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**Collectivism Vs Individualism in the American Farmers
Protest During the Thirties. In John Steinbeck's
The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937).**

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Dedication:

I would love to dedicate this modest work to:

My dear mother, my dear father and Mamanou.

My sisters and my brothers.

My beloved husband for his encouragements.

All the members of my family in law.

All my friends.

To you reader.

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Abstract

Our aim through this memoire is to study the two philosophies of Collectivism and individualism in the light of John Steinbeck's novels The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and Of Mice and Men (1937) in order to shed light on the conflict between the two opposing philosophies in the period of the 1930s. In fact, due to the effects of the Great Depression (1929) and the Dust Bowl (1935) in the United States of America, American farmers faced difficult moments. To overcome their plight, they found no solution (means) than acting and protesting collectively believing that collectivism was the only way to stop the abuses of government and the greediness of businessmen at that time. Within the collective bodies, they formed each one of them looked for his/her self-interests in the actions they organized. This proves that despite their collectivity, the spirit of individualism they lived for so many years was still engraved in their minds. The clash between the two philosophies of collectivism and individualism is well illustrated in John Steinbeck's novels The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and Of Mice and Men (1937) which reflect well the misfortune and despair of the American farmers who tried by all the means necessary; including the creation of organizations so that to establish unions and agreements to put an end to economic and social problems, such as unemployment, homelessness and famine. So, this memoire identifies how characters in both The Grapes of Wrath and Of Mice and Men acted collectively but at the same time looked for their self-interests. To reach our purpose, we rely on Jean Jacques Rousseau's theory of collectivism mentioned and discussed in The Social Contract (1762) and Alexis DeTocqueville's theory of individualism mentioned and discussed in Democracy in America (1835).

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Introduction

The subject of our research is the study of the two opposing doctrines, Collectivism and Individualism within the American farmers' protest of the thirties. The study will be based on two novels written by the American pioneer John Steinbeck (1902-1962), who is known for his works, entitled *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), in which he portrays the misfortune and the extreme poverty of the American farmers during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Through his portrayal of the farmers' social life, Steinbeck focuses on the way they were obliged by the government either to leave their land or to stay and live as tenants, and how they did not accept the situation and opposed the government's decisions. Yet, their weak position in front of the government's officials prevented them from the latter individually. As a result, they acted collectively and protested in order to change their bad living conditions and to overcome their problems. But, at the same time, being unable to get rid of the individualism of the Jazz age, they looked for Individual self-interests through their protest.

Throughout his novels, Steinbeck is known for his portrayal of the real life of the farmers in the West and their struggle for survival in a period known for its social, economic and political instability. Being a journalist, he was in a close contact with the farmers who travelled from Oklahoma to California and known as the "Okies", the thing which provided him with a detailed historical background to write his novels that seem to be close to reality. Indeed, as a journalist, he accompanied those farmers and infiltrated their camps, and he shared their social and economic problems. In addition to this, he came to realize that the problems they experienced forced them to act as groups in order to survive and face their problems despite the spirit of individualism that dominated their souls as American citizens.

Review of the Literature

As he portrayed the American real life during the Great Depression, John Steinbeck emerged as a great and famous American writer. Indeed, thanks to his books, mainly *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), the author gained a number of Awards, including a Pulitzer Prize in 1940 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962. His fame made his books and essays the subject for many critics. While his works were mainly criticized at the level of the characters and his presentation of the events of the Great Depression.

Among the writers who reviewed John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* the very famous writer Frank J. Taylor in his essay *The Social Context in The Grapes of Wrath*. The latter believed that Steinbeck's work was the best –selling novel of migrant agricultural workers. This was due to the fact that the novel dealt with the specific story of the Joad family which was mainly an agricultural one. However, Taylor attacked the factual accuracies of Steinbeck's works and asserted that all the facts that were said in the novel were not true. Indeed, he considered that though the book was a fiction, many readers accepted it as facts. Yet, these facts never existed. In this context, the author claimed: "These are a few of the sins which Steinbeck indicts California farmers. It is difficult to rebut fiction, which requires no proof, with facts, which do require proof".¹ Furthermore, he argued that the experiences including the obstacles and problems, which were faced by the Joad family during their journey from Oklahoma to California, were not typical of those of the real migrants. He stated:

I made one inquiry during the winter of 1937-1938, following the flood which Steinbeck describes I made another at the height of the harvest this year. Along three thousand miles of highways and byways, I was unable to find a single counterpart of the Joad family. Nor have I discovered one during fifteen years of residence in Santa Clara Valley the same valley where John Steinbeck now lives), which is crowded each summer with transient workers harvesting the fruit crops. The lot of the "fruit tramp" is admittedly no bed of roses, but neither is it the bitter fate described in *The Grapes of Wrath*.²

Moreover, according to Taylor, there was no migrant family who hungered in California. In this context, he declared: “there is no red tape about getting free food or shelter and there are officers who may issue money for clothing, gasoline, or medical supplies”.³

While Frank J. Taylor criticized Steinbeck from a historical angle, there were many other reviewers who criticized Steinbeck’s works from other perspectives. Among them, Louis Owen who in his essay *Criticism in the Grapes of Wrath* criticized Steinbeck’s novels, especially *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), from a religious perspective. According to Owen, California is considered by John Steinbeck to be as the New Eden and the Okies were as the Israelites.⁴ To Owen, this was similar to William Bradford’s comparison of his pilgrims at Plymouth to Moses and the Israelites. In fact, he asserted that John Steinbeck was very fascinated by Biblical Promised Land. In this context, Owen stated that it was essential that Steinbeck should keep the Bible firmly in both the background and the foreground of this great American novel. So for him, Steinbeck wrote not only about an isolated historical and sociological event such as the Dust Bowl and the “Okie” migration, but also about a nation founded solidly upon a Biblical consciousness.⁵

Furthermore, he argued that John Steinbeck’s fascination throughout his life about Biblical consciousness came from the first writings of the British colonial founders who considered that the American land was to be the Canaan or the New Jerusalem. For instance, in one of his essays, William Bradford’s pilgrims at Plymouth were depicted as the chosen people who consciously compared themselves to the Israelites. According to Owen, they were repeatedly linked to Moses because they too fled from persecution and religious bondage in England for the new Promised Land called America, just as Moses who fled Egypt to the Promised Land called New Jerusalem. Therefore, to Owen, the

acutely Biblical consciousness became what was come to be called the American myth, which was a kind of national consciousness which holded Steinbeck's attention.⁶

Another American author named Nellie Y. McKay criticized Steinbeck through her essay "*new essays on the Grapes of Wrath*". throughout this essay, McKay gave mainly an interest to the centrality of women's action in *The Grapes of Wrath*. To clarify her idea, she said that from the very beginning of the novel, one could notice that not only among the Joads, the main characters in the novel, but in all the families in crisis, the children, every time, looked to women for answers to their needs and to their immediate survival. To support her statement, she gave the reader examples from the novel as: "What we going to do ma?" "Where we going to go?" The anonymous children ask.⁷ She added that during the thirties, which supposed to be the era of the male domination, one could notice that children depended not on their father for parenting, but on their mother and children's stability rested mainly on the consistency and reliability with which women met their needs.⁸

Moreover, McKay asserted that in Steinbeck's novel, there was no question that the woman-wife and mother contributed to the stability of the family and had a very important role in the existing social order. Indeed, according to her, Steinbeck portrayed Ma Joad as a strong and wise woman, who constantly gave advice to the members of her family and even to others. And she always tried to keep the unity of her family by finding a solution to every single problem they faced. So, according to McKay, without the unshakable strength and wisdom of the mother who most of the time asserted her will to fill the vacuum of her husband's incapability, nothing in the family would survive the misfortune. Also, she assumed that though, at that time, women had

not yet succeeded to gain their rights and freedom, they continued to fill the social space as women, wives and mothers.⁹

In addition to the role of women in Steinbeck's novel, McKay tackled another important point in her essay. In fact, she said that according to many critics, there were two distinct narrative views of women in Steinbeck's writings. In one, in novels such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *To God Unknown* (1933), the image of women was positive, with a female significance completely associated with maternal roles. However, in the other novels such as *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *East of Eden* (1952), the portrayal of women was very negative since they were given the images of tramps and whores. Therefore, in this regard, she claimed: "whores, hustlers, tramps, or madams".¹⁰ These names were the outstanding roles that define the majority of women. More graphically stated by one critic, women seemed compelled to choose between homemaking and whoredom. Interestingly, in spite of their questionable behavior, women within the group were often described as "big-breasted, big-hipped, and warm", thus implying the maternal types.¹¹²

The above selected critics were just few examples among many others who criticized Steinbeck's novels at the level of characters and plot as well as their relatedness to the historical background of the 1930s. In their study of Steinbeck's novels, the critics could not escape the agrarians aspect of his novels as well as life in community and collectivity while studying the points they felt worth of interest.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

From our Review of the literature, we noticed that John Steinbeck was criticized especially through *The Grapes of Wrath*. Indeed, some writers intended to criticize the factual

accuracies of the novel by arguing that all the facts that were mentioned were not true. Some others criticized it from a religious perspective, by asserting that California was considered by Steinbeck to be the New Eden and the migrant workers namely “Okies” were Israelites. There were also writers who focused on the centrality of women to the actions of the novels. However, none of the critics combined the two works *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* to study the reason why American agrarians acted and protested collectively and at the same time looked for individual interest in their actions and protest during the Great Depression.

