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## The Representation of Poverty in Great Depression American Literature

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THE REPRESENTATION OF POVERTY IN GREAT DEPRESSION  
AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

CAVEL CASSANDRA AUSTIN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in English Literature  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Elsie Olan, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to explore how American authors represented poverty across different states during the Depression Era. I have chosen to review social reform author John Steinbeck, and proletariat authors, Michael Gold, Meridel Le Sueur, and William Attaway. Before addressing the issues presented in the data collection tools (novels): *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Jews Without Money*, *The Girl*, and *Blood on the Forge*, I reviewed the fundamentals of the events leading up to the crash of the stock market, which spiraled the United States and the world at large in the greatest Depression ever known. In this thesis, I have also outlined a summary of the novels for the benefit of readers who may not have had the opportunity to read them. I have applied a Marxist literary critical analysis to the preceding novels highlighting three overarching concepts of the theory: economic power, materialism versus spirituality, and class conflict. Evolving from these concepts are the key tenets of Marxism: base, superstructure, hegemony, commodification, class conflict, and false consciousness. In the literary critical analysis, I applied these key tenets to the plot of each novel in order to underscore the ideologies of Marxist theorists with regards to the existence of class divisions and how this division creates class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats.

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## INTRODUCTION

“How can we live without our lives? How will we know it’s us without our past? No. Leave it. Burn it. They sat and looked at it and burned it into their memories” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 88).

A close reading of a number of literatures written during the 1930s spawned my idea to write a thesis that would compare the salient resemblance of social dilemmas during the Great Depression Era and how they further deepened society into separate class structures. I have selected four Depression Era novels to analyze the effects of the greatest recession the world has ever witnessed on Americans. To lay the foundation of my thesis, I have given a synopsis of the changing face of literary works during the Great Depression and a brief introduction of each novel. In order to conduct a favorable critical analysis, I presented a brief summary of the events that led to the Depression. Before engaging in the literary criticism, I thought it important to provide background information and a summary of each author and novel. I have used a Marxist literary critical analysis to highlight the nature of the socioeconomic impacts of the Great Depression.

The Great Depression underscores an important period in the history of American literature. During this period 1929-39, many American authors veered towards writing literary works that addressed the social impacts of the Depression on American families. Poverty surfaced as a recurring theme in the work of an onslaught of new authors. Some sought revolutionary political reform while others called for social reform. Many writers rejected the idea of capitalism and its so-called progress and formed allegiance with the Communist Party.

Some novelists drew inspiration from probing deeper in the lives of the poor and the working class. Others looked to politics and economics to pen many fictional representations of poverty in American during the Great Depression.

Two distinct styles of writing emerged: proletariat and social reform or sociological novels. According to Foley (1993), “[d]epression-era proletarian literature, arising as it did in a moment when many felt the great day was coming soon, offers sustenance and inspiration ... to those who still hope and work for the great day to come” (p. viii). Foley (1993) states, “many proletarian writers focused on the formation of working-class experience and consciousness (or false consciousness) in relation to race and gender” (p. viii). However, sociological novels bear similar characteristics to problem novels. According to Holman (1977), sociological novels are “a form of the PROBLEM NOVEL which centers its principal attention on the nature, function, and effect of the society in which the characters live and on the social forces playing upon them” (p. 502). One of the most poignant literary works of the Depression Era came from the pen of John Steinbeck. Through his literary works, Steinbeck emerged as one of the first American authors who called for social reforms.

*The Grapes of Wrath* (2009), an American realist novel, records the history and lives of dislocated, poor, white, sharecropping farmers from Oklahoma. The story depicts a family that joined the Westward migration to California in search of jobs advertised on handbills throughout the villages in Sallisaw, Oklahoma. During the era of the Great Depression, poverty emerged as one of the most prevalent themes in society and literary works. However, poverty was not confined to any given race or region. Instead, it had sprawling effects especially on the lower class or “‘the American Underclass:’ those ‘people who [were] seen to be stuck more or less

permanently at the bottom” (Gandal, 1997, p. 3-4). Millions of immigrants joined the American underclass the moment they left the shores of Ellis Island.

In the novel *Jews Without Money* (1993), a semi-autobiographical novel, Michael Gold presents a first hand account of his migrant, poverty-stricken family, along with thousands of other Jewish families that also faced the pitiable conditions of poverty living in Manhattan’s lower East side of New York City. According to Foley (1993), “the [novel] goes on to deliver a pungent description of a cross-section of Jewish ghetto life, ending with the framing assertion, ‘[e]xcitement, dirt, fighting, chaos! The sound of my street lifted like the blast of a great carnival or catastrophe. The noise was always in my ears. Even in sleep I could hear it; I can hear it now” (p. 292-293). Proletariat literature also included female writers who joined in the call for reform. Crawford (1987) states, “I was interested in young working-class writers, people of color, women, and blacklisted Communist writers of an earlier time” (Essays, p. 137).

The Great Depression had sweeping effects and bred poverty across the United States. “[Meridel Le Sueur] was a rare woman’s voice among the preeminent writers of the early Communist movement: one of the two women attending the American Writers Congress of 1935, and one of the few to work in the proletarian fiction genre” (Crawford, 1987, p. 145). In *The Girl* (1999), a novel of trenchant social realism, Le Sueur writes about the heroic women who came together to tell their stories of the adverse effects of poverty on their families. The novel focuses on the lives of women and the sacrifices they made for their families. “The story takes us back to the thirties and a culture of poverty and oppression ... [i]ts rhythms are not of the movement of grasses, but of the wrenching movements of urban poverty and the beginnings of our modern bureaucratic world” (Schleuning, 1939, p. 134). According to Crawford (1987),

“[t]o properly understand Meridel’s intention, it must be emphasized on the one hand that *The Girl* is about real women, some of whom still survive today [1987] in Minnesota sanatoriums, all of whom were caught up in the poverty of the Midwest depression” (p. 146).

The Great Migration (1910-1930) led millions of African-Americans trying to escape the poverty and hopelessness of the segregated South to the industrial cities of the North. The novel *Blood of the Forge* (1939), a migration novel, “chronicles the impact of the Great Migration upon individual lives and depicts the struggles of the workers in the major northern industries of the period” (Garren, 1998, p. 5). According to Jones (2007), “Attaway’s *Blood on the Forge*...begins with a contemplation of the ‘hungry blues’ (p. 2) of black life in the sharecropping South which is only replaced by exploitation in the industrial North” (p. 133).

Poverty may be defined in terms of a one’s inability to adequately satisfy his or her basic needs. Poverty inherently affects mankind’s psychological and sociological well-being. I will use the abovementioned novels to investigate how poverty is represented during the Depression Era and its social impacts on families across different states. Throughout the centuries, a direct correlation can be made between economic, literacy, and emotional poverties. This research also seeks to demonstrate the relationship between economic poverty and both literacy and emotional poverty.

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

As a pre-service educator, I have always had a vested interest in the needs of students whose families' socioeconomic status debilitates them from maximizing their potential. Consequently, my first instinct in answering the invitation to embark on this research prompted me to investigate the roots of representations of poverty in American literature. My fascination sprouted from the fact that as an aspiring educator and an English major student, I will need to develop higher level thinking about the complex historical nature that surrounds the differing genres and prevailing themes in literature. Having established an in-depth understanding and analysis of American literature, I believe I will be able to impart accurate and incisive knowledge about American literature to students in my future classroom. As an educator, it is imperative that I aim to create a culturally responsive learning environment, which will help to foster students' learning through relatable circumstances. A culturally responsive classroom includes accommodations to students' diversity in the physical layout of the classroom, the teaching strategies employed, and the adjustments to the curricula.

This research will help me to raise students' awareness of the sociological and psychological influences of society on the literary works they will study in American literature. I will continue to chip away at the fundamentals of classical literature in order to glean credible and insightful knowledge to impart to my future students. As Dewey (2006), reiterates Jacob Riis' sentiments of poverty in his quote: ““When nothing seems to help, I go look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that

blow that did it, but all that had gone before”” (p. 23). Learning can only be achieved through constant investigation, which remains my steadfast goal.

In this research, I will present historical information on the Great Depression and the principal causes and effects as they relate to the American society. Examining the events of this era is important to the literary criticism I will use to analyze the effects on society. I will then examine how American authors during this era represented the sociological and psychological impacts of the Depression on families. To better appreciate the authors’ perspective, I have included a background excerpt on each author. Using the previously mentioned data collection tools, (novels), I seek to examine how these authors represent poverty during the Great Depression. The analysis will utilize Marxist literary criticisms to draw conclusions of how poverty is represented in Depression Era fiction.

## **THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

The Great Depression spanned over a decade from 1929 to 1939 and had rippled effects across nations worldwide. According to Szostak (2003), the Great Depression remains “the longest, deepest, and most pervasive depression in American history” (p. 44). The Depression produced high levels of unemployment and dislocation. “It is widely accepted that the unemployment rate peaked above 25 percent in 1933 and remained above 14 percent into the 1940s” (Szostak, 2003, p. 44). Resulting from the wide scope of unemployment, poverty and hardship reigned among the American populace. Szostak (2003) further states, “[y]et these figures may underestimate the true hardship of the times: those who became too discouraged to seek work would not have been counted as unemployed. Likewise, those who moved from the cities to the countryside in order to feed their families would not have been counted” (p. 44).

### **Root Causes of the Great Depression**

The American economy witnessed significant growth in the years after WWI with the rise of new businesses. According to Fearon (2004), “[t]his period was an era of stable prices, full employment, high levels of investment, and high company profits” (p. 935). As a result of the prosperity and confidence in the economy, “[b]ig businesses in particular, flourished building on the technological advances that had been adopted during WWI” (Fearon, 2004, p. 935). Both big and small investors benefitted from the nation’s prosperity and “National prosperity encouraged stock market growth” (Fearon, 2004, p. 935). However, this era of prosperity would

soon collapse plunging the nation into ten years of Depression, which sent shock waves across the world.

Contrary to popular belief that the crash of the United States stock market in October 1929 resulted in the Great Depression, no single event can account for the Depression. The events that led to the Depression intertwined among diverse political, economic, and social factors. The fundamental cause of the economic collapse can be argued against the “efficacy of the unregulated free market” (McElvaine, 2003, p. 151). However, this remains debatable even in the twenty-first century.

The United States agricultural industry boomed to meet the demands of European nations after World War I, also known as the Great War, ended. European countries’ economies experienced deflation, which resulted in a “demand for American farm products, especially grains, soared as did prices. Such profitable conditions led American farmers to go deeply into debt to buy additional land and machinery” (McElvaine, 2003, p. 151). However, the European farmers recovered quickly and “the demand for the expanded production of American farms plummeted, (helping along with a sharp contraction in the money supply) to carry the economy into a sharp recession in 1920-21” (McElvaine, 2003, p. 151).

The Great War significantly transformed the international financial sector. The United States emerged the world’s largest creditor. According to McElvaine (2004), “[m]assive war debts owed by the British and French to American creditors were part of the economic landscape of the 1920s, as were the huge reparation payments the European victors demanded from Germany” (p. 151). The United States assumed the position of world banker, which was initially held by Great Britain. America was not prepared to shoulder the responsibilities that came with



this position and “political leaders of the twenties were committed to maintain a favorable balance of trade, meaning that they wanted the nation to export more than it imported” (McElvaine, 2003, p. 151). However, as the world creditor, America could not strike a balance between the two “because other countries had to sell more to the United States than they bought from it if they were to have the funds to repay the debts they owed to American creditors” (McElvaine, 2003, p. 151).

According to McNeill, R. Hanes and S. Hanes (2003), “Manufacturing industries had produced more consumer goods than Americans could buy. By 1929, stores and warehouses bulged with goods, so manufacturers began cutting back production and laying off workers” (p. 2). With widespread factory redundancy, Americans’ spending power decreased, which resulted in a domino effect on various industrial plants as the workers bought fewer manufactured goods. McNeil et al., (2003) further states, “[r]oughly 75 percent of Americans had no money to save after purchasing necessities. Most of America’s wealth was in the hands of a very few. The very wealthy spent money on luxury items, but this spending could not counteract the increasing lack of spending on the part of the majority of people” (p. 2). The United States’ economy needed stimulation from the working class to sustain investments in the stock market.

As the domino effects trickled down, the “banking system was weakening as thousands of small, rural, undiversified banks failed when farmers could not repay loans. The Federal Reserve (America’s central bank) took little action” (McNeil et al., 2003, p. 3). Panic set in and thousands rushed to withdraw their savings from banks but many banks did not have funds to pay out. The United States had endorsed the emergence of numerous holding companies, which engaged in managing other business instead of production. “Americans who invested in holding

companies were at risk, because such companies could collapse more easily in this ‘house of cards’ structure” (McNeil et al., 2003, p. 3). Another contributing factor resulted from the practice of “[i]nvestors [who] were buying stocks with loaned money and assuming the stocks’ value would continue to go higher and higher” (McNeil et al., 2003, p. 3).

