

THE GRAPES OF WRATH: Hollywood's Challenge to Public Opinion

OUT of the flat, wind-stripped dust bowl into the squalor of the fruit pickers' camps in California clattered the Joad family in their old, broken-down jalopy. Behind them rolled a storm of protest equalled only by the thunderous applause of critics who hailed John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as the greatest book of the era. No one, however, thought that hide-bound, censor-ruled Hollywood would dare to film the tragic story of the Joads, fiction that is fact, a novel so documentary that it will live as damning evidence against a section of life in America.

But Darryl Zanuck, cocky 20th Century-Fox production chief, accepted the challenge, bought *The Grapes of Wrath* from Steinbeck for \$75,000, highest price ever paid for a novel and, despite threats and protests, has brought it to the screen. Although the big farm and banking interests of California have thrown their power against the production of the movie, Zanuck has gone ahead, pulls no punches. Before he began the picture he satisfied himself that Steinbeck was not writing fiction when he described the hunger, the filth, the heartbreak in which Oklahoma sharecroppers were forced to live when they migrated to California, expecting to find jobs in a land of promise and sunlight. After convincing himself that he was portraying the unassailable truth of a desperate situation, Zanuck started the cameras grinding.

Realism, keynote of the book, was the keynote of the picture. Henry Fonda, who plays Tom Joad, lived for weeks among the Okie farmers from Oklahoma to understand their problems. A 20th Century-Fox troupe rattled down Highway 66, scene of much of the action of the book, in cars as old and decrepit as that in which the Joads traveled, shooting background shots for the film. No make-up is worn in the picture, clothes are those actually worn by Okie fruit pickers.

In the scene above, the Joads, driven off their hopelessly mortgaged middle-Western farm by creditors' tractors which have sent all the tenants off the land, rest at an Okie camp in California. Led to believe that there will be plenty of work at high wages, they are disappointed; bitter when they discover that the posters offering jobs to fruit pickers lied, that there is no work. Left to right, foreground, are John Carradine as the preacher, O. Z. Whitehead as Al, Henry Fonda who plays Tom Joad, Dorris Bowden as Rosasharn, Jane Darwell in the coveted role of Ma Joad, Darryl Chikman as Winfield, and Shirley Mills as Ruth. They are presented as Steinbeck wrote them: hungry, dirty, hoping that tomorrow will bring them the work they need. *The Grapes of Wrath*, perhaps the greatest indictment of a section of the American scene ever written, may come to be considered the greatest picture Hollywood has ever produced.



TOM JOAD, who has killed a deputy in a fight and has been in hiding, meets Ma Joad for the last time before he disappears.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH



ROSASHARN and her husband, Connie, face the trip to California with fear, for she is expecting a baby. Later he deserts her.



ONE OF THE MOST MELODRAMATIC moments of the picture, as of the book, occurs when Tom Joad and Preacher Casey gather with the Okies to discuss organizing in order to compel farmers to pay a living wage. While they talk, the meeting is raided and Casey is killed. Tom, enraged, kills a deputy in self-defense.



20TH CENTURY-FOX EXPERTS pored over thousands of pictures taken by U. S. Government photographers of dust-bowl workers, like this one, with his family. They also had their own photographers record the hopeless misery in which migratory workers of the West live. Then, sure that Steinbeck had not exaggerated in his descriptions, they went ahead with the filming of *The Grapes of Wrath*. It cannot be a pleasant picture, because it was not a pleasant book.

(continued)

THE GRAPES OF WRATH THESE MEN MADE IT POSSIBLE

Darryl Zanuck

WHEN, IN THE October 1939 CLICK, the statement was made, "Many doubt that censor-beset, taboo-inhibited Hollywood will have the guts faithfully to reproduce the squalor and misery of Steinbeck's tragic people," Zanuck objected. He sent the telegram below, completed the most controversial picture of the decade.



John Steinbeck



THE AUTHOR of the most tragic book of the generation approved the film version before it went into production. Many accused him of exaggerating the conditions of the Okies because he could do so in writing fiction. But critics agree the lives of the real migratory workers are no less depressing than the lives of the Joad family.

Nunnally Johnson

TOP-FLIGHT Scenarist Johnson, responsible for conversion of Steinbeck's tragic tale of the great 20th century exodus from a novel to a movie, has taken none of the bitterness or sting from Steinbeck's book. He has been in Hollywood nine years. Scenarist, columnist, author, he is also associate producer for the picture.



John Ford



DIRECTOR of *The Grapes of Wrath* is John Ford, veteran Hollywood hit maker. Stressing the realism of the story, Ford insisted that on the set actors be called by their names in the movie, not their real names. Having directed such films as *The Informer*, he was well-fitted to direct the great sociological study of the migrants.