Our intention through this piece of research is to shed light on how John Steinbeck portrayed the migrant workers in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) as individuals and as collectivity. It aims at highlighting the actions of his characters who did act collectively while claiming their rights and denouncing the injustices made by government, and at the same time, they looked for self-interests within their struggle against obstacles caused by the economic crisis of the thirties. Our selection of these two novels is justified by the fact that they were seen as being a medium that depicted and described the realistic events of the thirties in the United States of America by which Steinbeck depicted how the farmers did protest collectively and at the same time individually to solve their problems.

Method and Materials

It has so far been clear that the material selected to study the idea of collectivism and individualism in John Steinbeck's fiction concerned the novels *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937). As far as the method was concerned, we will appeal to both Jean Jacques Rousseau's theory of collectivism and Alexis De Tocqueville's theory of individualism. Individualism made the individual its focus. It emphasized the moral worth of the individual. Individualists promoted the exercise of one's goals and desires and they gave importance to independence and self-reliance. Individualists advocated that the interests of the individual should achieve priority over a social group or a state whereas, collectivism was a political, economic or social orientation that emphasized the interdependence of every human from collective groups. Collectivists advocated the interests of the group with priority over the individual. Also, the collectivists usually focused on community, nation or society.

Indeed, in Steinbeck's two novels, readers could find aspects of Collectivism and Individualism. Throughout his description of the plot and characters, one could easily identify aspects of the two opposing doctrines. By narrating and describing farmers during the Great Depression, Steinbeck showed how American farmers acted collectively in order to overcome the difficulties of the thirties. However, the writer unconsciously also showed that farmers every time used individual actions in their struggle.

Our issue is based on the study of the two philosophies of collectivism and individualism in Steinbeck's novels. Thus, we find it necessary to give a clear explanation of the two philosophies by relating them to Steinbeck's novels *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). By reading the two novels, one can notice that the events of the stories turned

around the context of the migrant farmers (Okies) who desperately looked for solutions to overcome misery, homelessness and despair. Indeed, Steinbeck got no sympathy towards the bankers and the land owners. Therefore, in his novels, he described the farmers' revolt against landowners and bankers by acting collectively to surmount their difficulties.¹² One can understand Steinbeck's position, if one related it to the eighteenth century French philosophy of collectivism, developed by John Jacques Rousseau (1762). The latter gave much importance to collectivism. In fact, in his book *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau compared and made a link between society and family, he claimed that "The family may be called the first model of political societies. The ruler corresponds to the father and the people to the children. And all of them are born free and equal alienated their liberty only for their own advantage."¹³ In other words, he claimed that an individual could not build a political society alone even if he was free and strong. However, it was thanks to the family unit that the political societies were constructed. According to Rousseau, the family was like the starting point for collectivism. He also insisted on the fact that within the society, the force of the group which was more important than the individual one. In this context, he said:

As men cannot engender new forces, but only unite and direct existing ones, they have no other means of preserving themselves than the formation, by aggregation, of a sum of forces great enough to overcome the resistance. These they have to bring into play by means of a single motive power, and cause to act in concert.¹⁴

According to him, to overcome obstacles and problems, people had to unify their forces and powers against the enemy. They should not act individually. So, in order to protect their goods, people had to act collectively. He added that: "...if then we discard from the social compact what is not of its essence, we shall find that it reduces itself to the following terms: Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an invisible part of the whole."¹⁵

Here Rousseau explained that if individuals rejected the agreement of the social rights and duties, each of them would be inefficient in his act and he would be unable to produce a power to influence the society. So, to keep society united, it was very important for its individuals to accept and respect agreements so that to end with the unfairness, injustice and violation of their rights. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of collectivism over individualism by asserting that: “This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons formerly took the name of city...Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of people...”¹⁶. One can understand that Rousseau sustained the idea that the individual was free to enjoy civil liberties only by submitting to the general will. That is to say that the individual was self-ruling and not controlled when he acted in favor of the group.

Besides, he said:

It may also happen that men begin to unite one with another before they possess anything, and that, subsequently occupying a tract of country which is enough for all, they enjoy it in common, or share it out among themselves, either equally or according to the scale fixed by the sovereign. However, the acquisition be made, the right which each individual has to his own estate is always subordinate to the right which the community has over all.¹⁷

In the passage, Rousseau explained that in order to maintain stability in the social tie, and equality within society, individuals’ right would be less important than the collective right. In addition, he argued that the general will which can be ascertained by the majority voting was always right and tended to the public advantage. In this regard he said: “The general will is always right and tends to the public advantage and our will is always for our good.”¹⁸ Thus, the general will, according to Rousseau, was the common interest and it was always accurate and consistent, and it was always in charge of the public profits. So, in his book *The Social Contract* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau emphasizes the importance of the collective over the individual. He argued throughout his book that the individual was free only by submitting to the general will

which was conceived as the essential part of opinion and the general will was always right and tended to the public advantage.

As far as individualism was concerned, by reading both the novels, the reader could remark that though the American farmers acted collectively to overcome difficulties, they always looked for their self-interests. So, Steinbeck in his novels showed the individualistic principle apparent in his characters' actions. One could understand Steinbeck's position by relating it to Alexis De Tocqueville; a French philosopher, who was famous for his studies of American Democracy. His philosophy was the seminal voice of nineteenth century and still deeply embedded in American culture. In his book *Democracy in America* (1835), he wrote that individualism was as a cornerstone of democracy, and a means of equality. De Tocqueville's philosophy celebrated the independent individual.

Furthermore, positively wrote about individualism, which was according to him, synonymous with freedom and independence from oppression and domination. He said: "Individualism is a recent expression arising out of a new idea. Our father knew only the word egoism...Individualism is democratic in origin, and it threatens to develop as conditions equalize."¹⁹ De Tocqueville showed the real meaning of individualism in Democratic country. In fact, according to him, individualism was a new expression and idea which was completely different from what their fathers knew before. According to De Tocqueville, their fathers saw the word individualism as being similar to the word egoism which was an exaggerated love of self, which led a man to relate everything with his own person, and to prefer himself to everything else in the world.

Also, according to him, individualism was different from egoism. He claimed: “Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures, and to draw apart with his family and his friend; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself.”²⁰ One can understand that egoism was originated in blind instinct whereas individualism was originated from Democracy. So, the former was negative and the latter was something positive, which had no relation with cruelty, domination or oppression. It was just a feeling in which a person had a need to form his own as an individual in order to be free and to be able to choose, to make decisions and act as a free and independent moral agent.

Moreover, De Tocqueville described and compared the individualism of the aristocratic ages and that of the democratic ages. Indeed, he argued that individuals during the aristocratic ages willingly imposed duties on themselves towards their fathers and their descendents. They also sacrificed their personal gratifications to those who went before and those who would come after them. According to De Tocqueville, aristocratic institutions even helped to bind everyone to several of his fellow-Citizens. As a result, individuals during that period were not free and they were always attached to one another. However, in the Democratic ages, as De Tocqueville said: “when the duties of each individual to the race are much more clear, devoted service to any one man becomes more rare ; the bond of human affection is extended, but it is relaxed.”²¹

According to De Tocqueville, aristocracy made a chain of all members of the community from peasants to the king; fortunately, democracy broke that chain and separated every link of it, so that every individual within the society became equal to another. Individuals, therefore, became neither rich nor powerful enough to exercise any domination or influence on the others. In his words, De Tocqueville said: “...They owe nothing to anyone, they expect nothing from

anyone; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands”.²² From this quotation, one can say that the democratic community, according to De Tocqueville, contained a large number of independent and free individuals who were not afraid to show that they cared about nothing but themselves. In addition, for De Tocqueville, individualism was a choice made by all the members of Democratic society which concentrated on the private life not on the public one. Furthermore, he argued: “Individualism meant that each man had within himself the right to make his own choices and to make or break his life-career on the basis of his own judgment...”²³ Besides, according to him, a man could make his choices and be rewarded when he did well. And Americans believed that individualism was a fair system, and thanks to it, their way of life was understandable to all, because they could live and act as individuals.

As a conclusion, we can say that De Tocqueville used the concept of individualism in connection with democracy in the American society and concentrated on the American social structure which was, according to him, different from the European one. Moreover, De Tocqueville had a passionate love for liberty and was concerned to point out the dangerous trends that threatened to destroy it as well as the means by which it could be preserved. Besides, he considered individualism to be a mature thing which came from Democracy, a calm feeling, something good which belong to the modern world and led to freedom. De Tocqueville also hoped that through the insights he communicated in his book, humanity would be better able to direct themselves toward freedom, knowledge and prosperity.

From what has been said, we deduced that despite the opposition between the philosophies of individualism and collectivism, we can say that we cannot find one without the other. Indeed, theorists as Rousseau and DeTocqueville could not explain one without making

reference to the other. So, Steinbeck's two novels *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) were counter balanced in the depiction of how the characters acted collectively to overcome the effects of the Great Depression and, at the same time, had self interests. For instance, *Of Mice and Men* opens with a story of two migrant workers who lived in California. Both dreamed of being able to own their small farm. They were always inseparable during their travel. They found a work in a ranch where Candy guided them all over the bunkhouse. Soon after, they met Curly, the son of the boss, who tried always to dominate and exploit the workers of the ranch by making troubles mainly with Lennie. Therefore, the workers always tried to act collectively and mainly to be against the capitalistic system of the government of the thirties. However, when reading the novel, one could notice that each of them acted for himself looking for a better life for himself. As an instance, Lennie always entered in a fight with Curley. Accidentally, Lennie killed Curley's wife when she let him stroke her hair. The thing that forced George to kill his friend Lennie.