“All of these factors came together in October 1929 to create an uncontrollable slide of the U.S. stock market. The slide signaled the beginning of the Great Depression, the severest economic crisis in the history of the United States” (McNeil et al., 2003, p. 3).

### **The Social Impacts of the Great Depression**

After the Stock Market crashed, the economy took a plunge with the closures of many businesses, which swung Americans into a tailspin. Most Americans felt a sense of despair with the loss of jobs among professionals and common laborers. According to Carson and Bonk (2008), “men wanted to go to work, but plants stood idle. Prolonged unemployment created a new class of people. The jobless sold apples on street corners. They stood in breadlines and outside soup kitchens” (Great Depression, para. 3). To conceal their shame, many men continued to dress in their suits pretending to go out to work every morning. The Depression uprooted Americans’ homes and lives and “many live[d] in ‘Hooverilles,’ shantytowns on the outskirts of large cities. Thousands of unemployed men and boys took to the road in search of work, and the gas station became a meeting place for men ‘on the bum’” (Great Depression, para. 3).

## METHODOLOGY

The 1930s witnessed a period of starvation and displacement for millions of Americans from every race, gender, and more specifically, the working class. I have chosen to conduct a qualitative research, specifically a literary critical analysis on the sociological and psychological effects of the Depression Era as represented in four works of American literature. This research seeks to identify “How poverty is represented in novels written during the 1930s.”

In identifying relevant literature, my initial reading list expanded to include both fiction and nonfiction as follows:

### **Literary Fiction**

*The Girl* (1939/1978) by Meridel Le Sueur  
*Blood on the Forge* (1941/1969) by William Attaway  
*Jews Without Money* (1930/1993) by Mike Gold  
*Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) by Rudolfo Anaya  
*The Grapes of Wrath*, (1939/2002) by John Steinbeck  
*The Jungle* (1988) by Upton Sinclair  
*Black Boy* (1937) by Richard Wright  
*The Dollmaker* (1954/2003) by Harriette Arnow  
*The Street* (1946) by Ann Petry  
Any of the Socrates Fortlow series by Walter Mosley

### **Literary Criticism**

*Radical Representations* by Barbara Foley  
*The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* by Keith Gandal (Oxford UP, 1997)  
*American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840-1945* by Jones, G. (2008)

### **Literary NonFiction/Memoirs - Contemporary, Literary, Creative Nonfiction Books**

*Before Women Had Wings* (1996) by Connie May Fowler (novel/memoir)

*The Glass Castle* (2005) by Jeannette Walls (memoir)

*Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* (2004) by Nick Flynn (memoir)

*Blackbird* (2000) by Jennifer Lauck (memoir)

*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (2001) by Barbara Ehrenreich (literary journalism)

### **Jonathon Kozol Books**

*Savage Inequalities* (1991)

*Amazing Grace* (1995)

*Death at an Early Age* (1967)

*The Shame of the Nation* (2005)

*Ordinary Resurrections* (2000)

In order to critically analyze and demonstrate the dynamics of the social world of the Depression Era, inclusive of the mass migrations and in terms of race, gender, and class, I narrowed the selection of data collection tools to comprise four novels written by proletariat and social reform authors. The central issues of all four novels surround the sociological implications of the Depression Era on families. I selected these novels because they provide representations of both male and female authors, and mixed race perspectives.

*The Grapes of Wrath* rates among the most successful social reform novels and provides a solid depiction of the struggles of poor, Whites. *The Girl*, though written in 1939, remained unpublished until 1978 but echoes the sentiments of women. *Blood on the Forge* gives a glimpse of the struggles of Blacks both in the South and North. *Jews Without Money* illustrates

the European migrants' dilemma. These novels will help to create a painting of how the Depression affected the diverse population of America.

The following collection has engaged the complexities of the then social world:

*Table 1: Demographics of Data Collection Tools.*

Title	Author	Race	Gender	Class
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (1939)	John Steinbeck	Whites	Male/Female	Working
<i>Jews Without Money</i> (1930)	Michael Gold	Jews	Male/Female	Working
<i>The Girl</i> (1939)	Meridel Le Sueur	Whites	Female	Working
<i>Blood on the Forge</i> (1941)	William Attaway	Blacks	Male	Working

Using the broad themes of economic power, materialism versus spirituality, and class conflict, I will apply a Marxist approach to conduct a literary criticism of the tabled novels. The fundamental principles laid by Karl Marx theorize “Marxism declares it offers a comprehensive, positive view of human life and history that demonstrates how humanity can save itself from a meaningless life of alienation and despair” (Bressler, 2011, p. 166). Marx’s core contention lies in the disparity between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, or the ‘haves’ and the ‘haves not.’ He believed that if society can reach equilibrium then a classless society would result in a balance of wealth and equal opportunities.

First, I identified the key tenets of Marxism in the four focused novels. I then used specific scenarios that align with the key tenets. I observed that there is a recurring pattern throughout all four novels. This pattern identifies a line of division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. Having defined the key tenets, in a close reading I then looked to see how these

key tenets come into play with the plot of each novel. In explaining and analyzing the novels, I applied Marxist key tenets to different scenarios in each novel in order to evaluate if my research question “How did American authors represent poverty in Great Depression Era” could be answered.

*Table 2: Process of Analysis.*

<b>Tenets of Marxism</b>	<b><i>The Grapes of Wrath</i></b>	<b><i>Jews Without Money</i></b>	<b><i>The Girl</i></b>	<b><i>Blood on the Forge</i></b>
<b>Economic Base &amp; Superstructure</b>	Bourgeoisie (landowners, bankers) vs Proletariats The Joads family (white tenant farmers)	Bourgeoisie (Tammany Hall Representatives) vs Proletariats The Golds family (Immigrant Jews)	Bourgeoisie (Government Agencies & Relief Workers) vs Proletariats (Girl and her companions)	Bourgeoisie (Mr. Johnson & Steel Mill Owners) vs Proletariats Moss brothers (black sharecroppers)
<b>Hegemony</b>	Noah and Connie	Herman	Clara, Belle, and Girl	Big Mat
<b>Commodification</b>		Herman and Zechariah	Clara	Anna
<b>Class Conflict and False Consciousness</b>	Hooverville men (sharecroppers) and Deputy Sheriffs/contractors	Herman Baruch Goldfarb and Zechariah	Strikers, Foundry Owners, Relief Workers and Workers Women Alliance	Strikers and Steel Mill Owners

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

### Representation of the Poverty in Literature: *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

#### *Author's Background.*

“John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902” (Hearle, 2007, p. 396). Steinbeck attended Stanford University between 1919 and 1925 but he left, “never having made any attempt to fashion a program that would lead to a degree” (Hearle, 2007, p. 396). Carol Henning, his first wife became his “in-house editor, intellectual sounding board, and greatest early supporter” (Hearle, 2007, p. 396). In 1930, Steinbeck met Edward Rickett, “with whom he formed what was to become the closest and most intellectually vital friendship of his life” (Hearle, 2007, p. 396). According to Hearle (2007), “the two friends shared a number of concerns and interests which helped to shape Steinbeck’s writing in significant ways” (p. 396).

Steinbeck’s breakthrough as a social reformer came when “The San Francisco News commissioned [him] to do investigative reporting on the living conditions of the recently arrived refugees of the Dust Bowl” (Hearle, 2007, p. 400). He conducted a seven part series called the “The Harvest Gypsies” which “is significant because it mark[ed] [his] first literary attempt to help effect social change” (Hearle, 2007, p. 400). Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* from a firsthand experience, which helped him garner real life situations among the refugees. He met Tom Collins, “the manager of the Weedpatch unit of the Farm Security Administration’s migrants camps in California’s great Central Valley” (Hearle, 2007, p. 400). “Collins gave Steinbeck access to his extensive reports on the migrants and their lives on the road and in the federal camps and introduced [him] to many families” (Hearle, 2007, p. 400). *The Grapes of*

*Wrath* became a “top-seller book of the year and the Pulitzer Prize winner” (Hearle, 2007, p. 401). Steinbeck died in October of 1967.



### *Summary of the novel*

The novel depicts the story of the fictitious Joad family who gets evicted from their farm home in Sallisaw, Oklahoma. Along with thousands of other families whose homes and farms are demolished, the Joads decide to migrate to California in search of fruit-picking jobs advertised on flyers circulating throughout the villages. Tenant farmers had become victims of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. The drought destroyed the farmlands and all the crops. As a result, sharecroppers' means of sustenance became nonexistent and they could no longer pay their loans. The landowners forced the sharecroppers off their properties and mowed down their homes with tractors. The banks repossessed their lands, machineries, and homes.

The family's experiences embody the effects of the larger social issues of the migrants. According to Hearle (2007), "*The Grapes of Wrath* alternates chapters that tell the story of the fictional Joad family as it leaves Oklahoma for California and begins to break up, with those that document the larger forces at work" (p. 401). Steinbeck uses the novel to document the information he had gleaned from his visits to the migrant camps. "The effect of the mixture is to present a brutally naturalistic universe in which individuals retain the ability to make significant decisions that will affect their lives and possibly the ways of the world" (Hearle, 2007, p. 401).

Out on parole, Tom Joad, the protagonist, journeys home after serving four years in McAlester prison for a murder charge. He meets Jim Casey, a former preacher, who laments his loss of faith and the problems that sharecroppers face. Tom invites Casey to accompany him to his family's home. They find the Joad family's home deserted and in shambles. Hopeless and dejected, Tom wonders about his family's whereabouts. Wandering about the deserted lands, Muley Graves, a former neighbor, recognizes Tom and advises that his family got evicted and

moved to his uncle's home with the intention of going west to California like the thousands of other families including Muley's. Tom finds his family preparing for the westward migration. Although his parole confines him to the state of Oklahoma, he decides to journey with his family. They sell what they could of their dilapidated possessions and pack what could be carried on a rickety, broken-down truck. Tied to the family's labor on the lands, Grampa refused to leave. The family decided to sedate him so he could journey with them. The other eleven members of the family, along with Jim Casey, crammed into the rickety truck.

The story continues with the description of the migrants on Highway 66. Thousands of migrants bundled up in rickety cars and trucks jammed the highway. The Joad family spends their first night camping by the roadway where they meet the Wilsons. That night, Grampa suffers from a stroke and dies. The need to spend sparingly outweighed a proper burial, so they decide to bury him along the roadside. After Tom and Al repair the Wilson's car, the two families decide to unite and travel together. Steinbeck gives glimpses of roadside cafes and truck drivers that travel Route 66. After a few more miles, the Wilson's car breaks down again. The families decide that Tom, Al, and Casey would remain behind to repair the car while the others move along to find a campsite for the night. Tom and Al drive back easterly to find a junkyard where they would procure the spare parts needed to repair the Wilson's car. They meet a one-eyed attendant who despises his boss and tells them horrid stories.

The Joad family finds lodging at a roadside camp. They hear ominous stories of despicable working conditions and the lack of jobs in California. One man who is heading back home to Oklahoma relates how his wife and child died of starvation and that 20,000 men showed up for jobs available only for 800. Disheartened but not deterred, the Joads spend their days

travelling and nights in sordid roadside camps where migrants scrape for food. Many migrants struggled to find jobs to sustain their families that were dying from starvation. Broken from the recurring horrifying stories of life in California, the migrants bonded and developed a communal lifestyle.

After they crossed Arizona and reached the Colorado River, Noah Joad, the oldest child, having no willpower to continue abandons his family. Connie, the husband of the Joads oldest and pregnant daughter Rose of Sharon, forsakes the family too. The Wilson's journey also ends as Sairy, the wife, is too sick to continue. Fearful of the heat in the Mojave Desert at daylight, Tom assembles his family and they cross the dreaded desert at nightfall. Grandma, who had grown disillusioned after grampa's death, dies while they are driving across the desert.

Determined that her family must get into California, Ma grieves in silence.

The Joads confront the horror of life in California. At Hoovervilles, the government campsites, they witness the growing aggression among migrants who are desperate to find jobs and the hundreds of famish families. Hungry children encircle Ma while she prepares dinner for her family. The Joads too bore the anguish of the contemptuous label "Okie," which the locals coined fearing the influx of migrants. They confront the injustices meted out to the migrants. Tom instigates the men to argue with the contractors for better wages. The Deputy Sheriff, who accompanies the contractors, tries to falsely arrest one of the men in the camp but Tom intervenes. A squabble develops leaving one female migrant nursing gunshot wounds and a Sheriff knocked unconscious by Casey, who saves Tom by accepting the blame. Overwhelmed with sorrows, Uncle John gets drunk. The Joad family struggles to stay sober and together. They leave the camp that night after hearing that mobs plan to burn it down.

