: “They run him like a coyote an’ him a-snappin’ an’ a-snarlin’ mean as a lobo.” (103) But the Okies of this novel do not turn into that sort of outlaw. Driven out of the home and the society they once knew, wandering in isolation among those who cannot even accept them as members of a common humanity, they can only turn to each other for help and understanding and love. And there, bound together by their mutual plight, forced into recognition of the humanity of others, they can lose the loneliness that their isolation threatens.
For all its modern setting, then, for all its time of unusual conditions and its interest in a whole people as well as in the individual, The Grapes of Wrath is still clearly in the tradition of the American concern in fiction for the problem of isolation. It has simply broadened the theme, in keeping with the sociological interest imposed by the century, to include a group rather than a single person. The Joads much each meet the problem of alienation of his own way, yet behind the individual there is always the family, and behind the family there is always the whole tribe of migrants, each individual and each group of which must meet the problem too. Each individual and each group of which must meet the problem too. And the answer for all is still the old answer for the individual: the loss of self in concern and love for others. If man can lose his exclusively egocentric and selfish interest to turn outward to others, he need not fear loneliness or spiritual isolation. For this century the mechanics of the solution may be somewhat different from those of earlier days, man can no longer simply turn to humanity—desirable as that ideal is—but must belong to some form of group to which to turn. Even then the answer in not simple, for the group may itself be devoted to inhumane ends, as is the organization of farmers and cannerys in this novel. So man must turn to the group, and the group must turn to humanity itself. The individual is not longer in complete control of his own end, as Anderson and Faulker imply, but must depend upon
others as well as himself. But the others, as The Grapes of Wrath insists so successfully, are themselves individuals. And if the individuals of this modern complex, organized world would always keep faith with their common humanity in their necessary organization, the ideal world in which there is no isolation and no loneliness would be achieved. The goal may never be reached—and the fiction of this century is hardly optimistic—but man in the meanwhile has an immediate answer that will serve his needs and will eventually help the step toward the ideal.

The term "The Great Depression" is most frequently attributed to British economist Lionel Robbins, whose 1934 book The Great Depression is credited with formalizing the phrase, though Hoover is widely credited with popularizing the term, informally referring to the downturn as a depression, with such uses as "Economic depression cannot be cured by legislative action or executive pronouncement" (December 1930, Message to Congress), and "I need not recount to you that the world is passing through a great depression".

The Great Depression has been the subject of much writing, as authors have sought to evaluate an era that caused both financial and emotional trauma. Perhaps the most noteworthy and famous novel written on the subject is The Grapes of Wrath, published in 1939 and written by John Steinbeck, who was
awarded both the Nobel Prize for literature and the Pulitzer Prize for the work. The novel focuses on a poor family of sharecroppers who are forced from their home as drought, economic hardship, and changes in the agricultural industry occur during the Great Depression. Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is another important novella about a journey during the Great Depression. Additionally, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set during the Great Depression. Margaret Atwood's Booker prize-winning *The Blind Assassin* is likewise set in the Great Depression, centering on a privileged socialite's love affair with a Marxist revolutionary. The era spurred the resurgence of social realism, practiced by many who started their writing careers on relief programs, especially the Federal Writers' Project in the U.S.

A number of works for younger audiences are also set during the Great Depression, among them the *Kit Kittredge* series of American Girl books written by Valerie Tripp and illustrated by Walter Rane, released to tie in with the dolls and playsets sold by the company. The stories, which take place during the early to mid 1930s in Cincinnati, focuses on the changes brought by the Depression to the titular character's family and how the Kittredges dealt with it. A theatrical adaptation of the series entitled *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl* was later released in 2008 to positive reviews. Similarly, *Christmas After All*, part of the Dear America series of books for older girls,
take place in 1930s Indianapolis; while Kit Kittredge is told in a third-person viewpoint, Christmas After All is in the form of a fictional journal as told by the protagonist Minnie Swift as she recounts her experiences during the era, especially when her family takes in an orphan cousin from Texas.

And the great owners, who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read history and to know the great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed. –John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath

Effects of depression in the U.S.:

- 13 million people became unemployed. In 1932, 34 million people belonged to families with no regular full-time wage earner.
- Industrial production fell by nearly 45% between 1929 and 1932.
- Homebuilding dropped by 80% between the years 1929 and 1932.
• In the 1920s, the banking system in the U.S. was about $50 billion, which was about 50% of GDP.
• From 1929 to 1932, about 5,000 banks went out of business.
• By 1933, 11,000 of the US' 25,000 banks had failed.
• Between 1929 and 1933, U.S. GDP fell around 30%, the stock market lost almost 90% of its value.
• In 1929, the unemployment rate averaged 3%.
• In Cleveland, the unemployment rate was 50%; in Toledo, Ohio, 80%.
• One Soviet trading corporation in New York averaged 350 applications a day from Americans seeking jobs in the Soviet Union.
• Over one million families lost their farms between 1930 and 1934.
• Corporate profits had dropped from $10 billion in 1929 to $1 billion in 1932.
• Between 1929 and 1932, the income of the average American family was reduced by 40%.
• Nine million savings accounts had been wiped out between 1930 and 1933.
• 273,000 families had been evicted from their homes in 1932.
• There were two million homeless people migrating around the country.
• Over 60% of Americans were categorized as poor by the federal government in 1933.

• In the last prosperous year (1929), there were 279,678 immigrants recorded, but in 1933 only 23,068 came to the U.S.

• In the early 1930s, more people emigrated from the United States than immigrated to it.

• With little economic activity there was scant demand for new coinage. No nickels or dimes were minted in 1932–33, no quarter dollars in 1931 or 1933, no half dollars from 1930 to 1932, and no silver dollars in the years 1929–33.

• The U.S. government sponsored a Mexican Repatriation program which was intended to encourage people to voluntarily move to Mexico, but thousands, including some U.S. citizens, were deported against their will. Altogether about 400,000 Mexicans were repatriated.

• New York social workers reported that 25% of all schoolchildren were malnourished. In the mining counties of West Virginia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, the proportion of malnourished children was perhaps as high as 90%.

• Many people became ill with diseases such as tuberculosis (TB).
The 1930 U.S. Census determined the U.S. population to be 122,775,046. About 40% of the population was under 20 years old.

To sum up, the exquisite literary sensibility not only responds to contemporary economic phenomena enveloping the populace of the time but also aims to sensitize a tribe of migrants to their need of mutual co-operation to build a social dynamics of working force to bring about socio-economic change as a first step for egalitarian society. The Grapes of wrath has indeed combined his literary genius to galvanize people to a higher social economic parity through their conscious political organization to bring about equitable socio-economic order.
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