Also, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck described in detail the Collectivism in United States through the family farming who shared the same problems due to the economic crash. In fact, Steinbeck described how the Joads, Wilsons and the migrant farmers suffered in the Promised Land, where they were subjected to intimidation by the police officers. The Joads and other families moved from camp to camp looking for work while their living conditions worsen. Unfortunately, they were known as "Okies" which meant dirty son of bitch.²⁴ so, the migrant farmers faced hardships and ill treatment there in California. As a result, farmers acted collectively in order to overcome the plight. However, every character in the novel unconsciously rugged individualism and that was due to their influence by Herbert Hoover's presidency in 1928

which was associated with the traditional American values such as personal freedom, capitalism, competition, privatization and limited government.

Materials

Summary of *The Grapes of Wrath*

Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) described in detail family farming who shared the same problems due to the economic crash. In fact, Steinbeck portrayed how the Joads, Wilsons and the migrant farmers suffered in the Promised Land, where they were subjected to intimidation by the police officers. The Joads and other families moved from camp to camp looking for work while their living conditions worsen. The migrant farmers faced hardships and ill treatment in California. Penniless and starving, the farming families in the novel met on roadsides and makeshift camps. In such settings and without any appointed leader or organizer, they talked about their shared problems and gradually acquired a new outlook on social institutions in order to make a change in their social lifestyle.

Summary of *Of Mice and Men*

Steinbeck in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) described two migrant workers in California during the Great Depression. George Milton, an intelligent man, and Lennie Small strong but limited mental abilities. Both came to California to work in a ranch hoping that one day, they would attain their shared dream of settling down on their own piece of land. Lennie's part of the dream was to have soft rabbits in his own farm. However, their dream crashed when Lennie accidentally killed the young and attractive wife of the ranch owner's son, while trying to stroke her hair. George realized that he was doomed to a life of loneliness and despair like the rest of the migrant workers, therefore he killed his best friend Lennie.

Methodological Outline

To achieve our purpose, we will divide the discussion sections of this dissertation into two main parts: In the first part, we will explore John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and how the individual feeling tried always to break the collective actions of characters. In the second part, we will focus on how the individual feelings tried to break the collective actions in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937).

Notes and References

¹ Frank J. Taylor, *The Social Context, in The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck: Text and Criticism, ed. Peter Lisca and Kevin Hearle (London: Penguin books,1997),458.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 459.

⁴ Louis Owen, *Criticism, in The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck: Text and Criticism, ed. Peter Lisca and Kevin Hearle (London: Penguin books,1997), 644.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 647-652.

⁷ Nelly Y. McKay, *Criticism, in The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck: Text and Criticism*, ed. Peter Lisca and Kevin Hearle (London: Penguin books,1997), 665.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 667.

¹⁰ Ibid.,670.

¹¹ Ibid., 671.

¹² Paul Thompson, *Agriculture and Human Values* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 170-71.

¹³ G.D.H.Cole,trans.*The Social Contract* (New York : cosimo classics,2008),3.

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵ Cole, *The Social Contract*,11.

¹⁶ Ibid., 12-7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cole, *The Social Contract*, 21-52.

¹⁹ Henry Reeve, trans., *Democracy in America* (Pennsylvania Unniversity: An Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2002), 574.

²⁰ Reeve, *Democracy in America*, 574.

²¹ Ibid.,576.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 578.

²⁴ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: penguin books,1992), 280.

Results

Our investigation has reached some important results after the analysis of the concepts of collectivism and individualism in John Steinbeck's novels *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). To reach our objectives, we have based our study on the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau's theory of collectivism developed in his book *The Social Contract* (1762) and Alexis De Tocqueville's theory of individualism found in his book *Democracy in America* (1835). We have dealt with collectivism and individualism in the two novels mainly at the level of characters. The problematic we have raised aims at painting out the way John Steinbeck portrayed the migrant workers in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and why they acted collectively by claiming their rights and denouncing the injustices made by government, and at the same time, they looked for self-interests during their protest.

To better understand the issue of collectivism and individualism, we have included in the discussion section two sections. In the first, we have studied the collective actions of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and how at the same time looked for their self-interests. In the second section we have explored the same ideas in the novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937). Steinbeck wrote the two novels during the Great Depression under which Americans, especially farmers, suffered from homelessness, poverty and despair.

We can end this section by deducing that though John Steinbeck in his two novels *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) took a retrospective approach to criticizing individualism due to the capitalistic system of the thirties in the United States of America by showing the reader the collective actions of the characters. However, when reading

the two novels, one can realize that unconsciously Steinbeck rugged individualism which was reflected on the characters who everytime looked for their self interests in their actions.

Historical Background

The economic and social history of the 1930s was shaped by that of the 1920's. In fact, the beginning of the Roaring Twenties was marked by the rise of the Republicans. Three of them namely Warren G Harding, Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover succeeded to the presidency of the USA. Under their rule the United States' economy picked up and new industries emerged especially during Coolidge's presidency. The latter considered that the chief business of the American people was business. Thus, he encouraged and sustained the growth of industries. At the social level, the 1920s were marked by a decline in social and religious values in addition to the emergence of new morality. In fact, thanks to the political stability, people were extravagant, excessive and wasteful in spending. Moreover, all what interested people at that era were productions, profits and earning billion of dollars. In this context, F. S. Fitzgerald wrote, "here was a new generation grown up to find all gods dead, all wars fought and all faiths in man shaken".¹

Besides, the era was also characterized by the rise of fundamentalism that led to the prohibition of Darwin's Evolutionary Theories. Literature in its side was affected by the social and economic developments of the 1920s. This period was marked by the emergence of the lost generation of writers, as they were dubbed by Gertrud Estein, Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot and F. S. Fitzgerald. Those writers produced a literature that portrayed the extravagant way of life of the 1920s millionaires. They also showed in their writings how American people used all means possible, legal or illegal, to reach the high ranks of society and to get access to the extravagant way of life that lured them. The 1920s writings served as an advertisement to the different industrial and scientific inventions of the era, and the different reasons that turned the American society into a consumerist one that multiplied the fortunes of businessmen from millions to

billions. Meanwhile, the economic and social changes of the 1920s contributed greatly to the economic decline in America engendering the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent decline in US Economy that marked the beginning of the Great Depression in the nation's history. Thus, America entered a long and a dark period which was shaped by a new scale of misery and disaster. In fact, for more than a decade, neither free market nor federal government were able to restore prosperity. In addition to this, there were serious signs of social and economic downfall. Unemployment, poverty, hunger and homelessness spread in the major cities of America. As a result, in 1929, the depression caused both an economic and social destruction.²

The Economic Collapse

The Americans, especially the farmers, were endured and humiliated by the impacts of the Great Depression. The latter shattered the banking system and caused troubles in economy. To be explicit, factories and mines were shut and thousands of farms were sold to pay debts.³ within that circumstances, people were anxious about the situation they lived in. The president Hoover worried too, and he sought to end speculation, but it was useless. Hoover wanted to keep hope and confidence. So, after the Great Depression, he said: "We have passed the worst and with continued effort we shall rapidly recover"⁴. In the same context, Professor Robert said: "hoping to calm down the spirits and restore confidence to the population and to investors, Hoover declared at the end of 1929: "Any lack of confidence in the basic strength of business in the United States is foolish."⁵

Unfortunately, in 1929 stock prices became unsteady. And in the next day, they saw a catastrophic collapse. In addition to this, sound stocks, like the American Telephone and Telegraph, General Electric and General Motors, lost from one hundred to two hundred points in a single week. Moreover, millions of investors lost their life earnings. The Deeping depression

did not stop there. Business houses were closed, factories were shut and banks were ruined. Even foreign trade had declined into a great extent. In that context, the historian Reeves Thomas said: “The Stock market crash triggered the great depression of the 1930s”⁶ Investments declined, business failed, stores and factories closed, banks collapsed, unemployment soared from 5 million in 1930 to 13 million in 1932.⁷ Moreover, with the stock market crash of 1929 and the decline in the US Economy, banks lost too much money it followed from this that banks removed families from their lands and took their properties because according to them by paying rent to occupy their own properties, tenant farmers could help those banks to recover. Unfortunately, these farmers were not able to pay rent and were unskilled and inexperienced in other fields. Therefore, they were ill equipped for other employments. Indeed, the economic conditions of the 1930s pushed many farmers to migrate to California seeking jobs there.⁸

The Social Destruction

As a result, the economic problems caused by the Depression of 1929, American society faced severe moments. It was logical that a country which faced economic downfall would certainly become weakened. In fact, at the level of society, people became homeless and jobless, famine spread all over the country and became a real threat. It was the first time in the American history that the breadlines and soupkichen appeared. So, people could get small parts of food in order to avoid starvation. As O’Callaghan pointed out, “Many were soon without homes or food millions spent hours suffering slowly forward in breadlines, here they received free pieces of bread or bowls of soup”.⁹

It was worth mentioning that in addition to the stock market crash of 1929, America witnessed during the 1930s another harsh event which was called “The Dust Bowl”. The latter was a severe drought caused by a violent wind and dust storms which brought a wide spread

agricultural destruction. Throughout the 1930s, but precisely from 1935 to 1938, the drought covered The Southern Great plains. Everything melted-down; the crops were damaged, thousands of animals were slaughtered since there was no food. So, farmers were harmed, and their cars and machinery were ruined. The disaster pushed many farmers and their families to leave their land and even their regions. . At that time, more than a million families lost their houses and lived in hulks of old cars. Later on, those places were called “Hoovervilles”, which was a mocking reference to president Hoover whom many people blamed for the situation of the country.¹⁰ So far, under these circumstances, thousands of people found themselves facing debts. Some of them even committed suicide as they became desperate and uncertain about their future.¹¹

American people, especially farmers, were still shocked by the collapse as well as their changing life since all of them became tenants of their own properties. So, between the 1930s and the 1940s, the wave of migration to California increased. Unfortunately for the farmers, California was not the land of their dreams and the ghost of the bad time and poverty were everywhere. In fact, they found themselves dispossessed of everything. Those facts mainly led to the failure of the American Dream, as they lost trust and hope to carry on with this mood of life. So, America was no more in its higher prosperity and its golden age of the 1920s. Politically, Hoover believed in individualism, ragged individualism and self- reliance. He feared that Federal Relief Program would make individuals as recipients (i.e. dependent on government). But, by 1932, it was clear that Hoover’s policies were a complete failure.