The family takes refuge at a Weedpatch camp managed by migrants. The camp proves to be more desirable with flushing toilets and running water. Tom finds a pipe-laying job, which he keeps for only a few days. Mr. Thomas, his employer, discloses that some men plan to disrupt the camp's Saturday night dance, which would allow the police to get onto the campsite and shutdown the facility. However, the migrants avert the looming disruption. With no work, money or food, the Joads leave the Weedpatch camp to find work so they could survive the growing hunger that prevailed among the migrants.

They find a fruit-picking job at Hooper ranch where Tom runs into Casey who informs him that they are hired to break a strike for higher wages. After his release from jail, Casey starts to organize workers, which earns him many rivals among the landowners. Deputies barge into their meeting and kill Casey. Tom avenges Casey's death by killing his murderer. To protect Tom, the family goes on the move again to another campsite. They find cotton-picking jobs but Tom remains hidden in a cave. Ruthie, his youngest sister, tells a girl that Tom has killed two men and is in hiding. As a result, Tom has to find refuge elsewhere. Before he goes away, he tells Ma of his plans to fulfill Casey's dreams of organizing workers. Work ceases at the end of the cotton season. The wet season mimics the migrants' despair and repression. The rains flood the boxcar camp. Rose of Sharon has a stillbirth. Desperate to save her family, Ma moves to higher grounds. They find a barn with a boy and his father. While the father lay dying of starvation, Rose of Sharon feeds the father with the milk meant for her baby.

## **Representation of the Poverty in Literature: *Jews Without Money* by Michael Gold**

### *Author's Background.*

“Michael Gold was born Itzok Granich 12 April 1893 on Chrystie Street in New York City, the son of poverty stricken Jewish immigrant parents from Bessarabia” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 83). He attended New York University for a year. Gold maintained his birth name as a writer until 1921 when he returned to the United States after he had fled to Mexico to avoid drafting. According to Tuerk (1984), Gold explained his name change saying ““he took the name change of the father of a friend of his ... an upright fiery man”” (p. 85). His friend's father Captain Michael Gold was a veteran of the Civil War. Gold's rationale for a name change was a direct result of “the raids Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer was conducting against so called foreign radical organizations” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 85).

Gold gravitated towards radicalism; and as a result of reading the *Masses*, (a radical magazine) he “became an active participant in radical movements. Shortly after its formation, he joined the American Communist Party and remained an active member for the rest of his life” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 84). Gold stated that his reading of the *Masses* ““was the beginning of [his] education”” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 84). “In 1922, Gold was one of the three editors of the *Liberator*. The *New Masses* began publishing in 1926. In 1928, when the periodical was almost bankrupt, Gold became its editor and as one critic puts it ‘revised it in his own image’” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 84).

Gold is best known for his semi-autobiographical novel, *Jews Without Money*. The novel exposes the lives of the poor and oppressed in Lower East side, New York City tenements. “The novel tells of dreams turned to dust as immigrants come to America hoping to find the goldmine

medina (golden land) and instead find sweat shops and Tammany Hall” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 84).

Herman, the father, “finds himself ‘trap[ped]’ in abject poverty ... when the book ends, Mikey too has been entrapped by poverty dashing Herman’s hope that even though he himself could not escape, his son would be able to” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 86). “In February of 1967, after suffering a stroke, [Gold] entered a Kaiser Foundation Hospital, where he died May 14, 1967” (Tuerk, 1984, p. 87).

Racism prevailed during the 1930s and the ‘N’ word was acceptable and commonly used in literature. As such, Gold uses the ‘N’ word as the name for one of the characters in *Jews Without Money*. Using the ‘N’ word in this research does not endorse the term as appropriate or tolerable but simply regurgitates its use in the text.

### *Summary of the novel*

The novel epitomizes poverty in a series of vignettes, which highlight the impoverished families of Lower East Side, New York City tenements. It illustrates the lives of Gold and his family with young Mikey, as the protagonist. The young narrator recounts his childhood encounters in the streets. Gold recalls his fifth birthday as one that leaves an indelible mark because of the whipping he got for teasing the prostitutes. He joined a gang of Yids led by Nigger, who decided that they would play a game teasing the prostitutes. They picked on Rosie who ignored their derision. They moved on to teasing the other women. They mocked and jeered them shouting “fifty cents a night!” (Gold, 1993, p. 17). Shortly into the game, Mikey heard his mom shouting for him to come home. The sight of Rosie sitting in his mother’s kitchen sent shivers down his spine. He describes the East Side as “the red light district” (Gold, 1993, p. 14). At any given hour of the day, the prostitutes lined the streets wrapped naked under their kimonos. Prostitution became a thriving business, which resulted in overwhelming increased cases of syphilis.

Every street on the East Side was riddled with gangs, thieves, drunkards, and cheap pimps. Instead of working, they hung out on the streets seducing young girls into prostitution and at other times, the more detestable ones gang raped the girls. Nigger gave Mikey another harsh glimpse of life as a prostitute. The boys trailed Suzie, one of the whores who had picked up a truck driver, to her room and peeped through the keyhole. Mikey was horrified at what he saw especially because Nigger told him that’s how babies were made. Mikey felt it was an insult to his mother and he got in a fight with Nigger who beat him to a pulp. Many of the whores resorted to prostitution because of poverty.

The influences of the gang led Mikey into gang wars, stealing from the pushcart peddlers, swearing at his teachers, profanity, sex education, smoking, and a host of other wrong doings. Straying onto the wrong street would ultimately start a gang war. They swam in the sewers running along the roads, which was filled with garbage and dead animals. One youngster died after he was thrown off the pier, which was Nigger's way of teaching them how to swim. If they struggled then he would help. Unfortunately for this boy, help did not come in time. Nigger was a fearless, powerhouse, strong-built guy who defended his gang. He defied the cops and became an outlaw after throwing a stone at one. After stealing a ride on a horse cart, another gang member died when he fell under the wheels as he jumped off. The young boys were also at risk to homosexuals. Becoming a gang member was inevitable for self-protection.

The tenements were broken-down, overcrowded, squalid buildings, with outdoor shacks for toilets and the backyard a former graveyard, which still had bones of the dead that the children dug up and played with. In winter, the pipes froze and burst. The lumber and bricks rotted and slowly fell apart. Cats, cockroaches, bed bugs, rats, fleas, and all sorts of insect infested the building. Mikey's family lived in the tenements and experienced the humiliation that came with it, as did the other tenants. Herman, Mikey's father, once operated a suspender store but got swindled by his cousin and was left to do odd jobs as a painter. Katie, his mom, stayed home and kept the family together. His sister, Esther, roamed the streets as well and helped her mom cared for the other siblings. The Jewish family maintained their beliefs. Herman went to the synagogue and Mikey went to the Chaidar after school every afternoon. His teacher, Reb Moisha was a staunch orthodox Jew. The Jews and the Christian constantly argued about God. Katie insists that Mikey learns his family's Hebrew religion. One day Mikey asked



Reb if God made everything and hearing that He did stirred Mikey's interest. Soon he too became interested in knowing about God. Like all the other families, Mikey's often welcomed new immigrants into their homes whether family or friend until they could afford to rent their own space.

During the summer, life became even more miserable because of the heat. The tenement families slept out in the streets, on the docks, in the parks, and on the roofs. Lower East side had only two doctors in the community that were kept busy. Endless diseases plagued the families. Thousands died of tuberculosis, pneumonia, typhoid, influenza, and other illnesses. Most of the men worked as painters, carpenters, tailors, sweatshop owners, peddlers etc. Those who were painters suffered and grew ill from the fumes ingested from the lead in the paint. On many occasions, Herman also grew ill and caused much fear for his family, as he was the sole breadwinner.

Reb Samuel grew weary of his Jewish brothers because they had started to break the Mosaic Law by shaving their beards. He and the other orthodox factionalists decided that they would recruit a Rabbi from Europe to rule the synagogue. For five years the Jews saved monies to acquire a synagogue for the Rabbi, depriving their families of food. When the Rabbi arrived, the Jews became emotional and worshipped him. As they led him to the synagogue, the Rabbi scoffed at the dilapidated state of East Side. He devoured the food they had prepared, which disturbed Mikey who had hoped to get a bite. Mikey's complaints to Reb earned him a strong rebuke and an order to return home. Soon after the Rabbi came, he made unrealistic demands and his lifestyle went sky high. Reb spent his days raising funds to match the Rabbi's demands. His wife was left burdened with the duties of their umbrella shop. However, Reb grew weary

because the Rabbi did nothing about the men shaving their beards. Within a year, the Rabbi abandoned his congregation for a better paying-job. Reb became paralyzed from grief and spent the next ten years bedridden.

Herman kept his dream of reopening a suspender shop alive and hoped to gain \$300 to restart his business. Baruch, a politician and former poor boy of East Side, persuaded Herman to vote for \$3. Herman revered Baruch and thought of him as a friend because he was successful and they both immigrated to America from the same town. The corruption of politics reared its ugly head when Herman went to vote. He was taken to three different locations to vote. At the last location, there was an outbreak of violence. Herman was attacked and hit with a black jack across his head. The following day, Herman visited Baruch's office and asked for help to reopen his suspender shop. Baruch agreed to help Herman but never did. He only gave empty promises and as much as possible avoided Herman. However, Herman joined a lodge that Baruch introduced to him. There he met Zechariah, a boss painter. Zechariah used Herman to spy on his foreman, who had worked for ten years, because he was too friendly with the other painters. Zechariah fired the foreman and placed Herman in the position. Herman was ecstatic about the changes in his life but Katie was disgusted that the foreman lost his job and could no longer feed his family.

Soon Zechariah peeked Herman's interest in real estate. He arranged with Herman to purchase a home in Borough Park, Brooklyn. Herman took his family to view the place, which was located in a remote and lonely area. Zechariah's wife boasted about their grocery, restaurant, and butcher bills, and all the other luxuries they had. Feeling belittled, Katie remained adamant she would not leave East Side. Herman negotiated with Zechariah and began

making payments towards the new home. However, two months later Herman fell from a scaffold and splintered every bone in his legs. He stayed in bed for over a year, broken and debilitated. Katie had to go out to find a job to sustain her family. After three months, Baruch's lodge stopped paying sick benefit of \$8 per week to the family. Herman tried but never could go onto another scaffold because of his traumatic experience. Esther stayed home and cared for her younger sister and father.

One afternoon, Katie returned home from work earlier than usual because the restaurant closed due to severe weather conditions. Esther had started preparing dinner and left her dad to watch it while she went out to find wood. Katie grew uneasy that Esther had not returned home and it was getting late. Soon she heard a commotion in the hallway and went to the door to see what had happened. A man held Esther's almost lifeless body in his arms. An Express truck had mowed her down. Later that night, Esther died in the hospital. A lawyer came to build a case in their favor but Katie refused to take blood money. She could not be comforted and sat by her window day and night. All the neighbors rallied around and helped them with food and cleaning the house. Shamefacedly, Herman resorted to selling bananas on a pushcart while Mikey sold newspapers after school. Rosie, the prostitute, sent \$5 for Katie. One of the neighbors intervened and sent welfare officers to their aid but Herman flatly refused. At 12 years old, Mikey took full responsibility of providing for his family.

## **Representation of the Poverty in Literature: *The Girl* by Meridel Sueur**

### *Author's Background.*

“Meridel Le Sueur was born 22 February 1900, in Murray, Iowa to suffragist Marian Wharton and William Winston Wharton, a Church of Christ minister” (Berglund, 2005, p. 239). Born into political movements, Le Sueur adapted to the culture and soon became friendly with migrant women. “Through these early experiences as well as her awareness to the family legacy of her maternal grandmother, an early settler of Iowa, Le Sueur cultivated a sense of the world that was in opposition to the values of mainstream, white, Anglo-Protestant culture” (Berglund, 2005, p. 239). According to Berglund (2005), during the McCarthy era, Le Sueur was blacklisted and her family over-shadowed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI (p. 239). “Le Sueur’s mother married Arthur Le Sueur, a former socialist of Minot, North Dakota, and moved to St. Paul Minnesota, after the university where she worked was burnt down by anti-socialist” (Berglund, 2005, 239-40).

