

Freedom-Zine America

Published by The Cepia Club LLC

Community Reports

Issue # 25 February 3, 2009

www.cepiaclub.com

P.O. Box 214, Centuria, WI 54824

715-646-9933

Until February 28, 2009
Last Chance Offer for
Introductory Rate

\$40

For **Cepiaglobal Associated
Membership Program**
Contact us for enrollment
details! Barter, Futures Report,
Placement Discounts!!
715-646-9933

The Bitter Wine:

Review of: John Steinbeck,
The Grapes of Wrath, 1939.

Land. Good land. Good land produces food to eat, clothes to wear, and the materials and places to live. Land. Without it, farmers can't farm, and people can't live. What happens when the land dies? When the communities supporting the land, and even more the land supporting the towns, can't survive any longer when the land goes bad, turns dry from ignorant management, erosion from over-use, and withers so it refuses to yield a crop to live. Land and people, the symbiotic union (def: one needs the other for both to survive), break apart. One and another both wither, separate, sometimes ending decades under the feet and family of a single ancestor. The Dust Bowl era of the 1930s in our Great Depression, when such a "perfect" catastrophe happened, when

the economy was too poor to resolve or bridge temporary hardship until all renewed, provided the setting for John Steinbeck's travels then and in 1939 for his masterpiece novel, The Grapes of Wrath.

Upon returning home from his prison sentence for manslaughter, Tom Joad finds his family packing everything possible into a beat-up, old, just-bought Dodge truck. The land gone bad, the small homestead farms in Oklahoma had been purchased by, or rather lost to, farmer businessman, men of enough wealth to bring "capital" and construction tractors to bulldoze the farm houses and buildings to make bigger farms, farms easier for profit. Thus became homeless the Joads and their kin and their neighbors. With this "revolution" in the affairs of society, food could be grown more efficiently,

though not as caring, without the people on it to care about what happens to it. And the great Joad family migration to the land of milk and honey, in California, was underway.

Traveling west, along the old caravan route, 66, the Joads spent their days driving, living in constant fear of spending all their small hoard of cash to sustain them the entire exodus. Seeking work—any work—just to feed themselves without much left over—in the unimaginably lush gardens of California ranch farms and orchards—it is a matter of family survival. Almost as soon as they left their battered, board-shackle house in Oklahoma, tragedy strikes the first, the aged victim of a worn out, old broken heart. Through the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona the Joad family meets other people, good people, and bad ones, seeking the same ends, at the roadside

impromptu campsites (it only needed water to qualify). Then, as Ma Joad loathed and tried to prevent, the “famby” riding the breaking down truck began to bail out voluntarily, through fear, sadness, and then there was more death, and finally tragedy. The family and the friends with whom the Joads partnered their hardship and their hope, finally arrive in the land promised, only to find thousands upon thousands of other desperate families migrated or still migrating to accept the few jobs promoted on colored handbills they carried all the way from back in Dust Bowl, Oklahoma.

Economics comes into play here: supply and demand raising the stakes of families desperate to get work to eat in a market where too few jobs accommodate an overload of people wanting them. Wages go down; bitterness at the “Oakies” and other migrants, but Oakies especially, rises; conflict between Big Business and Little Guys ensues, with the money behind the power enforcing their own rules and winning by doing it. Injustice, they say. Hard facts of a life where the rich rule and the poor hard scabble to feed themselves. Never healthy in body from malnutrition, weary in mind from all-day hard work, and losing the optimism that in normal times worked land gives people humble pride, the Joads and others get to the end of their story. Tom Joad, convicted felon, migrant farmer, already breaking his parole by leaving Oklahoma,

vows to “be there” whenever the poor, the infirm, the hungry, the helpless suffer injustice. His story goes on through time of upheavals and hardship and revolution.

Better off? Worse off? Seeding communist realities comes heavy with the book. But it was the failure of capitalism that Steinbeck wrote about when Industrial Mass Society completed the extinction of Mass Agricultural Society. People want answers, then and now, to bad times. They'll look anywhere, even to communism and fascism, if it will feed them and protect them. The era was the transition from that Steinbeck witnessed in his travels that led him to write such a book. And as we pass the extinction of factories to what comes next, there will be many relevant cultural, economic, and ultimately political relationships in The Grapes Wrath that parallel this 21st Century “great (?) depression.” In the pages of this novel a reader might inform themselves of the same moral and personal dilemmas between then and now. Well, it is necessary to read the book. But a warning, as it has the most unexpected, and weirdly shocking, last paragraphs of any American classic. And this is a classic, if there is such a thing, but one must read the entire book (don't cheat) to fully grasp the last few sentences—otherwise, don't bother. Steinbeck, this reviewer's personal favorite writer of American prose, without doubt masters the details of American novel as the art form all but a couple other novels never have achieved, and perhaps never will.

Community, Not Isolationism

When Cepia Club mentions “community”, it means the value of what people and land have together: A rooted, spiritual connection to time and place. Land and people are one in many respects; separate the one from the other, and a humble pride of knowing whence we came, WHERE we stand in values, memory, joy, and family, fall away from being the focus of life. We instinctively have in our humanity to help people. We help our family despite our reason when family suffers from the members' mistakes or misfortunes. We rely on our friends, and our neighbors, to sustain the little spark of faith and life that makes the difficult at least bearable. Community, where we identify our personal and family interests for property, safety, society, and our natural rights to be free men and women, is the place we want to belong, or the place we eventually are accepted. It is loneliness, isolation, fear, and greed that replace the “Platinum Rule of Humankind—that our only purpose here is to be helpful to others—when we separate ourselves from the otherwise Diamond Rule of Reality. That studded rule is, No person can live sane, safe, sustained, and spiritual if we do not accept that we need each other, of diverse types, to not only survive well, but survive at all. It is in the community we build that can give us hope as things collapse. That optimism in others is faith hard to build, trust hard to earn. Keep hope in our lives, in each other, in our community, and help others do the same. It is our only choice.