The First New Deal

By 1932, Franklin D.Roosevelt won the election against his adversary the Republican Herbert Hoover. The new president Roosevelt brought an air of confidence and optimism to the American people. He tended to deal with underlying problems. So, he made his famous program

known as the New Deal in which he declared to the nation that the only thing they had to fear was fear itself. The New Deal represented the abandonment of “laissez-faire” policy and the revival of the principles of the American business, such as individualism. As well as the adoption of some socialist principles as the government regulation of economy, the president Roosevelt recommended the Americans to return to their ancient times of positivism and power and to restore their fathers’ dreams. Therefore, the dominant goal of Roosevelt’s administration was recovery and relief as the president believed that prosperity would return with a little help to spark the economy. So, he sought to help business community by introducing a number of economic reliefs.¹²

Financial Relief

After the crush of the banks, many Americans lost faith in them and instead of restoring their money to banks, they kept them at home. Therefore, unlike his predecessor Hoover, the president Roosevelt used different forms of media, such as radio, newspapers and television to confide people to save their money in banks in order to help those banks to recover. So, in 1933, he declared a Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to insure depositor’s savings. In the same year, the congress advocated a Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) which granted to people food, money and clothes. But, the Relief kept people jobless waiting for charity. So, the New Dealers created the Public Work Administration (PWA) which offered jobs instead of handouts. The program provided projects as building bridges, schools, waterworks, reconstructing houses...etc. Besides, the most generally admired new deal relief agency was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). It offered jobs to unemployed single men aged from 18 to 25 to work in fighting forest fires, stopping soil erosion, building reservoirs...etc.¹³

Agricultural Relief

The impoverished condition of farmers prevented them to pay back bank's loan. As a result of this, the banks seized the property that was put as security for the loan, and the farmers lost their jobs. In addition to this, the natural catastrophe of the Dust Bowl which lasted from 1934 to 1935, a violent wind and dust storms ravaged the southern plains, crops were destroyed and the region became a desert. As a solution to those problems, President Roosevelt proposed an unusual approach. He declared to pay the farmers who would reduce the production of the main crops as wheat, corn and tobacco. The relief was called Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) under which the government would stop agricultural surpluses. However, the act also created unemployable situation, against which the government reacted by offering the Farm Security Administration Agency to give loans to help those farmers who lost their jobs.¹⁴

Industrial Relief

In the aim of controlling industrial production and limiting the exclusive policy of the businessmen, the government established the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). The latter drew codes of fair competition to set the prices of products and to eliminate the exploitation of the workers by reducing the working's hours, improving work conditions and protecting workers. Even though the reliefs known as the first New Deal solved some financial, agricultural and industrial problems, they worked and served for some not for the whole population, since there were so many people who still suffer from unemployment and poverty. As the nation entered 1935, American spirit fell down, farm prices and industrial wages were well below 1929 levels, workers remained unemployed and poor. Moreover, minorities as the Native American Indian, the Black and women were all neglected by the New Deal program. For that reason, many

critics raised against the practical side of the New Deal, since it never solved the problems of the poor and escaped the social relief.¹⁵

Therefore, it was important to focus on the fact that the New Deal did not end unemployment nor did it bring the Great Depression to an end, but it was the right solution toward recovery since the United States could not remain aloof from the Old World affairs. Indeed, America saw a decade of economic and social downfall. Indeed, the Americans, especially farmers, could not avoid the bad conditions they faced such as homelessness, joblessness as well as poverty. In the face of the pressures from left and right, President Roosevelt backed a new set of economic and social measures by following the policy of Keynesianism which evoked a solution to reduce the damages of the crisis mainly through offering job opportunities under governmental support.

Besides, the capitalists' and the socialists' views about the Depression Roosevelt's program was mixed. In fact, on the one hand, the socialists viewed the New Deal program as a solution to mitigate and reduce the damages caused by the Great Depression. On the other hand, the capitalist viewed it as an inefficient and unconstitutional program since it was not, in the main an early example of economic management it did not lead to rapid recovery and it gave too much power to the government which had the right to control constitutions such as agriculture and industry. Moreover, they disapproved the social acts which were established by Roosevelt, and said that the program led directly to Moscow the capital of socialism. Furthermore, they suggested that even after the implementations of Roosevelt's program, America was still in an oppressive and very difficult situation.¹⁶

Yet, despite the different blames that were thrown to the New Deal, it remained the best solution to the Great Depression which struck the United States. Indeed, the hopes of Americans

seemed achievable with the arrival of the president Franklin.D.Roosevelt who brought an efficient plan to free the U.S country from the crisis, and to restore the prosperous years of the past. The American public voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Democrat's promise of the "New Deal". As a result, Roosevelt's socialist program had an influence on the social life of Americans during the thirties. He expanded the Federal government which became directly responsible for people's well-being in a way it had not been before. For instance, the Federal government made relief payments, served school lunches, and run a programmed providing pensions. Therefore, American people during the thirties came to see the Federal government, not their state or local government, but as the protector of their welfare. Thanks to these several reliefs, American people became flexible to socialism and adopted some of its principles in their daily life.¹⁷

However, even though American people's life in the thirties was characterized by welcoming socialist values, they were still individualists in their thinking, and they could not get rid of the rigid capitalism they lived for many decades, especially in the 1920s under Hoover's presidency. American social life became similar to Roosevelt's program which was characterized by the mixture of capitalist (individualist) principles and socialist (collectivist) ones. Yet, in the minds of those people, the mixture was manifested as a clash between the two doctrines; their reason advocated that only collectivism could help them to overcome their situation, but their soul was still individualist. Accordingly, their struggle to overcome their problems was characterized by a clash between collectivist and individualist tendencies. In fact, these mixed ideas were reflected in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937).

Discussion

Part One: Collectivism Vs Individualism in *The Grapes of Wrath*

In this part, we will shed light on how John Steinbeck represented in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) his characters, acting collectively to claim their rights and denouncing the injustices made by the government, and at the same time, they always looked for their self-interests. To describe the farmers' behavior, Steinbeck pointed out the reasons behind the farmers' struggle via a number of themes as mentioned in the historical background. During the thirties, the Great Depression and its aftermaths had greatly varied impacts on Americans. In other words, the society was on a verge of ruin. Unemployment, malnutrition and poverty were commonplace. Another effect of the Great Depression was the emergence of the struggling social classes. Indeed, Steinbeck addressed farmers and landowners by describing the land work and the low wages that the workers were forced to accept in order to feed their children.

One of the major causes that pushed the farmers to act collectively against the landowners was the exploitation of laborers and all what it generated. So, in the novel, Steinbeck described how the landowners were dependent on the laborers for their productivity, but they wanted the cost to be as low as possible, keeping wages down and thus causing troubles and rebellions, as shown when Steinbeck wrote:

When there was work for a man, ten men fought for it- fought with a low wages. If that fella'll 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 and this was good, for wages went down and prices stayed up¹⁸

Furthermore, in the novel, Steinbeck used the theme of social class struggling effectively to define the idea of segregation which was also one of the major causes of the farmers' rebellions. In more concrete terms, he portrayed the hardships of the deemed migrants and their struggle with the upper class that included farm-owners and policemen. This was shown for instance in

the first chapter, when Steinbeck began to describe the poverty and the misery of the migrant workers. So, within the novel, Steinbeck described a discussion between Tom Joads, Jim Casey, and an old friend, Mulley Graves, about the bad condition of Tom's house, which was cut up and dragged to a different location. They also had very simple and low-class meal, as shown when Steinbeck wrote: " He reached down, picked up his ask, and emptied it the torch two cottontails and a jackrabbit fell out and rolled over limply, soft and furry." ¹⁹

Steinbeck further described the struggle between the classes. For instance, when a police deputy visited Hooverville to settle a false riot about fair wages for fruit pickers, Tom and Jim took part in the struggle. He wrote:

The deputy sitting on the ground raised his gun again and then, suddenly, from the group of men, the revered Casey stopped. He kicked the deputy in the neck and then stood back as the heavy man crumpled into unconsciousness.²⁰