“Le Sueur attended McFadden’s Physical Culture School in Chicago, Illinois” for a year before she moved to New York where she attended “American Academy of Dramatic Art” (Berglund, 2005, p. 240). Naturally, Le Sueur became a member of the communist party “in 1924 and began to write articles for the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses* on the subject of breadlines, labor strikes, unemployment, and rights of farmers” (Berglund, 2005, p. 240). In 1927, Le Sueur let her voice be heard by joining forces “in [the] protest against the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for which she was jailed” (Berglund, 2005, p. 240).

“During the 1930s Le Sueur began working for the New Deal Federal Workers’ project; became involved in the Workers’ Alliance ... and found, with Dale Kramer, *Midwest Magazine*”

(Berglund, 2005, p. 240). In 1939, Le Sueur wrote *The Girl*, but “her submitted draft of the novel was rejected and she was required to return an advance of \$250. However, under the editorship of John Crawford, the novel got published in 1978” (Berglund, 2005, p. 243). “The novel charts the eponymous girl’s involvement with a would-be bank robber, his death, and her struggle to survive during the Depression, aided by a group of women she lived with” (Berglund, 2005, p. 243). “*The Girl* ends with the birth of the protagonist’s baby and a sense that the title character and women will endure” (Berglund, 2005, p. 243).

### *Summary of the novel*

The story embodies the sexual arousal of a young, naïve, virgin, girl from St. Paul, Minnesota who strived to enter womanhood. The protagonist known only as, the Girl, left her parental home to live in the city. With the ensuing Depression, the Girl was lucky to procure a job as a waitress in an illegal bootleg tavern, the German Village. The Girl quickly bonded with Clara, the other waitress and a prostitute, and the other ladies, Amelia, and Belle. Clara's mom introduced her to prostitution from the tender age of twelve. Fresh out of her rural community, the Girl dreaded the big city's life especially after her mother warned that "the cities were Sodom and Gomorrah" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 1). Unfamiliar with this ruthless world, the Girl learned from Clara all the lingo and skills necessary for survival. The Girl fell madly in love with Butch, a young ambitious-guy who aspires to own a gas station but is thwarted by the Depression, strikes, and lack of employment.

Toss in a den of abusive males, Girl fears the obnoxious character Ganz, chief orchestrator behind the bootleg operation and one that everyone obeys because he protects the tavern from the police. One day while working at the tavern, Girl overhears Belle and Hoinck, Belle's husband, talking about a bank robbery, which she would later get entangled in because she falls in love with Butch. Butch's presence sets Girl's emotions on fire and he takes advantage by flirting with her while his brother Bill woos Clara off her feet. The more sober character Amelia helps Belle's cat, Susy, as she gives birth to seven kittens. The significance of Amelia's role in the birth of the kittens would become evident when she helps Girl later. The pretense of legal activities appears evident at closing time at the tavern when a cop stands by the door while the

customers exit. Ganz nods at the cop. However, more than half the customers return through the alley door and the bootleg sales begin.

Clara and Belle advise Girl of the horrifying evils that await her in the cruel world. Belle tells her Clara went to jail twice and about the thirteen abortions she (Belle) had because of her fear of raising a child in the cruel world. Hoinck tells Girl they were a good Christian couple that even spoke in tongues and gave all their money to the church. But after the Depression, they turned to the church for help and the church sent them to welfare. Thereafter, life changed for them.

Desperate to find work, Butch and Bill had plans to start a new job at the foundry even though a strike progressed and trouble loomed in the air. Ganz came with the news that Hoinck had been arrested. Shortly after Hone, Ganz's lawyer, came and promised he would get Hoinck out of jail. Relieved, the girls went out for a walk. Girl remained confused about Hoinck's arrest and Belle's sudden mood change after Hone's promise. Belle explained the organized chaos and arrest. The mayor plans to run for office in the upcoming election and asks Ganz to release some illegal operators in order to create and publish news in the morning paper giving an impression that he actively has things under control. Girl realizes everything is prearranged.

The next morning, Butch and Bill went to the foundry to start their new jobs. A tense atmosphere overshadowed the streets with the National Guards knocking at the doors in the village. Shortly after noon, Butch returned to the tavern panting, all bloody, and his clothes torn. Soon after Butch arrived, a customer came to the door with Bill suffering from gunshot wounds. The brothers were given a "scab job" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 20). The strikers set them up to repair a light bulb on the loading platform. There they set upon Butch beating him.

Girl gets a letter from her father saying he is still alive and lamenting over the years of his wasted life. The letter causes her to feel depressed when she remembers the awful times she spent with her father. The following week she gets another letter informing he had died. Although the circumstances of her return are grim, Girl feels happy to visit her family that lives in a small village only two hours away from the German village. When she arrives at the house, she finds her mother in tears. She looks around at the dilapidated home that her family lives in. She goes over to the couch and looks at her father. He had died two days ago but the county morgue still had not picked up the body. Her mother and siblings recounted the tragic end of her father. Pa had gotten in a rage and whipped his 21-year-old son, Joe, for taking out his tools. Dejected, Pa packed his belongings into a pillowcase and slept under the apple tree in the yard, which made him ill by the next morning. The family reminisce countless incidents living with Pa. Ironically, they felt happier that he had passed away.

Girl returned to the German village searching for Butch but no one knew where to find him. Finally, he surfaced after a few days without a dollar in his pocket. Once again, Butch asked Girl to buy his beer. After much quarrelling, he borrows a dollar from Clara and takes Girl to a dirty hotel. Girl felt disappointed about her first sexual experience and flashes of her mother's nightly fights with her father came back to her. Butch remained arrogant and hurriedly got dressed so he could meet with a guy, whom he refused to name. Girl returned to the consoling arms of her female friends, who nurtured and cared for her. Each related her first sexual experience, which helped Girl to feel a sense of togetherness with them. Later, Girl discovered she is pregnant and informed Butch. Outraged, he took her to see a woman who



would help to abort the baby. Girl went along with his plan but slipped out the room when the woman turned her back. She didn't tell Butch she had not followed through with the abortion.

Soon Girl discovered the plans of the bank robbery orchestrated by Ganz. She became an accomplice playing the role of driver, along with Ack, for the getaway cars. Hoinck, Butch and Ganz were the would-be robbers. During the robbery, someone inside the bank made an alarm and chaos erupted. In their efforts to escape Ganz shot and killed Hoinck and took the moneybag from him. Butch saw what had happened and in return killed Ganz. Butch escaped with Girl but was badly wounded by Ganz's returned bullet. Girl drove all the way to Iowa before she made her first stop in a forested area where she found an abandoned building. She laid Butch down to rest. He recounted the events of the robbery telling her his realization that Ganz had planned to kill them all and take the money. Butch succumbed to his wounds and she covered his body and left him there. Girl hitchhiked a ride back to German village and reunited with the other women. She learned Ack got arrested and was sentenced to life. She read in the paper they had found Butch's body. Hoinck had not yet been buried. Belle reassured her she had no need to worry since the police did not know that there was a second getaway vehicle.

Things grew progressively worse for the women. Belle, Clara, and Butch's mother moved into a relief tenement for women. Girl stayed with Belle but had to hide when the relief workers came to the tenement. As time passed, Butch's mother grew more and more delirious. Girl had decided to carry the baby but she was not getting any milk or oranges, which Amelia kept telling her she needed. While she waited to get relief, the program administrators had a woman following her everywhere she went. She reported rumors about Girl, to prevent her from

getting aid. The relief treated Girl and the other women with scorn. They were intrusive in their questionnaires about people's private life and were deceitful.

Finally, Girl got accepted for relief but grew angry after she saw a note stating that she needed psychiatric care and sterilization. She shouted and screamed profanities at the relief worker and was detained by cops. The cops both sexually and physically assaulted her but she fought back, which landed her in a deplorable maternity relief home. The conditions of the home equated to a prison with electric alarms at the windows and female police intimidating the women. The ladies were prevented from seeing their babies. During her stay, Girl met Alice, a deaf girl, who told her that she was a part of the Workers Alliance like Amelia. Alice gave her renewed hope of changes women would demand through demonstrations. Amelia helped to get Girl released from the maternity relief home. Sadly, Girl received the news that the relief workers had taken Clara to give her electric shock treatments, which would prevent her from remembering. Amelia recalled with Girl horrific stories of how the authorities had set her son afire and hung Sacco and Vanzetti, whose pictures she had hung on the walls of her room.

Amelia worked feverishly to organize protests and sought justice for the women. Clara returned from the Hastings Mental Hospital, white as a ghost. She had lost everything including her memory. Girl caressed her and reminisced about the times they had shared, recounting Clara's dream of a big house. Girl went into labor the day of Amelia's orchestrated women demonstration. Realizing Clara was gasping for breath, Girl knelt by the cot pleading for her to hold on. However, all hope had been lost for Clara. Before she took her last breath, she uttered her only and final word to name the baby Clara. Amelia returned with good news about the

success of the demonstration and in time to help with Girl's delivery. The women surrounded Girl and faces of joy gleamed at the sight of a baby girl.

## **Representation of the Poverty in Literature: *Blood on the Forge* by William Attaway**

### *Author's Background.*

“William Alexander Attaway was born in Greenville, Mississippi, on 19 November, 1911, the son of William A. Attaway, a physician and Florence Parry Attaway, a school teacher” (Garren, 1988, p. 4). Langston Hughes’ poetry played an integral role in Attaway’s decision to become a writer. Attaway rebelled against his successful parents. However, he eventually acceded and attended “the University of Illinois, but he did not remain there. At the onset of the Great Depression and after his father’s death he dropped out of school to live as a vagabond for two years” (Garren, 1988, p. 5). It was this experience that empowered him to write *Blood on the Forge*. According to Garren (1988), “[w]ith the 1939 publication of his first novel *Let Me Breathe Thunder*, William Attaway was hailed by Stanley Young in the *New York Times Review* as a writer of great promise, ‘an authentic young artist not to be watched tomorrow but now’” (p. 4). Eventually, in 1936, Attaway earned a BA.

Attaway’s first published story *Tale of a Blackmoor* “prefigures [his] refusal to treat black life in isolation from the relentless pressure from the dominant white culture” (Garren, 1988, p. 4). Attaway also explored acting with his sister, Ruthie. “His second novel *Blood on the Forge* (1941) not only confirmed his promise but ha[d] been called by critic Robert A. Bone, ‘by far the most perceptive novel of the Great Migration’” (Garren, 1988, p. 3). Bone applauded Attaway for his inclusion of the character “Zanski, a Ukrainian who represents a ‘superior adjustment to the new industrial environment’ and who understands, as the brothers do not, that their lives can only gain value if they put down roots” (Garren, 1988, p. 6). Due to the poor sale of his second novel, Attaway began writing music books. “He also composed and arranged

songs for Harry Belafonte” (Garren, 1988, p. 7). Attaway suffered a heart attack and died on June 17, 1986.

### *Summary of the novel*

The story exemplifies the struggles and hardships that blacks endured living in the south and the misconstrued perceptions during the 1930s of having a better life in the north. Exhausted by the inequality of the segregated south, the Moss brothers seek to escape the injustices of sharecropping. The protagonist, Big Mat, shoulders the responsibilities of his two half-brothers Chinatown and Melody, after the only mule they had to plow the fields mowed down their mother. Devastated about his mother's tragic demise, in a rage, Big Mat kills the mule. After which, everyone feared mentioning his mother to him again. The brothers and Big Mat's wife, Hattie, face starvation, because without the animal, they cannot plough the field. In addition, Mr. Johnson, the landowner, decides for the next two years he would hold onto the brothers' share of the crop as payment for the mule.

The brothers share a one-room shack in the hills of Kentucky. With nothing to eat and no sure hope of getting anything, Melody plays the "Hungry blues" (Attaway, 1969, p. 2) on his guitar while Hattie argues with Chinatown that they should not have to bear their hunger when he has a gold tooth. However, Chinatown would rather die of hunger than lose his prized tooth. They all anticipate Big Mat's return from Mr. Johnson's place since there is a slight hope he may be able to procure some pig tripe after the butchering. To pacify the growls of their churning stomachs, Chinatown and Melody play a wishing game. After butchering eight hogs, Big Mat manages to get only some chitterlings, better known as hog guts, for his family. Mr. Johnson exploits his labor claiming he owes him based on the books' records. Mr. Johnson agreed to replace the mule for the next crop but this would also be paid for with their labor. Before he left,

Mr. Johnson warned Big Mat against the jacklegs from up north that were trying to entice niggers into leaving the south.