Moreover, Steinbeck in his novel developed the theme of unemployment during the 1930s. The labor market in California was rapidly agitated, leaving migrants unemployed and starving. Unemployment rose from 3 percent to 25 percent of the national work force. In addition, wages for those who still had jobs fell by 42 percent. Therefore, unemployment affected a large scale of economic and social psyche.²¹ In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck showed how the Joads family left Oklahoma, fleeing from the harsh environment conditions moving westward to California in search of employment opportunities. The problem of unemployment in America during the Great Depression engendered starvation which was portrayed by Steinbeck by stating: "They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless to cut anything, any burden to bear, for food, they were hungry and they were fierce".²²

Steinbeck in his work depicted the real situation of Oklahoma people in the 1930s. In fact, his book began with a general image of the weather state and the drought that ravaged the

crops after the Great Depression, and became the only word that repeated along the work. The drought itself worsened the situation especially, in the Great Plains where farmers would not grow any crops. Thus, some farmers got into troubles because of the bad harvest. Later on, they were forced to give up and move out of the Great Plains looking for work. In his novel, Steinbeck described them as follows: “They took the migrant way to the West, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat.”²³ The intense heat and the drought caused the death of lot of Americans. To crown it all, the class struggle, unemployment, the Dust Bowl and starvation were the real causes that pushed thousands of American people to look for solutions in order to overcome their misfortune since they were even dispossessed of their lands by gigantic invisible hands of the banks. As a result, American people saw no other way to overcome these problems but acting collectively.

Steinbeck was so affected by the bad living conditions of the migrant farmers that in one of his autobiographical essays, he stated: “I like these people. They had qualities of humor and courage and inventiveness and energy that appealed to me. I thought that if we had a national character and a national genius, these people, who were beginning to be called Okies, were it. With all the odds against them, their goodness and strength survived”.²⁴ In one of his essays, Steinbeck admired the migrant workers’ courage and energy despite their poverty. He sincerely believed that the social order was about change but the change would only occur if the farmers united with each other. And he led blame on the unrest at the feet of California’s peculiar and strange system of production that, in his opinion, depended on the ruthless exploitation of the have-nots. This was mainly shown when he wrote in one of his essays: “I don’t know whether you know what a bomb California is right now or not, there are riots in Salinas and killings in the

streets of that dear little town where I was born. I shouldn't wonder if the thing had begun. I don't mean any general revolt, but an active beginning aimed toward it, the smouldering.”²⁵

All the circumstances helped Steinbeck to a certain extent to give in his work vivid images of rebellion and organized farmers, and showed how they acted in groups to protect their common interests. So, in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Steinbeck described in detail the United States as a collectivity of family farming who shared the same problems. Penniless and starving, the farming families in the novel met on roadsides and makeshift camps. In such settings and without any appointed leader or organizer, they talked about their shared problems and gradually acquired a new outlook on social institutions in order to make a change in their social lifestyle. This was shown when he wrote: “because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country”.²⁶

Moreover, the novel chronicled the story of two families; the Joads and the collective body of migrant workers. Although the Joads were joined by blood, the novel argued that it was not their genetics, but their loyalty and commitment to one another that established their true kinship. So, in the migrant lifestyle portrayed in the book, the biological family unit quickly became a thing of the past, as life on the road to California demanded that new connections and new kinships had to be formed. The reader could notice the phenomenon when the Joads met the Wilson in chapter thirteen. In a remarkably short time, the two families merged into one, shared one another's hardships and commit to one another's survival. Also, the merging took place among the migrant community in general as well. As Steinbeck said: “In the evening, a strange 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”.²⁷ So, according

to Steinbeck, the Joad family stood for a great number of farming families that faced the same bad living conditions. The agreement between the Joads and the Wilsons to aid each other on the way to California was a significant plot development, for it was in collective interests that these families find their strength. This was the first building block in a collectivist scheme that Steinbeck seemed to support and in which working class people came together for their collective interests.

In chapter eight, Casey's speech at dinner was yet another example of Steinbeck's glorification of the common person. For him, the population as a whole exemplified what was holy. It was only when people diverged from the common good that they became unholy. This was further supported by Ma Joad's musings that there might be hope if everybody became angry enough to rise up against the moneyed interests. Here one can understand that Steinbeck took a largely socialist viewpoint, championing the common good over individual interests. Steinbeck's portrayal of collectivism in his novel was similar to Jean Jacques Rousseau's definition of it in *The Social Contract* (1762), in which he stated that it was thanks to the family that the political society was constructed. Besides, according to Rousseau, the only way to be strong was the unity of men. The union could make a force and with that force men could defeat and overcome every single obstacle. In this context, Rousseau said:

Men cannot engender new forces. But only unite and direct existing one and they have no other means of preserving themselves and their interests than the formation, by aggregation, of a sum of forces great enough to overcome the resistance. These have to bring into play by means of a single motive power, and cause to act in concert.²⁸

Here, one could understand that the farmers had to organize and associate themselves at one single group against the land owning class and the government to regain their rights and therefore try to brand a new start.

The attempts of association and collectivity was well portrayed in *The Grapes of Wrath*, foremost through the character of Jim Casey since he always made actions intended to arouse public interest, actions for better working conditions and unification of farmers. He met Tom Joad again at a peach farm, where the Joad family was working hard to get money for food. It turned out that Jim Casey was leading a strike to keep wages up to 5 cents. But, as soon as the strike became useless and broke by the guards, the wages dropped to 2.5 cents. Casey was upset to hear that the Joad family and the other strike-breakers would work for the lower wages, therefore, he said: "Tell'em they're starvin'us an' stabbin theirselves in the back. Cause sure as cowflops she'll drop to two an' a half jus' as soon as they clear us out."²⁹

Another point in which Steinbeck focused on the aspect of collectivism in his novel through Casey was when he made Tom realize that competition was not helping anyone, but unification and revolutions were the only solutions and hopes for the future, even though participating in it would be a very difficult and dangerous task. In this context, Casey said to Tom: "You didn't do it for fun no way. Doin' it 'cause you have to".³⁰ Later, when Casey was killed, Tom was determined to revenge, and expressed his opinion on the importance of organizations by quoting the Bible: "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labour for if they fall, the one will lif'up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for the hath not another to help him up."³¹ Steinbeck continued to refer to a group of men in prison with Casey who all united to complain about the food they were getting. In fact, according to Tom, it was very important to act collectively to be strong. In other words, when one man complained nothing happened but when all of them yelled, their demands were met.

As Rousseau argued, each of us had to put his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will which was always right and tended to the public

advantage. Steinbeck used the same principle to explain and to mention the organizations and the associations that the working class, especially farmers, made in order to combat inequality and starvation. In the novel, Tom Joad was very affected by his family and other migrant farm workers' situations, including the inequality between them and the land owners. He said: "I been thinkin a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our people living like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hundred thousan' good farmers is starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' yelled, like them fella yelled..."³² The inequality between the landowners and the migrant farm workers led the poor to be aware of the danger of that situation, and farmers feared that the situation would worsen; therefore, they acted in groups as they knew that strength and a chance for a better life came through union.

Another example that showed the collective actions of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* was when it became very important for Ma Joad to keep her family together when they were forced to leave their land. Throughout the novel, Ma Joad let it become obvious that staying together was the solution to how to stay out of total despair and poverty. Therefore, it became obvious that with the loss of connection to their own land and to their work, it became more important to conserve the connection to people, especially the members of the family in order to prevent further alienation. Then, Ma Joad was very affected and discouraged when she heard Rose of Sharon's dream of leaving the city with her husband, and she tried by all means to convince her son Tom not to leave the family to go off alone, even though his presence could put all the family in danger since he was wanted by the police because of his violent disturbance with his friend Jim Casey. Ma Joad said to Tom: "going away ain't gonna ease us. It's gonna bear us down. And she went on, 'they was the time when we was on the lan'. They was a boundary to us then we're crackin' up, Tom. There ain't no fambly now got nothin' to trus'. Don' go, Tom. Stay

an' help.”³³ Ma Joad realized from the very beginning that the unity of the family was very important to overcome adversity. In the novel, she clearly showed her need to keep the union, as she claimed: “If we all get jobs an' all work – maybe we can get one of them little white houses”.

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Besides, throughout the novel, the reader could notice aspects of Rousseau's collectivism, since every time, the Joad family helped others in need even when they had almost nothing to give, they work together with other families in order to survive. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau argued that it was important for the community to control and exercise power over the nation which could provide equality of right, justice and happiness for each one. In addition to this, instead of an uncertain and precarious way of living, they would have one way of living that was better and more secure by acting collectively and by doing agreements and formal contracts. Similarly, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck described how it was important to form groups which could act in a collective way and as a collective body within the society by doing agreements to defend their common interests and therefore protect themselves against injustice as well as insuring themselves equality of rights and happiness. For instance, in the novel the government camps were ruled and organized by the workers. In fact, the campers elected their own committee that set the laws and kept order. Therefore, it provided the equal rights of each of the campers. And if the rules were broken by a camper, two warnings were issued before the law breaker was kicked out from the camp. Camping was free of charge if they participated in keeping order, cleaning and looking after each other's kids.³⁵

Steinbeck stressed the importance of helping each other instead of competing and the fact that union made force, when he wrote: “We're all a-workin' together...Fella organizin' for the union was a talkin out on the road. He said we could do that any place. Jus' stick together. They

ain't raisin' hell with no two hundred men. They're pickin' on one me.”³⁶ So, with a closer unification, the quest for change went faster. Claudia Durst Johnson concluded in her analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*: “The poor and the dispossessed were going to learn that power came in unionizing-power that could be turned against the system and the people who profited from abusing those who had lost everything”.³⁷ To be more explicit, according to Dust Johnson, throughout the novel of *The Grapes of Wrath*, when the farmers were ill treated or exploited to their maximum, they were forced to organize, and subsequently fought for their rights. This meant that the landowners were those who pushed the farmers to unification and cooperation against them.

In addition, John Steinbeck devoted the entire chapter fourteen in *The Grapes of Wrath* to foreshadow a change in the system of capitalism which was the basis of Americans' troubles, especially farmers, and compared the changing times with America's revolutionary system. The new system was not explicitly described, but the real message of the novel was about solidarity and unification of American workers, especially farmers. According to Stephen Railton : “ It is certainly socialistic, yet a goal of the novel is to suggest that a socialized democracy is as quintessentially American as the individualistic dream it will replace.”³⁸

However, even though on the one hand, Americans in the 1930s were very influenced by Roosevelt's socialist program, since they always made associations and acted collectively in order to change the American system of that time which was considered to be as an exploitation of the working class, especially farmers, On the other hand, they could not get rid of the strict Capitalism they lived in so many years since the ninetieth century. Therefore, American people unconsciously adopted individualistic ideas and had self-interests behind their collective actions. As a result, the individual feelings always broke the collective actions of Americans. This was

well reflected in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which the reader could every time notice that the characters always looked for their individual interests in their collective actions.

During the Great Depression, it was fundamental to own a land or a mean of production. Therefore, most of Americans tried by all means possible to have their own piece of land or at least a mean of production. Throughout the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck reflected the situation by describing how every character was independent, and how everyone had the right to own a land and a property during the thirties. Indeed, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, we could find elements of De Tocqueville's individualism. The first chapter deliberately dealt with the Joad family who were the focus of *The Grapes of Wrath*, they were one of thousands of American families to be affected by the harsh events of the Great Depression. The first chapter served to give the reader an insight on the individualistic actions of Americans during those hard years. So, from the very beginning, one could notice that Steinbeck used Tom Joad to show the American Individualism. This was done when he described Tom Joad as uneducated man who could barely write, walking down the road alone, but who was clever enough to know how to manipulate the truck driver into giving him a ride. Tom did everything just to get a ride. He said: "could you give me a lift mister?" The driver looks quickly back at the restaurant for a second. "Didn't you see the No Riders sticker on the win' shield?" "Sure-I seen it. But sometimes a guy'll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker..." the truck driver knows he is being trapped, but he cannot see a way out.³⁹

Then, throughout the novel, every character of the Joad family dreamed of having his own farm, being his own boss, and owning his little piece of land in the fertile California far from the other farming migrant families. So, in chapter eight, Steinbeck introduced each member of the

Joad family who were hardened by the experiences of life that everyone looked for his self-interest.

All were different from one another, and each had his own dream. Noah Joad was portrayed as being a strange man, not friendly, so selfish that he was not sociable at all. Steinbeck described Uncle John as being: “ Alone man like that don’t live long, sort of wild. Made a damn nuisance of hisself, give away about ever’thing he got, an’ still he ain’t verry happy. Gets walkin’ around alone at night sometimes...never wanted to get close to folks. Wanted to be off alone...”⁴⁰ Pa Joad was described as being sullen and withdrawn and selfish. Grandpa was too angry and bitter to even stay in the house. Grandma was so mean and though, she was sad to leave Oklahoma, she dreamed of owning a land in California. Tom was a self made man; he was described to be uneducated but a very smart man who was paroled from prison. “Now”, said Tom “I’m paroled. I’m free. I got my papers.”⁴¹ He was so excited to be a free man because he always felt the need to pursuit his own destiny and dreams to have a big business in California. Ma Joad was described to be very tough and strong. Even though she was the story’s moral center, reminding everyone that they had greater concerns than just their own interest she dreamed of having her own house and land in California. She said:

But I like to think how nice it’s gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An’ fruit ever’ place, an’ people just bein’ in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees. I wonder-that is, if we all get jobs an’ all work-maybe we can get one of them little white houses.⁴²

Al Joad stated on several occasions that he wanted to leave the family and work in a garage.⁴³ Furthermore, he stated that “Fella can make his way lot easier if he ain’t got no fambly.”⁴⁷ This was the strongest individualistic statement in the novel, and Al was also one of the strongest individualists. Jim Casey also asked to accompany the Joad just because he wanted to work in the field where he can listen to people rather than preach to them and to give them advice.

Moreover, those with an individual mindset that were incapable of reaching the other members of the family Joad soon left the group. As shown in the novel, the daughter Rose of Sharon and her husband Connie were less interested in farming and more interested in moving into town and taking a good job in a store or a factory, buying new modern things and eventually ran their own shop. “An’ we’ll live in town an’ go to pitchers whenever, an’ well, I’m gonna have a’lectric iron, an’ the baby’ll have all the new stuff”.⁴⁸ Besides, as shown in the novel both Noah and Connie were typical examples of people who could not rely on to those around them. Noah left because he was different and he realized that what mattered to him did not mattered to the others in the group. Thus, he preferred to go in his own direction rather than to struggle to fit in the group. As for Connie, he left because he was a selfish person who could not face self-denial and deprivation. He wanted a good life without work and he did not really want to share in the difficulties faced by the Joads, therefore he left. Besides, Steinbeck portrayed in chapter six the character Muley Graves as a ghost living alone on the outskirts of society and wandering the land, deprived of his wife and children.⁴⁹ So, through the characters, Steinbeck clearly demonstrated individualism during the years of Depression in the United States of America.

Furthermore, due to industrialization, and the small farmers’ subsequent loss of land, people lost connection to their work and to each other, and were therefore becoming aliens to each other. Everyone looked for his self-interest. This was perhaps due to the individualistic doctrine that was initiated by Hoover’s policies. Considering individualism as a theory which belong to the modern world, De Tocqueville saw in it something positive which had nothing to do with cruelty, domination and oppression. Thus, according to De Tocqueville, it was just a feeling in which a person had a need to form his own as an individual in order to be free and in order to be able to choose, to make decisions and act on them as a free and independent moral

agent.⁵⁰ This was well shown in chapter two, when Steinbeck told his reader how the working class was confronted with the danger of capitalism (businessmen) by comparing the working class to a turtle who every time struggled to survive, to be free, to be able to make a deliberate decision to do something and to be independent.⁵¹ And in chapter ten, Steinbeck described Ma Joad who issued the final verdicts, and took decisions as when she allowed Jim Casey to go with them to California. Through these two concrete examples, Steinbeck accurately presented images of his characters which wanted to be independent as individuals and not afraid to take their own decisions.

Moreover, in chapter five, Steinbeck clearly described the coming of the bank representatives who forced the tenant farmers to leave their property. He also described how man on a tractor replaced and took the place of a dozen families. And even though Steinbeck criticized the banks, he unconsciously adopted the individualistic ideas, because throughout this chapter, the reader could notice that according to Steinbeck, the employers' behavior toward the farmers was largely excusable because according to him, the truck drivers themselves were controlled by a large force which was the bank.⁵²

We can understand that Steinbeck as DeTocqueville considered that individualism was a calm feeling, something which was so good that the individual can feel himself free from all kinds of oppression or domination. Still, DeTocqueville in his book *Democracy in America* considered the concept of individualism as being something positive in which the individual felt not obliged to do something but pursuing his own destiny and goals. According to him, the individual did not need the help the others and considered himself as standing alone, free and independent from others. He said in this context: "They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man, they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone

and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands”⁵³ The principle was very apparent in Steinbeck’s novel *the Grapes of Wrath* when he gave the one-eyed man who was supposed to be an insignificant character some personality and history to emphasize the importance of all individuals. Though he was a one-eyed man, Steinbeck gave him importance and considered him as an independent man. Tom said to the one-eyed man: “whyn’t you roll on? Got no guards to keep ya here.” “Yeah, that’s easy to say. Ain’t so easy to get a job-not for a one-eye’ man.”⁵⁴ His appearance also demonstrated once again that Tom was honest and direct. He would not shy away from standing up to a person, a quality that gave him an air of authoritative and independent man.

Another aspect of DeTocqueville’s individualism that was apparent in *The Grapes of Wrath* was Steinbeck’s use of Ma Joad who, instead of being a home-maker, she wanted a little change once in California. She wanted to become independent and rich. In this regard, she said: “But I like to think how nice it’s gonna be, maybe in California. Never cold. An’ fruit ever’ place, an’ people just bein’ in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees. I wonder-that is, if we all get jobs an’ all work-maybe we can get one of them little white houses.”⁵⁵ In this context, DeTocqueville argued: “individualism meant that each man had within himself the right to make his own choices and to make or break his life-career on the basis of his own judgment...”⁵⁶ According to him, a man could make his choice, and Americans believed that individualism was a fair system, and thanks to it, their way of life was understandable to all because they could live and act as independent individuals.