The following day, Big Mat returns to Mr. Johnsons' place to butcher the last hog and pick up the mule. He is troubled because Hattie may be pregnant and she has already had six miscarriages. He believes he is cursed because he is the first-born and has done many evil things. Upon arriving at the farm, Mrs. Johnson informs Big Mat that her husband has gone into town and the riding boss would be in charge. By the end of the butchering, Big Mat goes to collect the mule. However, the riding boss refuses to give him the mule and slaps him across the face with a whip. He continues to aggravate Big Mat claiming the mule has a higher value, \$40, than his mother's life. This infuriates Big Mat and he kills the riding boss. Frightened, he took one of the mules and rushed home. Oblivious to Big Mat's dilemma, Chinaman greets him waving the \$10 he got from the jacklegs who visited their home earlier in the day and invited them to catch the train going up north at midnight. Hattie grows hysterical when she sees Big Mat's face. Immediately, he orders his brothers to pack their things and they leave to catch the train while Hattie stands barefooted gazing after them.

The brothers, along with many other men, cram in a sealed boxcar heading for Allegany County. They sacrifice travelling in the inhumane conditions of the boxcar, reeking of perspiration and urine, and pitch dark, because they hope to realize a better life in the north. The continuous rattling of the boxcar caused Chinatown to fear losing his gold tooth. As a result, Melody keeps talking to him to relieve his fears while Big Mat sits in the far corner distressed and separated from his brothers.

On arrival, the brothers spend their first day in a wooden bunkhouse, which accommodates most of the new migrants near the Monongahela River. Their immediate reaction is one of culture shock. The vast differences in the land of the north cause great concern and seem environmentally unfriendly leaving them void of their connections with nature. A seasoned worker gives them a mental picture of how things work in the iron mills.

Feeling claustrophobic, Chinatown and Melody decided to take a walk at which time they came upon a group of boys playing with a white girl. This reminded them of an incident back in Kentucky when a young boy, Charley, was lynched simply because a white girl screamed. They hurried to get back to the bunkhouse but soon realized they had lost their way and drifted into the East Europeans, (Slavs) who hated the blacks and threw stones at them. While trying to make their escape, they came across a pretty, black girl who reeked but her beauty stunned them. Bo, a black boss man from the mills, ran into the boys and walked them back safely to the bunkhouse. Later, the brothers would discover why the girl smelled and why the boss man did not feel threatened walking through the Slavs' village.

Back in the bunkhouse, the men pass time playing dice while an Irish foreman calls out the next day's shift. Smothers, a cripple, warns that it is not right to melt the earth and the earth will fight back. Before daylight, the brothers awake and head out to the mill yard. An Italian boss man, Mike, tells the men how to dress in the mill and gives them their working clothes. They work in the yard pit with the horrible pit boss, O'Casey, who constantly picks on Big Mat. Because the Slavs could not keep up with Big Mat, one worker drops his shovel complaining the ground is too hot. All the others follow suit except Big Mat who was ridiculed by O'Casey and ordered to hose-down the ground. Chinatown and Melody sneak between the furnaces for a nap



after they had finished cleaning up the slag. Within four weeks, the Moss brothers work into a routine and are able to stay up with the other men. Melody and Chinatown go to the Mexican shanties for entertainment and to buy whores. They meet Sugar Mama and Anna, her niece, who complains of feeling sick as a ploy for not sleeping with the men Sugar Mama introduces to her. Melody falls in love with Anna and refuses to treat her like a whore. However, Anna accuses him of being gay and calls him out.

The next day Big Mat returns to the mill yard feeling less intimidated. O'Casey observes this change and knows he couldn't ridicule him anymore. To save face, he promotes him to another area. Although he is warned, Chinatown drinks the water from the hydrant, which causes him to feel sick. An old Slav, Zanski, helps Melody watch over him in between working. Zanski counsels with Melody about moving out the bunkhouse and starting a family. Big Mat receives a letter from Hattie, which leaves him deflated from the news of her seventh miscarriage. Chinatown and Melody coax him to visit the Mexican shanties but he refuses. Big Mat believes if he preaches the word from the Bible, then the curse would leave him. After much coaxing, Big Mat finally gives in on the premise that he is only going to the shanties to watch the dog fight.

Mondays become a day of strange happenings in the mill yard and the boss men are unusually irritated. At times, some men are too drunk to go out to work. Big Mat earns the recognition of O'Casey and the other workers, after saving O'Casey from a young American, a hayseed. Earlier that day, the hayseed missed hammering a sledge block, hitting the concrete, which whacks O'Casey. O'Casey gets irate and slaps the hayseed across his face. Later, the

hayseed attacks him with a shovel but Big Mat saves O'Casey beating the hayseed to a pulp. Everyone hails Big Mat for saving O'Casey who is also thankful and names Big Mat Black Irish.

After much persuasion, Big Mat agrees to go to the dogfight. The events of his visit to the Mexican shanties changed the brothers' lives forever. The fight ends in a brawl after the prized dog loses. The owner of the prized dog, Bo Dank grows angry and swears to kill the other dog. In an effort to prevent him, Anna rushes into the ring but he gives her a staggering clout, which infuriates Big Mat who jumps in and beats Bo Dank mercilessly. Later, Anna sees the brothers, runs to Big Mat and kisses him square on the mouth.

Here, begun the changes that destroyed the brotherhood they shared. Big Mat returned to the shanties and rented a shack where he took up residence with Anna. A fit of jealousy brews in Melody and divides the brothers. He tried to get Big Mat to remember his promises to Hattie using a letter he had received from her earlier that evening. Melody talked Chinatown into taking the letter to Big Mat. However, when they got to the shanties they realized Big Mat was at the mills so they waited. While Chinatown slept, Melody took advantage of the situation making love to Anna before leaving. Upon his return, Big Mat refused to read the letter. He had decided to erase all thoughts of Hattie.

Devastated that Big Mat had developed a relationship with Anna, Melody spent the next three days in the bunkhouse, unable to play a good song on his guitar. He decided to return to work but asked for a transfer from the open hearth where he worked with Big Mat to the blast furnace. A string of bad luck started befalling the brothers. No sooner than he started working at the furnace Melody smashed his plucking finger used to play his guitar. Chinatown went to the shanties to inform Big Mat of Melody's accident but instead he found Anna beaten up and Big

Mat missing. Melody gets treated and returns to the mills. Suddenly, he becomes a hero and all the men talk with him. Bo reassures him of his position and promises to let Chinatown work for him till he recovers. He goes to get coffee and runs into Zanksi who tries to get him to talk about his worries. While having coffee, Melody ran into Chinatown who told him Big Mat has been arrested for killing a man, whom he was told was having an affair with Anna. The split between the brothers widens as Melody refuses to help Big Mat, which baffles Chinatown. However, Melody later changes his mind and goes to help Big Mat.

Chinatown worked in Melody's position while he recovered from his injuries. One day, Chinatown senses an eerie feeling about him as he approached the steel mill. Smothers and the other men also felt a strange air around the pit. Meanwhile, Melody went to get Big Mat released. On their trip back, the brothers sought to talk over their differences. Big Mat tells Melody about his suspicions of Anna and how Sugar Mama lied about Dusty Jones having an affair with Anna, which is why he tried to kill Dusty.

As they approached closer to the mill, Melody experiences the same feeling of danger looming. Soon, he sees the lights from the explosion in the sky, which comes from the number four pit where Chinatown is working. All the men except Chinatown and Bo died but Chinatown loses his sight because his eyes were severely burnt. The accident leads to the brothers reuniting. They rented a bigger place and Anna helped to care for Chinatown. Melody helped keep Chinatown's memory alive reminiscing on their lives in Kentucky. At the same time, Anna and Big Mat's relationship continues to grow further apart.

Disgruntled of their working conditions, some of the steel workers got unionized and organized a strike. However, the Blacks and the Irish stayed away from the unions. As they

plan the strike, an angry mob set upon Bo accusing him of being a spy. Soon, the steel mill becomes a strange place. The foreign workers no longer talk to the Blacks and treat them with contempt. In preparation for the strike, many new Blacks joined the steel mill while the deputies were called in to maintain order. They recruited Big Mat as a deputy because of his strong-built. Big Mat feels empowered but loses sight of his surroundings.

In an effort to appease Chinatown's hopelessness, Melody takes him to a whorehouse to help rebuild his confidence; but instead, Chinatown feels even more ashamed and cries to leave. One of the prostitutes, Rosie, comforts Chinatown and tells Melody of a girl who talks about taking care of a blind friend. He finds out that Rosie speaks of Anna, who leaves at nights when Big Mat was at the steel mills to go to work in the whorehouses. Melody leaves Chinatown with Rosie and returns to the Mexican village. He tries to persuade Anna to run away with him but she refuses. He threatens to tell Big Mat of her prostitution, but there is no need to as Big Mat overhears their conversation and whips Anna. Anna is determined she would rather die than be with Big Mat, whom she calls a peon, which angers him. Infuriated and frustrated Big Mat leaves the shack at which time Sugar Mama comes to take Anna back to her place.

Big Mat becomes vulnerable and allows the deputies to brainwash him into going on a raid of the union office. However, the union had gotten wind of the impending raid and set up a scheme for the deputies. Using poor Big Mat who had all this pent up anger, the deputies send him first into the building. He finds only the union organizer, some women, and children. One woman identifies him as a deputy, which enrages him. He holds the organizer by the throat and strangles him. A young Slav hits Big Mat with a pickax, which causes him to stagger and later dies. The tragedy that befalls the Moss brothers remains indelible on the minds of Melody and

Chinatown, who leave Allegheny Valley after burying their big brother and head to Pittsburgh still in search of a better life.

## LITERARY CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Karl Heinrich Marx, a nineteenth century German philosopher and economist, developed the theory Marxism, “as an alternative form of government to capitalism and as an acceptable worldview” (Bressler, 2011, p. 165). In applying a Marxist analysis to this thesis, I aim to heighten awareness of the ramifications of the Great Depression across the United States, especially on Americans on the lower spectrum of society. I will use the core principles of Marxism to draw parallels among the preceding four novels highlighting the varying elements of the theory. A Marxist theoretical analysis can be applied to literary works using three broad concepts: economic power, materialism versus spirituality, and class conflict, which I will utilize throughout this critical analysis. Marx refers to a society’s fundamental economic conditions as “material circumstances” (Dobie, 2011, p. 89). In order to accurately explain the protagonists’ and or antagonists’ social, psychological, or economical conditions, a Marxist approach dictates the material and historical context in which they occur must first be examined. According to Dobie (2011), “the moving force behind human history is its economic systems, for people’s lives are determined by their economic circumstances. A society is shaped by its ‘forces of production,’ the methods it uses to produce the material elements of life” (p. 89).

The owners of the means of production scrambled as a widespread backlash of the Great Depression swept across the nation causing investors to withdraw their investments from the stock market. The rippling effects ultimately settled at the feet of the tenant farmers of Oklahoma who fueled the forces of production in John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck presents a disheartening portrayal of the unequal distribution of goods and services that drive the working force of white, tenant farmers in Sallisaw, Oklahoma during the decade

long Depression. The fictitious Joads family led by young protagonist, Tom Joad, along with hundreds of thousand of other families emerged victims of an economic system that marginalized the lower class of society. Stripped of their means of livelihood, sharecropping, the Joads became powerless surviving on the bare minimum, which inches towards depletion. Nonetheless, the family refused to accept the material circumstances which society had imposed on them. Endeavoring to rise above their circumstances, the Joads joined the westward migration to California.

On the other hand, during the 1930s, thousands of Europeans migrated to the United States in search of the American Dream. Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* captures the grim reality of the material circumstances many Jewish families encountered. Gold, in the voice of a young narrator, Mikey, paints an even more heart-wrenching picture of the limited resources that drive the forces of production for his family. His mother, Katie, has been socially constructed to accept the less than humane conditions of their society. With very little means of production, his father, Herman, struggles to make ends meet and to provide for his family. Society has relegated Mikey's family to living in the gutters, as the means of production seemed almost non-existent.

As the backlash swept across the nation, production came to a standstill in Meridel Le Sueur's novel *The Girl*. Set in a small town in Minnesota, Girl, the unnamed protagonist, realized she has no skills, goods, or services to sell but her youthful exuberance and her body. The material circumstances of her family have forced them to be contented with small morsels for meals. In search of the means of production, Girl moved to the German Village where she met a group of women who have been socially constructed to a life of prostitution and selling

bootleg liquor. Girl became embroiled in the life society had constructed for her. Her society's economic system made no provisions for her to have an honest means of subsistence.

Looking through another lens, as America's economic system crumbled during the Great Depression so did her citizens. William Attaway's *Blood On The Forge* provides an in-depth speculative analysis of the injustices meted out to black sharecropping farmers. The protagonist, Big Mat and his brothers suffered under the harsh treatment of the South's economic system. Society denied them the means of production, yet expected they should harvest crops to pay debts of a shortfall for crops they should have produced the previous year. Society prescribed a life of poverty for the Moss brothers who believed they deserved nothing more than the bare minimum on which they survived, "chittlings" (Attaway, 1969, p. 34). The material circumstances of their society forced the brothers to believe they have no place in society and to remain subjects of another class of human beings.

The fundamentals of Marxist theory hypothesize the structure of a society is built on the means of production. According to Marxism, a capitalist society has two basic structures: the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. The bourgeoisie own the means of production, while the proletariats use the means of production, while generating wealth for the bourgeoisie. These means of production include: capital, assets, such as tools, machinery, and factories, or any other input that does not utilize physical human workforce. Upon this premise, Marxist theorist Georg Lukács developed an ideology he refers to as the base and superstructure. While Lukács believes "the superstructure reflects the economic base, Italian Antonio Gramsci declares that a complex relationship exists between the base and the superstructure which he calls hegemony" (Bressler, 2011, p. 172).



Without a shadow of doubt, a clear line of demarcation has been established and sustained in the four preceding novels. According to the authors featured in this thesis, the bourgeoisie constructed a capitalist system that bequeaths them political and economic power gaining control over the proletariats. The bourgeoisie, the aristocratic bankers, landowners, and the owners of machineries, sequestered the proletariat, Joads' family tools, machineries etc., which crippled their means of survival. They cannot pay the debts owed to the bourgeoisie since "[t]he owners of the land came onto the land or more often a spokesman for the owners came ... If a bank or finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank - or the Company - needs - wants - insists - must have - as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling which ensnared them" (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 31). The dividing line between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats stretches thin the moment the proletariats can no longer fill the pockets of the bourgeoisie. Steinbeck reiterates this point when he says, "[a] man can hold land if he can just eat and pay taxes; he can do that. Yes, he can do that until his crops fail one day and he has to borrow money from the bank. But – you see, a bank or a company can't do that because those creatures don't breathe air, don't eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money" (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 32).

According to Gramsci, the bourgeoisie initiate hegemony, which forms "the assumptions, values and meanings that shape meaning and define reality for the majority of people in a given culture, [b]ecause the bourgeoisie actually control the economic base and establish all the elements that comprise the superstructure ..." (Bressler, 2011, p. 172). Steinbeck (2002) demonstrates Gramsci's theory stating the tenant farmers "raised their eyes to understand" as they swallowed the bourgeoisie' ideology that the "bank – the monster has to have profits all the

time” (p. 32). The economic power of the superstructure widens the gaping hole between the bourgeoisie and proletariats, while infiltrating the minds of the lower class as they fall deeper to the bottom of the social scale. The dominant class molds the beliefs of the lower class into accepting their ideology. Steinbeck (2002) underscores the mindset of the tractor driver who tells the other tenant farmers “[t]hree dollars a day. I got damn sick of creeping for my dinner – and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day” (p. 37). The bourgeoisie used the economic base to gain control over the people while preying on the more vulnerable proletariats. Three dollars a day becomes a better option for the working class’ dilemmas. At the same time, the bourgeoisie accomplish their mission while creating division among the proletariats. The tractor drivers became numb to their own people’s plight even after they are reminded, “[because of] your three dollars a day, fifteen or twenty families can’t eat at all. Nearly a hundred people have to go out and wander on the roads for your three dollars a day” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 37).

Gramsci’s notion that the dominant class shapes the mindset of the lower class resonates in the tractor driver’s response when he says, “[c]an’t think of that. Got to think of my own kids. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day. Times are changing, mister, don’t you know? Can’t make a living on the land unless you’ve got two, five, ten thousand acres and a tractor. Crop land isn’t for little guys like us anymore ... Big shots won’t give you three dollars a day if you worry about anything but your three dollars a day” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 37). What better way to control an entire culture but by targeting their stomachs? Twisting underneath the pangs of hunger and the need to feed their families, some of the poverty-stricken tenant farmers surrendered to the superstructure power base. However, the Joads and others though powerless

remained adamant to struggle beneath the restraints of the capitalist economic system. The bourgeoisie manipulated the needs of the people, without whom they really have no power, since the workforce lies within the lower class. According to Gramsci, “[t]his shaping of a people’s ideologies is a kind of deception whereby the majority of people forget or abandon their own interests and desires and accept the dominant values and beliefs as their own” (Bressler, 2011, p. 173). The sophistication of the superstructure system works its way up the stomach walls of the weaker working class and brainwashes them to think solely of their need to provide for their families. The bourgeoisie used their economic power to desensitize those who will fall for their ideology. “Marxism declares that it offers a comprehensive, positive view of human life and history that demonstrates how humanity can save itself from a meaningless life of alienation and despair” (Bressler 2011, p. 166). Therefore, in applying Marx’ theory to the Depression Era, critics will be able to demonstrate that poverty becomes even more striking when they examine the disparities of power and wealth between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats.

From a different perspective, Marx theory suggests that the bourgeoisie subjugated Mikey’s family using their political power to suppress any upward mobility the father attempted thereby maintaining the division line. The Jews of New York’s East Side who fled Europe with the expectations of entering the “Promised Land” to realize the American Dream, “found awaiting them the sweatshops, the bawdy houses, and Tammany Hall” (Gold, 1993, p. 14). The political and economic powers remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie’ administrators in the superstructure – the Tammany Hall.

The Jews’ physical labor became their only force of production, which is synonymous with Marxist’s proletariats. They operated fruit carts, sweat shops, worked in the factories, sold

newspapers, and created all possible means of trade, painter, tailor, barber etc., to provide food for their families and not die in the poverty stricken conditions society relegated them to. In addition, the young, teenage girls were scouted by “HARRY THE PIMP” who “looked upon himself as a kind of philanthropic business man” (Gold, 1993, p. 28). Gold (1993) reiterates Gramsci’s hegemony theory as young Mikey observes that, “[s]trangely enough, there were others who regarded [Harry] the same ...He wore good clothes, clean linen, and smoked good cigars... he was our pattern of American success. People envied him. He had a big pull with Tammany Hall” (p. 28-29). As it were with all the other families, Mikey’s epitomizes the representations of poverty during the Depression Era. According to Gold’s representations, in a time of crisis, the bourgeoisie sought to expand and maintain their power while suppressing the lower class. The Jews’ outlook on their conditions ascribe to Gramsci’s arguments that “[t]he working class people themselves give their consent to the bourgeoisie and adopt bourgeoisie values and beliefs. As sustainers of the economic base, the dominant class enjoys the prestige of the masses and controls the ideology” (Bresslers, 2011, p. 173). With no other means of alleviating the poverty they endured, Herman gravitated towards the values of the dominant class as a model for his upward mobility.

Unlike his wife Katie, Herman refused to condition to the life society constructed for them. In an effort to elevate his family, he resolved to approach Baruch Goldfarb, “a Tammany Hall ward politician, a Zionist leader, and the owner of a big dry goods store” to procure a loan of \$300 to restart his suspenders business, which he had previously been defrauded of by his cousin (Gold, 1993, p. 207). Exemplifying Marx’s characteristics of the bourgeoisie, Baruch strategically undermined Herman’s attempts to uproot his family from the socially constructed

limitations society designed for them. Although Baruch agreed to help Herman, he never fulfilled his promise. Instead, he became an opportunist exerting his power over Herman and making false promises. Once again, according to Marx, the bourgeoisie and their system succeeded in bamboozling yet another powerless proletariat. Baruch's unscrupulous attitude paved the ultimate destruction of Mikey's family, which spiraled further down into the depths of the gutters.

Baruch maximizes on Herman's mistaken belief that they were friends. Mikey recalls, "[h]e had been a poor boy in the same [Romanian] town as my father, and they had emigrated about the same time. For this reason my father felt Baruch was his friend (Gold, 1993, p. 207). Baruch persuaded Herman to vote in the elections, which only serves to help him retain his power in the economic base and superstructure. Striking while the iron is hot, he tells Herman, "[i]t is easy, [tomorrow] I will make you a citizen, and then the next day you will vote. What could be simpler? ... [a]ll you do is mark a cross under the star. Under the star, remember! You will earn three dollars and be a Democrat. It is a good thing to be a Democrat in America, Herman. It brings one money and friends" (Gold, 1993, p. 207). The bourgeoisie again manipulate the proletariats who really have no recourse but to surrender to the powers of the economic base. Hungry for a better life for his family, Herman went to vote but also came to realization of the corruptions of the bourgeoisie' economic power. Mikey remembers his father saying, "[o]ne of Baruch's men took him to vote in three different places. In the third place, a barbershop, a man suddenly hit another man with a blackjack. [I] started to leave in great haste, but at the door another man hit [me] with a blackjack, too – why, [I] never could tell" (Gold, 1993, p. 208). In order to maintain their hegemony, the bourgeoisie create false hopes for the

lower class making empty promises while taking advantage of their impoverished positions by offering \$3, which seems to be the going pay rate for any job during the Great Depression that undermines their own people. Despite his experiences at the barbershop, Herman continues to trust Baruch illustrating Gramsci's claims that the working class gives consent to and adopts the bourgeoisie' ideology (Bressler, 2011, p. 173). Nevertheless, Herman aims to improve the economic crisis of his family and their powerlessness.

Still pursuing his dreams, Herman followed Baruch's advise, "to join a lodge he had organized called, 'Baruch Goldfarb Benevolent, Sickness, Social and Burial Society'" (Gold, 1993, p. 209). Of course, the lodge's policies are designed to squeeze the nickels out of the poor, which was just another ploy to exploit the lower class. Herman was completely sucked into the deceptions and became a puppet on a string to the bourgeoisie' economic power base. Gold (1993) states, "[m]y father had no such hesitations and doubts. Baruch Goldfarb became his idol, and the lodge his glorious obsession" (p. 210). As Gramsci hegemony theory suggests, Baruch cunningly shapes Herman's consciousness in sustaining the dominant class while he enjoys the prestige. In hindsight, Gold recognizes his father had been hoodwinked. He recalls his father's ecstasy saying, "[t]hat Baruch!' ... not only is he a businessman, and our lodge President! He is also secretary of a Zionist club and trustee of a synagogue! It helps him in politics, he says. One must believe in God, he says. The Jews have no country, he says. There will be a boom in Brownsville real estate, he says. That Baruch, he is also a real estatnik! He says he will sell me a good lot!" (Gold, 1993, p. 212). The invisible forces of the economic system continue to plummet Mikey's family. According to Marxist theory of the powerful superstructure, Herman could not perceive that the capitalists' economic system is designed to

keep the proletariats downtrodden. Moved by the needs of his underprivileged family, he tried to assert himself in a system that aimed to keep him suppressed. Gold's representation of poverty illustrates the power of the capitalists' economic base.

In *The Girl*, the division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat seemed unbridgeable. The economic base and social system imposed the bourgeoisie' power over Girl, her female companions, the antagonist, Butch and his brother, Bill. The rippling effects of the Great Depression plunged the German village and surrounding towns into massive job losses and closures of businesses. The bourgeoisie no longer provided the means of production, and this sent the proletariats scrambling for food. With nowhere to turn for employment, Girl resorted to a life riddled with illegal activities in order to provide her daily meals. Although she had a legitimate job as a waitress at the German village she realizes that "Ganz brought in bootleg from Dakota and paid protection for the place" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 1). She discovered the bar operated under a false pretense and the bourgeoisie pulled the strings that controlled the business. Similar to the tractor drivers in Steinbeck's novel, Ganz became the "stool" for the bourgeoisie (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 3). In the context of the novel, a stool is more or less a traitor.

Once again, the attitude of Girl's friends illustrates Gramsci's hegemony theory, which proposes, "because the bourgeoisie control the economic base, they define the reality for the majority of the people in a given culture" (Bressler, 2011, p. 172). Le Sueur illustrates this theory by comparing differing attitudes. Girl complained about not liking Ganz and refused to serve him. However, Belle, the owner, quickly responded, "[y]ou don't have to like him ... He gives this place protection. He can butter your bread. The cops don't bother us on account of him. He could give you anything" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 3). According the Gramsci's hegemony

theory, Belle demonstrates the effects of the 'iron fist' that the bourgeoisie use to exert their power over the proletariats. She knew the illegal operation was her only means of survival; and therefore, gave in to Ganz's desires.