Independence and freedom were the unequivocal traits in Steinbeck’s novel. The most vivid example was Jim Casey who stood up to the official church, following instinctively his own philosophy of love for humanity. He indicated his independence by comparing himself to a land

turtle: “Nobody can’t keep a turtle though. They work at it and work at it, and at last one day they get out and away they go-off somewheres. It’s like me. I wouldn’t take the good ol’ gospel that was just layin’ there to my hand. I got to be pickin’ at it an’ workin’ at it until I got it all tore down.”⁵⁷ And later on in chapter five, when the turtle tried to escape from captivity, Casey again emphasized its independent nature: “I seen turtles all my life. They’re always goin’ some place. They always seem to want to get there.”⁵⁸

Furthermore, freedom of action was also one of the major themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was mainly portrayed by the Joads’ ‘do-what-you-have-to-do’ attitude. Casey explained such freedom to Uncle John, who suddenly wanted to leave the rest of the family because of his alleged bad luck on them: I can’t tell you. I don’t think they’s luck or bad luck. 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 hisself. Help him, maybe, but not tell him what to do.”⁵⁹ So, throughout the novel, Casey’s ‘do-what-you-got-to-do’ became commonly accepted and implemented by the Joads. It was repeated for example by Ma Joad who in the last chapter of the novel, calmed down her unhappy husband, who desperately wanted to evacuate their almost flooded box car: “When it’s time to go- we’ll go. We’ll do what we have to.”⁶⁰

We can conclude this part of analysis by saying that American people especially farmers, as individuals, tried to preserve their uniqueness in everyday life. Generally speaking, as mentioned throughout this part, individualism stressed freedom, independence, and self-reliance. Alexis DeTocqueville described individualism in terms of a kind of moderate selfishness, which allowed people to be concerned only with their own small circle of family and friends. That was to say, all values in individualism were man-centered, the individual was of supreme value, society being only a means to individual ends. Individualism held that an individual best developed when he was allowed maximum freedom, independence and responsibility for his

choosing objectives. As such, being an American, Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*, fell in these individualistic principles when he tried to preserve collectivism that he defended all along his novel by portraying the collective protest of the farmers.

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Part Two: Collectivism Vs Individualism in *Of Mice and Men*

In this second part, we will focus on the way in which John Steinbeck described American farmers in his novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937), during the Great Depression. In fact, Steinbeck in his novel presented his characters acting collectively to claim their rights and denounce the injustices exercised on them by the government and the bankers. And, at the same time, every one of them looked for his self-interests as in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Steinbeck, in his novel *Of Mice and Men*, described the lives of the poor and landless migrant farm workers in California during the Great Depression. Men within the novel desired to come together in a way that would allow them to be like brothers to one another. That was, they want to live with one another's best interests in mind in order to protect each other and to know that there was someone in the world dedicated to protect them. Given a harsh, lonely condition under which these men lived, it should come as no surprise that Steinbeck idealized collectivism and friendship between men in such a way at a time when jobs were not easy to find. In the novel, the two friends George and Lennie traveled together to wherever there was work while dreaming of eventually being able to buy a little farm of their own. In this context, George said: "Ok. Someday- we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and..."⁶¹

Throughout the novel, Steinbeck presented a mutual acceptance of his two main characters George and Lennie. George traveled with Lennie because they were brought up together and, therefore, he felt responsible for his retarded friend. George could not easily do without Lennie. However, since George accepted him as his partner, they both lived for the dream of owning a land. Thus, they together adjusted themselves to the events and the conditions of the Great Depression. As Peter Lisca stated: "The dream of the farm originates with Lennie;

and it is only through Lennie, who also makes it impossible, that the dream has any meaning for George.”⁶² George believed that he would not attain that dream without Lennie, so they kept the dream alive together for themselves that was their way of adjustment together. At this point, elements of Rousseau’s collectivism in *The Social Contract* (1762) were apparent in Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. Indeed, According to Rousseau, the unity of men and their mutual acceptance was the best way to be strong even in the worse situation. In this context Rousseau stated:

As men cannot engender new forces, but only unite and direct existing ones, they have no other means of preserving themselves than the formation, by aggregation, of a sum of forces great enough to overcome the resistance. These they have to bring into play by means of a single motive power and cause to act in concert.⁶³

As mentioned above, this was similar to Steinbeck’s representation of his two inseparable characters that always cared for each other, completed each other and acted together no matter how hard were the circumstances.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the novel, when the two men arrived in the ranch, we could remark that they cared for each other, and this was shown when Lennie flung himself down and drunk water from the surface of the green pool like a horse, and George cared a lot for him. He was afraid that his friend would be ill, so George said: “Lennie, for God’ sakes don’t drink so much” He shook him and said: “You gonna be sick like you was last night.”⁶⁴ George was so afraid that his friend would be sick because he drunk a lot; therefore, he showed him the best way to drink with his hands. Here, we could notice a real connection between the two men. Also, when George said: “Well, look, we’re gonna work on a ranch like the one we came from up North.”⁶⁵ Steinbeck gave a very strong example of collectivism since he proved that they always worked together and helped each other in the difficulties.

Then, the way George and Lennie run out from Weed referred to collectivism, since though Lennie was the one who did bad things in the ranch Weed with a girl, George didn't abandon him and run out with him to Soledad. In this regard, George said: "I could get along so easy and so nice if I didn't have you on my tail...I could live so easy and maybe have a girl." George abandoned his sentimental life for Lennie. He preferred Lennie's companionship than having a family. ⁶⁶ With this example, one could understand that George sacrificed a lot to help his friend Lennie though he was a fool George said: "I want you to stay with me, Lennie. Jesus Christ, somebody'd shoot you for a coyote if you was by yourself. No you stay with me. You're Aunt Clara wouldn't like you running off by yourself, even if she is dead...Trouble with mice is you always kill'em" ⁶⁷ This sentence showed to the reader that once again George did not give up his friend Lennie though the later was mentally ill.

In addition to the relationship between George and Lennie, one could notice the collusion between farmers when it came that Steinbeck let the old swamper Candy tell the new arrivals George and Lennie that it was better not to get involved with curly or his wife. Curly was the owner's son and a man with a short temper and good boxing skills, which he liked to practice on big guys especially. Since Curly was the boss's son, he was most likely to win his fights as the workers did not want to risk their jobs by defeating him or by complaining about him using foul means when boxing. The workers knew that if conflict would arise their word would mean little against Curley's: "He just don't give a damn. Won't ever get canned' cause his old man 's the boss." ⁶⁸ This also explained that the farmers organized themselves on groups against the land-owners, and showed that they didn't give each other up no matter how hard the conditions were.

Besides, Steinbeck, through this conflict, mentioned the collusion between Lennie and George. This was shown when George tried to explain it further to Lennie by repeating the

message: “He’s the boss’s son. Look Lennie. You try keep away from him, will you? Don’t never speak to him.” ⁶⁹ It showed how George was attached to Lennie. Also, when Curley’s wife bored with the country life and looked for company and drama she caused further conflict by flirting with the workers. Again George wanted Lennie to understand the danger for someone of their status socializing outside their class: “Don’t you even take a look at that bitch. I don’t care what she says or what she does. I seen’em poison before, but I never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her. You leave her be.” ⁷⁰ Here Steinbeck showed how much George cared about his friend Lennie. So, in order not to get into troubles, George warned him to stay away from Curley’s wife.

Steinbeck in his novel gave much importance to companionship, through which he explained the importance of collectivism and the importance of being together. In fact, staying together like Lennie and George was unusual, and their companionship was one of the most important themes of the novel. The odd couple rose surprise with other men, and George’s motives for travelling with Lennie and helping him to get a job were questioned. George unwillingness or inability to explain their companionship lied in his failure to get a legitimate reason for looking out for Lennie, so, he said they were cousins. ⁷¹ However, the two of them together had no problem with defining their need for one another: “Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place.” “With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us.” ⁷²

Furthermore, when Steinbeck talked about men who were lonely, a quote that appeared several times in the novel, partially or in whole, was always in Italics: “But not us! An’ why? Because...I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you.” ⁷³ Even the black man Crooks who lived alone in his own room had also understood the importance of companionship

and the importance of being with someone. Being the outcast at the farm, Crooks wanted companionship: “A guy needs somebody- to be near him.” He whined, “A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody. I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an’ he gets sick.”⁷⁴

Steinbeck emphasized the importance of collectivism over individualism in his description of American farmers in the novel. According to him, since farmers lived in the same town, they shared the same hard conditions; it can reinforce their connection to each other.⁷⁵ We can make an analogy to Rousseau’s theory of collectivism when he sustained that: “This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons formerly took the name of city...Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of people...”⁷⁶ The idea was mainly reinforced in Steinbeck’s novel, that every American farmer faced the bad living conditions during the Great crash. Therefore, sharing the same circumstances, American farmers associated and acted collectively for better working conditions and in order to overcome and surmount their misfortunes.

In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck did not explicitly comment on workers’ organization and associations as he did in *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, he clearly illustrated the importance of men sticking up to each other and helping out in conflict with their employers. It was well reflected in Rousseau’s theory of collectivism when he asserted that: “... Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an invisible part of the whole.”⁷⁷ Here Rousseau explained that to put an end to the injustices and violations, it was very important for the individuals to act collectively because it was the only way to be strong and defeat injustices and the enemy. In fact, in Steinbeck’s novel, for instance, when Lennie injures Curley the boss’s son, in a fight started with the Lennie, the men in the bunk house stood up for Lennie in order to

protect him from being fired or reported for the police. Even though men found George's and Lennie's solidarity to one another strange, and at first were a bit suspicious towards George's feeling of responsibility toward Lennie as when Slim said:

I hardly never seen two guys travel together. You know how the hands are, they just come in and get their bunk and work a month and then they quit and go out alone. Never seem to give a damn about nobody. It jus' seems kinda funny a cuckoo like him and a smart little guy like you travelin' together.⁷⁸

Farmers still felt solidarity when it came to a conflict with the employers. Therefore, the men threaten Curley not to tell what really happened, and one of them urged: "I think you got your han' caught in a machine. If you don't tell nobody what happened, we ain't going to. But you jus' tell an' try to get this guy canned and we'll tell ever'body, an' then will you get the laugh."⁷⁹ Still, through this example, one could understand the importance that Steinbeck gave to the collective actions to face the everyday injustices.