According to Marxism, the bourgeoisie use the economic base and superstructure to perpetuate their dominance and repress the lower class. Before long, Girl realizes Ganz worked like a double agent. After he broke the news that Belle's husband, Hoinck had been arrested, Girl remained baffled about what had happened. Belle explains, "[t]hey worked it like this ... Ganz is a big guy, he's got a lot of rackets. Hone is his lawyer, he's in on the take too. Ganz knows a lot of people. We couldn't keep boot-legging after hours if it wasn't for the protection Ganz gives us (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 18). Le Sueur tries to highlight the naked truth about the corruptions the bourgeoisie sometimes get embroiled in to achieve successes and maintain their prestige while remaining unmindful of the effects or the consequences the lower class must endure. Belle continues to say, "[w]ell, there's a big election coming up and the mayor's running again, and he's got to do something to please the public, so there has got to be a clean-up so all of the so-called respectable people will vote for his party (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 18). Instead of conducting a legitimate campaign to rid the streets of bootleg businesses, the bourgeoisie staged their interventions simply to create a façade for the elections' polls. Belle further explains "[s]o the mayor calls Ganz up to bat and tells him to let him choke out a few of his addresses, some little joints like ours, see, so as not to offend anybody. Then in the morning they will have something to print in the paper" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 18). Controlled by the dominant belief system, Belle brushed off the arrest knowing Hoinck is the "fall guy this time" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 18). Le Sueur illustrates how the lower class' consciousness is shaped by the ideology of the



dominant class. Her representations of poverty reveal that during the Depression Era, the lower class fell victims to a corrupt superstructure. The working class becomes subjects of an economic base that does not care about their well-being.

Desperate for work, Butch and Bill agreed to take jobs at the foundry despite Amelia's warnings that a strike would start the same day and prospects of getting work are falsified. Le Sueur once more shows how the bourgeoisie played the lower class against each other. The powerful superstructure, knowing pretty well the strikers are restive and could wreak havoc, deployed the National Guard on the streets to avert pandemonium. The bourgeoisie used their economic power to entice the brothers to accept the scab jobs they offered. Butch returned to the German village beaten and bloody saying, "[i]t was a scab job ... they locked us in the plant. They sent me out to fix a light on the loading platform. I was fixing a big bulb and [the strikers] came to get me and I dropped a live wire in the middle of them and they beat me up" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 20). The strikers rebelled against the bourgeoisie, but that didn't prevent the bourgeoisie from seeking workers elsewhere at all cost. Unfortunately, Bill died from a gunshot wound. Le Sueur's representations of poverty show the callous nature of a capitalist system and the powerlessness of the proletariats. The powerful bourgeoisie in the system had scant regard for the working class, as their only interests were to retain power and control.

Le Sueur underscores how poverty can sometimes breed crime. Things grew progressively worse for Girl and her friends. Neither of them has the ability to help the other. Although Butch has ambitions of setting up a service station, it was all based on the fallacy of the bourgeoisie' economic system. With no other recourse to find food, clothes, and shelter, Girl agrees to join in a bank robbery with Ganz and the others. The impact of the division between

the bourgeoisie and their controls of the means of production leaves the working class with very little alternative for survival. All but one of Girl's male friends die from sporadic gunfire during the bank robbery leaving the women with no other option but to move into a "tenement on Seventh where they were nearly all women on relief ... each living in one room with a stove and the relief gave you wood, and only one toilet to a floor and running water in the hall" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 103). While she waited to get on relief, Girl walked the streets during the day to avoid being spotted by the relief in Belle's room where she sleeps at nights.

The women have accepted the conditions society has constructed for them. Girl laments, "I feel I'm living day by day, and understanding some of it. I have no home now. I have no place but the place of this understanding which is a kind of home too. I feel full and heavy and I am walking with my eyes on the street, finding it out now ... I get scared when I think of the days going by and no oranges or milk" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 107). According to Marxism, the economic base has full control over Girl's situation. Le Sueur tries to highlight the plight of the ladies relegated to the slums while the bourgeoisie who controlled the superstructure wielded their power.

Le Sueur (1999) represents poverty through the dilapidated conditions of the relief home, with "the halls dark and full of rubbish, apple cores, papers, cigarette butts, crusts of bread, old shoes, and garbage. There were long pieces of string hanging from the bare light bulbs in the hall so the kids could pull them because in the daytime it was as dark in there as a closet. Some of the windows were boarded up, ... the floors sag down, and the bedbugs walk on the walls" (p. 103). Nevertheless, "the relief paid the people on the hill a good price for it" (p. 103). Here, Le Sueur identifies the economic power of the bourgeoisie. Though the conditions of the building

were unfit for human habitation, the economic base continues to reap the benefits of the big profits.

Similar to the Joads family, Big Mat and his brothers, the Moss brothers, remained powerless at the hard hands of the bourgeoisie' powerful economic system. Marxist theory hypothesizes that power lies in the hands of those who control the means of productions. Back in Kentucky, the line of demarcation that separates the bourgeoisie, Mr. Johnston, the landowner, from the proletariats, the Moss brothers, widens immeasurably. Big Mat labors in vain for Mr. Johnston who abuses his control over the brothers. According to Attaway (1969), "Mr. Johnston said that they could not have any more food credit. He claimed their share of the crop for the next two years in payment for his mule. He didn't say where the crop was coming from when there was no animal to plow with. He didn't say how they were going to eat without food credit. All they could do was to wait for him to change his mind" (p. 7). The brothers remained absolutely powerless under the bourgeoisie' economic system. They have been conditioned to their positions in society and have no means of uprooting themselves. Their very existence depended on the bourgeoisie who have little sense of concern or care for the working class. *Blood on the Forge* epitomizes the selfish, greed of the bourgeoisie.

According to Dobie (2011), "[b]ecause those who control production have a power base, they have many ways to ensure that they will maintain their positions" (p. 89). This power base or economic base ties to what Georg Lukács calls the "superstructure" (Bressler, 2011, p. 171). Mr. Johnston maintained control by withholding the records of the brothers' labor and manipulating control over their only means of production, the mule. With no control over the crops they produced, the brothers are left to the mercies of the bourgeoisie for food. Big Mat's

attitude towards Mr. Johnston underscores Gramsci's hegemony theory that "[t]he working class people themselves give their consent to the bourgeoisie and adopt bourgeoisie values and beliefs" (Bressler, 2011, p. 171). The bourgeoisie' perception of Big Mat and his family was one of scant regard, which was endorsed by Big Mat, who remained intimidated by Mr. Johnston. Displaying much disdain for Big Mat, Mr Johnston says, "[w]hat I say just past your understandin', Mat – slips off your head like water offen a duck's back'" (Attaway, 1969, p. 15). Big Mat answered in the affirmative, which gives credence to Gramsci's theory that the lower class enables the bourgeoisie to shape their perceptions. Mr. Johnston's statement insinuates that Big Mat has very little intelligence and Big Mat simply agreed thereby giving more prestige to the bourgeoisie.

Attaway's representations of poverty can be viewed through the eyes of the brothers and their experiences. They endured hunger, working in extreme conditions receiving no wages; but instead, continuous ridicule and humiliation. Attaway (1969) reiterates, "[n]ineteen-nineteen – early spring: the last time there among the red-clay hills, he was to reach down his guitar. It was a hungry craving yanking at his vitals. That wasn't unusual; share-cropping and being hungry went together. He had never thought about white pork, molasses, and salt water cornbread as food anyhow. They were just something to take the wrinkles out of his stomach" (p. 1). Melody has no means of obtaining food besides the hope that Mr. Johnston would be merciful and give Big Mat some hog guts. The brothers waited till dark just hoping for food. Attaway shows the power of the economic base in the south and how the lower class is subjected to a life of poverty. After killing nine hogs all Big Mat gets for his labor is a "sack o' entrails" (Attaway, 1969, p. 16). The hard hand of the bourgeoisie claimed his "[l]abor go ag'inst what he got us on the

books for” (Attaway, 1969, p. 16). The brothers shared a one-room shack furnished with a homemade barrel chair and a small iron bed for Big Mat and Hattie. Attaway (1969) epitomizes poverty saying, “Chinatown dragged the pallet from the corner where he and Melody slept” (p. 20). Poverty becomes a way of life for the brothers. They had no food, no furniture, and Big Mat’s wife walks barefooted.

The Moss brothers join the mechanical process of the bourgeoisie’ economic system that preys upon the impoverished lower class. Craving for nothing but the manual labor of the proletariats, “jackleg recruiters from the North” lured the brothers to work in the steel mills (Attaway, 1969, p. 20). To emphasize how far removed the brothers were from a simple, normal life, Attaway (1969) stresses Chinatown’s reaction on seeing the jackleg pull out a few dollars saying “[i]t was more money than Chinatown had ever thought was in the world” (p. 32). By midnight, they added to the unfortunate lot of poor sharecroppers who were searching for a way to climb out of the claws of poverty. However, the inhumane conditions in which they travelled illustrate the manipulations of the bourgeoisie.

According to Attaway (1969), they [s]quatted on the straw-spread floor of a boxcar, bunched up like hogs headed for market, riding in the dark for what might have been years, knowing time only as dippers of warm water gulped whenever they were awake, helpless and drooping because they were headed into the unknown and there was no sun, they forgot even that they had eyes in their heads and crawled around in the boxcar, as though it were a solid thing of blackness (p. 38).

Attaway attempts to demonstrate that the working conditions ahead of the Moss brothers would not have been one that rewards their merits; but instead, would push them further down into the depths of their socio-economic class structure.

Once again, Gramsci's hegemony theory is demonstrated in Big Mat's misconstrued idea of power, which he allegedly gained when the deputies recruited him to lead the raid against the union organizers and workers of the steel mill.

According to Attaway (1969), [t]he union organizers made a desperate effort to induce the black men to join the movement toward a strike. But the steel interests had bought the black leaders ... Bo had brought two Negro politicians to speak to their own. These politicians both said the same thing. A victory for the mill owners would be a victory for the Negro worker (p. 180).

Clearly, the politicians' endorsement of the steel mills owners are in accordance with Gramsci's ideology that the bourgeoisie "maintains hegemony by shaping and defining the values and meanings of the majority of people in a given culture" (Bressler, 2011, p. 171). "The black worker, they said, had never advanced through unions. He had only advanced fighting alongside of the owners. 'Do not forget "... that the men who now ask for your help in a strike are the men who have spit at you on the streets because of your color'" (Attaway, 1969, p. 16). The bourgeoisie understood the status of Blacks and played on their inferiority by highlighting that they were already a marginalized race. Blacks remained the minority race in the South and had little options than to follow the influences of the bourgeoisie on whom they depended for survival.

The bourgeoisie shaped the brothers' consciousness. Although Melody realizes that Bo was a "stool pigeon," and caused the other men to lose their jobs, he quietly stepped aside saying, "[i]f Bo was able to get white men put off the job he could even more easily do the same to black men" (Attaway, 1969, p. 181). Melody recognizes that as a proletariat, he doesn't stand a snowball chance in hell by rising up against the bourgeoisie. The brothers simply accepted the conditions society had constructed for them, giving in to the bourgeoisie' hegemony.

Taking full advantage of Big Mat's powerlessness, the deputies offered Big Mat four dollars to work as a Deputy in the planned raid. Already marginalized and ignorant of the ulterior motives of the deputies, Big Mat readily accepted the task. Big Mat was completely confused about his new job and what it meant. He waited for an opportune time to ask the sheriff, "I was jest wonderin' about this swearing in ... Jest what I swear to uphold?" (Attaway, 1969, p. 193). The sheriff's response echoes Gramsci's ideology, "Listen, ... you git on home. Monday you uphold what I tell you to uphold. That's all to it. Now git" (Attaway, 1969, p. 193). According to Marxism, the dominant class controls the economic base and the superstructure and as such controls the beliefs of the lower class. Big Mat illustrates this theory as he "thought about the four extra dollars a day. That was a lot of money. Maybe he would buy Anna a lot of new clothes. Dance-hall dresses and shoes with high heels – she like those things. It might make things right at home" (Attaway, 1969, p. 193). Big Mat failed to realize that the capitalists' economic system is designed to keep him marginalized. By spending his hard earnings to get clothes for Anna, Big Mat enables the economic power of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie placed little value on his life much like they did on his mother's. Big Mat was deliberately set-up and lost his life for want of recognition and at a price of four dollars.

According to Marxism, “[s]ome of the damage caused by the economics of capitalism is psychological. In its need to sell more goods, capitalism preys on the insecurities of consumers, who are urged to compete with others in the number and quality of their possessions” (Dobie, 2011, p. 90). Of the four focused novels, three authors depict characters that demonstrate Marx’s allusions to psychological damage. Marxism theorizes “this attitude of valuing things not for their utility (use value) but for their power to impress others (sign value) or for their resale possibilities (exchange value) as commodification” (Dobie, 2011, p. 90).