We can say that in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck stressed the benefits of collectivism by giving examples of companionship between George and Lennie and the solidarity among the workers after Lennie's fight with the boss' son. So, for Steinbeck, the solution was to act collectively, but at the same time sympathized with the dream that everyone should have the opportunity to have a property and land.

Indeed, though Steinbeck emphasized collectivism and defended the collective actions of the American farmers during the thirties, throughout the novel, he unconsciously urged individualism. So, as most of Americans during the Great Crash, Steinbeck unconsciously adopted individualism while defending collectivism. As in *The Grapes of Wrath* and all his novels, this was well reflected in his novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937). Through our reading, we could clearly remark that despite the character's friendship, union and companionship, they

always looked for their self-interests, therefore, every character in the novel dreamed of owning his own farm and making his own business. Just like in *The Grapes of Wrath*, elements of the philosophy of individualism were apparent in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*.

As mentioned in the Method and Material sections, Alexis DeTocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835). Alexis De Tocqueville believed that individualism was a celebration of the independent individual. He positively wrote about individualism, which was according to him, synonymous with freedom and independence from oppression. According to him, "it is a calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures, and to draw apart with his family and his friend; so that he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself."⁸⁰ In Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, this was exemplified by the strong desire to own a land. In fact, the main characters George and Lennie, like many other ranch workers, dreamed of being able to have a farm of their own, as when George said: "Ok. Someday- we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and" 'An' live off the fatta the lan"⁸¹ According to Steinbeck, having your own farm symbolized power over your own life; being able to decide when to work or not, and consequently being your own master, as when George said: "S'pose they was a carnival or a circus come to town, or a ball game, or any damn thing." "We'd just go to her," "We wouldn't ask nobody if we could." "Jus' say, 'We'll go to her, an we would."⁸² Here, George explained to Lennie the importance of being an owner. He asserted that if he was an owner and he had his own farm, he would be free to do whatever he wanted without anybody's permission.

For most characters in the novel, acquiring a land was very important to be a significant person in a society. For George and Lennie, the dreamed of owning their own piece of land had a

real potential and was very significant in the novel, since they made an agreement with Candy. The latter would give them money, if they allowed him to live with them. Suddenly, George realized that the dream that he had and whose details he also transferred to Lennie through their repetitive story-telling had a true chance of being implemented. Therefore, one could understand that each of George, Lennie and Candy looked only for their self-interests.

The stable buck Crooks who was a marginalized black was unconcerned and had a more pessimistic view after seeing the same dream being destroyed for so many men before them: “I seen hunderds of men come by on the road and on the ranches , an’ every damn one of’ em’s got a little piece of land in his head. An’ never a god damn one of’ em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Ever’body wants a little piece of lan’”.⁸³ Here Crooks foretold the future that no one of the men would have a land of his own because of the rigid and difficult system of capitalism of the thirties. Through Crooks’ words, Steinbeck wanted to show how hard for the American farmers to own a land. As it was mentioned in the historical background, Due to the hardships and the effects of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, the American economy fell, the banks were closed therefore the government and the chief bankers obliged the American farmers to leave their lands. As a result, the farmers became as tenants and jobless. So, even if they tried so hard to have a land of their own, American farmers were so poor to get what they wanted.

Moreover, the dream of owning a piece of land in the novel meant not only being an independent person, but also getting roots and a sense of belonging, which stood for the travelling life of the workers. As George expressed it: “I’d have my own little place, an’ I’d be bringin’ in my own crops, ‘stead of doin’ all the work and not getting what comes up outta the ground.”⁸⁴ Throughout this example, the reader could also notice that when Steinbeck defended collectivism unconsciously fell and adopted individualism mainly through his use of the personal

pronoun “I”. Steinbeck’s use of this personal pronoun “I” instead of “we”, had a great importance since it directly referred to individualism.

Besides, Steinbeck showed aspects of individualism and how his characters stuck to their independence through Crooks’ “paroles” when he says to Lennie: “You got no right to come in my room. This here’s my room. Nobody got any right in here but me.”⁸⁵ So, through the example, one could say that Steinbeck gave much importance to the individual and his private life no matter how was the color of his skin.

In DeTocqueville’s words, an individual was an independent and free person who was not afraid at all to demonstrate that he cared about nothing in the world but himself. Also according to him, an individual had to focus only on himself as he was the center of attention, and he didn’t need the assistance or the advice of anyone but himself. In this regard, he said: “...They owe nothing to anyone, they expect nothing from anyone; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands.”⁸⁶ This principle was also well reflected in Steinbeck’s novel when George said:

“God a mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an work’, an’ no trouble. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come I could take my fifty backs and go into town and get whatever I want. Why, I could stay in a cat house all night. I could eat any place I want, hotel or any place, and order any damn thing I could think of. An’ I could do all that every damn month. Get a gallon of whisky, or set in a pool room and play cards or shoot pools.”⁸⁷

From this short passage, we can feel the strong desire of George to be independent and free to do whatever he wanted; his awareness of how much he could live in peace and harmony without his friend Lennie. DeTocqueville’s theory of individualism was so strong in Steinbeck’s novel that he showed George imagining himself as an independent and free individual.

Furthermore, aspects of individualism were shown in the novel when George said to Lennie about the boss: “If he tangles with you, Lennie, we’re gonna get the can. Don’t make no mistake about that. He’s the boss’ son. Look, Lennie. You try to keep away from him, will you? Don’t even speak to him. If he comes in here you move clear to the other side of the room.”⁸⁸ Here, we can notice that George and Lennie wanted so to realize their dream of earning an amount of money to buy their own piece of land that they tolerated the boss’ behavior toward them even if most of the time they were ill-treated. So, the individualistic desire to own their own property was more important than being subordinates and their collectiveness was guided by individualistic schemes.

We can conclude this second part by stating that throughout the novel *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck, once again, defended collectivism but differently from the *Grapes of Wrath* and, this was shown in some examples mentioned above. In fact, Steinbeck did not explicitly comment on workers’ organization and associations as he did in *The Grapes of Wrath*. But, he clearly described the collusion and the mutual feelings of trust and affection between the two protagonists and he illustrated the importance of men sticking up to each other and helping out in conflict with the employer. However, when Steinbeck tried hardly to preserve collectivism by describing the collective actions and the mutual friendship of the American farmers, he once again fell in the individualistic principles.

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⁸⁸ Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 29.

Conclusion

In the discussion section of this dissertation, we illustrated the ideas of collectivism and individualism in our study of Steinbeck's two novels *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937). We analyzed in the both novels how Steinbeck depicted and described the American farmers who acted collectively by making a kind of organizations and associations and by creating friendship relations in order to overcome their problems. In fact, Steinbeck wrote these two novels during the Great Depression, under which Americans, especially farmers, suffered from despair, homelessness and poverty. American people, especially farmers, were shocked by the economic crash as well as their changing life since all of them became tenants of their own properties and had nowhere to go. So, between the thirties and the forties, the wave of migration to California increased. Unfortunately for the farmers, California was not the land of their dreams and the ghost of the bad time and poverty were everywhere. Therefore, they found themselves deprived and dispossessed of everything especially their property. At the same time, Steinbeck unconsciously defended individualism in his novels, where the characters always looked for their self-interests while trying to surmount the bad effects and the circumstances of the Great Depression as poverty, homelessness and employment.

The analysis was done in relation to Jean Jacques Rousseau's theory of collectivism developed in his book entitled: *The Social Contract* (1762). In fact, Jean Jacques Rousseau emphasized the importance of the collective over the individual. He argued throughout his book that the individual was free only by submitting to the general will which was conceived as the essential part of opinion and the general will was always right and tended to the public advantage. This theory was reflected in Steinbeck's two novels by his description of the American farmers and their collective actions.

Throughout the analysis of the two novels, Rousseau's theory of collectivism was contrasted with Alexis DeTocqueville's theory of individualism developed in his book *Democracy in America* (1835). Indeed, according to him, individualism was a mature thing which came from Democracy, a calm feeling, something good which led to freedom. De Tocqueville also hoped that through the insights he communicated in his book, humanity would be better able to direct themselves toward freedom. This was reflected in Steinbeck's two novels considering that the individual was an independent and free person who was not afraid at all to demonstrate that he cared about nothing in the world but himself. Therefore throughout our dissertation, we attempted to show examples of collectivism and individualism in both the novels.

Throughout our exploration of the two novels, we provided the reader with the way the American society suffered as described by John Steinbeck and the reasons why they acted collectively to overcome their problems during the thirties and how did the American farmers acted collectively but at the same time, unconsciously looked for their self-interests because they stuck to the ideas of individualism. So, to crown it all, we can say that being an American, Steinbeck in both novels: *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937) fell in the individualistic principles when he tried to preserve collectivism.

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