In *Jews Without Money*, Herman yearned for a big house like his boss Zechariah’s who flaunted his possessions at him. Both men became victims of Marx’s sign value. Soon after meeting Zechariah, Herman becomes a changed man, “[h]e had found the secret key of Nathan Schiff and Otto Kahn! ... He smoked many cigars, he drank wine, he wore his black lawyer’s suit every evening after work” (Gold, 1993, p. 214). Herman’s insecurities surfaced as he longed to be like the bourgeoisie. In the meantime, Zechariah tries to impress Herman saying, “I want you to see my fine expensive furniture, my hand painted oil paintings, my up-to-date water closet; everything! When you are rich like me, Herman you will have these things too!” (Gold, 1993, p. 214). Also a victim of sign value, Zechariah uses his possessions to brag about his wealth. Similarly, his wife boasts about having a “ten-course dinner that cost three-fifty” and that she pays her cook “eighty dollars a month” (Gold, 1993, p. 219). She continues to reel out a laundry list of her household’s expenses including the fact that “[their] house cost twenty thousand dollars to build and [it] is the most expensive house in Borough Park” (Gold, 1993, p. 219). Sucked into Zechariah’s showcase, Herman flatly rebuked his wife when she objected to



moving to Borough Park. Gold (1993) writes, “[f]oolishness! ... We will move here, [y]ou must not hold me down! I refuse to be an East Side beggar all my life!” (p. 221).

Le Sueur’s character, Clara, also exhibited psychological damage, which Marxism claims to have been a direct result of capitalism. In *The Girl*, Clara maintained the attitude of placing value on things not because of their use value but simply a desire to impress others. Clara says, “[t]here’s winning and the good feeling it gives you, and love of a good man, ... who has a house in Florida and a swimming pool” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 5). Her desires for these things were not based on the premise of satisfying her needs but to impress others like the bourgeoisie. Though she cannot afford it, she hopes to someday “... get married and sing in the choir and play bridge on Sundays with the best people. Or she might get a typewriter business in a swanky hotel and wear black dresses with white collars and cuffs and see that everyone comes to work on time [o]r a tea shop is a good thing and some people rent a whole house and rent out rooms to the best people and sleep until ten” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 8). Clara’s dreams surpassed the need to rise out of her impoverished circumstances. Her ambitions were formed on the need to impress others rather than self-actualization. According to Marxism, Clara has been psychologically damaged because her desires carried a sign value instead of a use value.

In *Blood on the Forge*, Anna’s consciousness is also shaped by the values of the bourgeoisie. She wants nothing more than to replicate the bourgeoisie’ fashions. Anna dreams of finding a man who can buy her shoes and clothes. She says, “[h]e will get me high-heel shoes with bright stones in the heels ...” (Attaway, 1969, p. 104). This pushes Big Mat deeper into the controls of the dominant class. He gave all his savings to Anna, who went to the stores and purchased “rhinestone shoes and dresses like the hostesses wear in the dance halls” (Attaway,

1969, p. 104). Anna did not buy the clothes and shoes for their use value but instead she desired to use her accoutrements to impress the other women in the shanties. Attaway (1969) writes, “[t]he dresses were heavy around the bottoms where they dragged in the mud. Still, Anna wore her new clothes every day and paraded through the Mexican part of town like an overseer’s wife” (p. 104). She became yet another victim of the capitalist system. According to Marxism, Anna also suffered psychological damage based on the economic system. Her clothing becomes important for its sign value rather than use value.

A study of Marxism reveals Marx and his followers did not subscribe to religious ideology or philosophical beliefs in terms of mankind’s reality. Marx upheld that spirituality did not shape who we are as humans. Reality for us is constructed on the premise of materials, which shape our world, culture, and social groups. According to Dobie (2011), “[b]y examining the relationships among socioeconomic classes and by analyzing the superstructure, we can achieve insight into ourselves and our society” (p. 92). Analyzing the interrelatedness of a society’s class structure will determine the level of class conflict that exists and “will [demonstrate] how the distribution of economic power undergirds” any given society (Dobie, 2011, p. 92). Since the bourgeoisie, dominant class, has “control over the base and the superstructure, worldviews are likely to be false” (Dobie, 2011, p. 92). The proletariat will buy into the perspectives of the bourgeoisie and as such mold their concepts of what ideals they should aspire to become, which are shaped by the material world.

Evidences of how the material world shapes a false worldview can be seen in characters from *Jews Without Money*, *The Girl*, and *Blood on the Forge*. Gold specifically states that Herman’s reasons for coming to America is to realize the American Dream. The material world

of the American society attracted the entire world. Gold (1993) reiterates Herman's passion saying, "[i]n America, we believed people dug under the streets and found gold anywhere ... I had seen two pictures of America ... One picture had in it the tallest building I had ever seen. It was called a skyscraper. At the bottom of it walked the proud Americans. The men wore derby hats and had fine mustaches and gold watch chains. The women wore silks and satins, and had proud faces like queens" (p. 102). Like Herman, many people desired to travel to America based on the imagery portrayed by the superstructure of the capitalist economic system. However, the reality he faced was in complete contrast of what attracted him to America. According to Marxism, Herman was not destroyed by "character flaw" or religious beliefs but by the material world created by a capitalist society (Dobie, 2011, p. 92).

Influenced by Clara's desire to acquire luxurious and over-priced items from the material world, Girl became an accomplice in a bank robbery and a prostitute. In the beginning of her novel, Le Sueur introduces Girl as a young, innocent, naïve girl whose impoverished circumstances leads her to a path of destruction. Clara continuously reminds Girl of the importance of living in a big house with a pool and owning expensive things. Given her circumstances, prostitution was Clara's only means of acquiring these things, which she taught Girl. Girl says, "... she pushed me out into the cold midnight street. Clara said you stand across the street and don't come near, just watch. It's not good with two together. A man doesn't like to have anybody watching" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 50). Girl sees Clara as a role model and quickly adapts to her teachings. Clara's false worldviews are fashioned by the material world created by a capitalist economic system. Both women become fascinated by material circumstances, which leads to the demise of Clara and a "deeper sense of alienation and powerlessness" of Girl (Dobie,

2011, p. 92). Their reality was not shaped by spiritual beliefs but by their material circumstances. The causes of their destruction cannot be attributed to their philosophical or religious beliefs.

Similar to Herman, Anna became a victim of the material world created by the capitalist economic system. She too came to America because of the portrayal of American lifestyle in her country, New Mexico. In New Mexico, Anna lived a poverty-stricken life where “[a]ll the time [she] was barefooted, and [her] mother and old folks [were] barefooted too” (Attaway, 1969, p. 113). The fine imagery of well-dressed tourists driving through the villages caused Anna to desire a life that imitates that of Americans. She grew passionate about acquiring items that the capitalists’ economic system manufactures. She tells Melody that back in her village, “... many cars pass with Americanos” and that “[t]he women in the cars wear shoes with high heels. The Americano get many things for the women” (Attaway, 1969, p. 114). She became trapped by the material circumstances created by the capitalists’ superstructure and longed to become a part of their lifestyle and world. Anna developed a false worldview because of the material world she had observed. She continues telling Melody that, “I will not marry with the fella who has no house and watches the neighbor’s goats. He cannot buy shoes with high heels. All the time I dream of high-heel shoes with bright stones in the heels that will make me like the Americanos” (Attaway, 1969, p. 114). According to Marxist theory, Anna experienced failure because the capitalist economic system “has created a superstructure that will not allow her to have a better life” (Dobie, 1941, p. 92). Coming to America did not help her to realize her dreams, but instead relegated her to a life of prostitution. The dominant class controls the superstructure and would not allow her into their social group but instead constructed a class in which she would fit.

According to Marxism, class conflict is inescapable in a capitalist society. The conflict develops because of the disparity between the means by which goods and services are produced and the benefactors of the economic gains. Dobie (2011) states, “the struggle will take place between the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production by owning the natural and human resources, and the proletariats, who supply the labor that allows the owners to make a profit” (p. 92). The dominant class employs the resources of the lower class, which are the forces of production; yet keep them marginalized while they enjoy the fruits of their labor. Because the bourgeoisie control the forces of production, they maintain dominance and the lower class remains downtrodden.

Class conflict sometimes leads to revolutionary actions from the working class as is revealed in the studied novels. In *The Grapes of Wrath* class conflicts prevailed as the proletariats fought to regain jobs in order to provide food for their families. The proletariats became even more aware of their powerlessness and the plights of their living conditions after their determined journey across the deserts and into California. The bourgeoisie of the superstructure tried to maintain the power base of their economic system by setting up government “Hooverville camps,” which housed the poor, immigrant, sharecroppers (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 234).

Steinbeck uses the tenement camps to demonstrate how poverty-stricken the sharecroppers had become. He writes, “[t]he rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile ... The man drove his family in and became a citizen of Hooverville” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 234). The proletariats struggled to find a place to lay their heads at nights and had no other recourse but to “... put up [their] own

tent as near to water as [they] could get; or if [they] had no tent, [they] went to the city dump and brought back cartons and built a house of corrugated paper. And when the rains came the house melted and washed away” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 234). The proletariats were reduced to a life on the streets continuously fighting to find food. With no other choice, “[they] settled in Hooverville and ... scoured the countryside for work, and the little money [they] had went for gasoline to look for work” (p. 234).

Friction between the socioeconomic classes becomes inevitable as a result of the underprivileged conditions in which the working class lives. In the Hooverville camps, the bourgeoisie contractors insist on subverting the sharecroppers by advertising jobs to thousands knowing that they had less to offer. Their tactics aimed to pay cheaper wages since there would be workers like the tractor drivers who would cave in under the pressures of hunger. They preyed on the needs of the sharecroppers, which enabled them to exchange below minimum wages for the forces of production - labor. Consequently, society will experience unrest if the working class opposes the economic system and the bourgeoisie’ actions, which will result in Marx’s theory of class conflicts.

Steinbeck highlights class conflict when Tom Joad and the other sharecroppers in the Hooverville camp get in an altercation with a contractor. The contractor tries to entice the men to work as fruit pickers but refuses to show his license or state how much wages he will pay for their labor (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 263). The antagonist who heads the conflict preaches to the farmers that “[t]wice now I’ve fell for that. Maybe he needs a thousan’ men. He’ll get five thousan’ there, an’ he’ll pay fifteen cents an hour” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 263). Having experienced the deceptive nature of the bourgeoisie, he tries to help the farmers become more

cognizant of the strategies they employed. He continues saying, “[a]n’ you poor bastards’ll have to take it ‘cause you’ll be hungry. ‘F he wants to hire men, let him hire ‘em an’ write it out an’ say what he’s gonna pay. Ast ta see his license” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 263). The antagonist seeks to empower the working class by raising their awareness of the contractors’ obligations to workers, which would become binding.

In retaliation, the bourgeoisie contractor exerts his power over the workers by calling on the sheriff to intervene. The sheriff attempts to make a false arrest but the proletariats defended their rights. The confrontation resulted in a physical fight between the sheriff and the Hooverville men. In the end, one woman suffered from gunshot wounds, the sheriff was knocked unconscious, and the antagonist was on the run. To save Tom Joad from getting arrested, Jim Casey took the blame and went to jail. The bourgeoisie maintained their power by setting the camp afire claiming that the “Board of Health” issued orders to close the camp (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 264). According to Marxism, class conflict is inevitable in a capitalist society because of the unequal distribution of the means of production and power, which Steinbeck so aptly illustrated.

On the other hand, Marxism postulates that a capitalist society lends itself to an ideology that “appears to be a reasonable, natural worldview because it is in the self-interest of those in power to convince people that it is so” (Dobie, 2011, p. 94). Steinbeck accentuates this theory in the contractor’s approach to present a viable option to the workers’ present circumstances. However, his interest in employing the vulnerable farmers rested in the profits he would gain from their cheap labor. “When such cultural conditioning leads the people to accept a system that is unfavorable for them without protest or questioning – that is, to accept it as the logical

way for things to be – they have developed a false consciousness” (Dobie, 2011, p. 94). The Joad’s family loses their oldest son, Noah, and son-in-law, Connie to false consciousness. Neither of the two has the willpower to fight but instead gives into the ideology. Connie tells Rose of Sharon, “[i]f I’d knowed it would be like this I wouldn’ of came. I’d a studied nights ‘bout tractors back home an’ got me a three dollar job. Fella can live awful nice on three dollars a day, an’ go to the pitcher show ever’ night, too” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 252). Connie accepts the subservient, powerless role society has ascribed to him. He has given into the bourgeoisie’ ideology believing that life will not get any better. Likewise, Noah did not dispute the actions of the bourgeoisie. He became submissive and chose to exist on a chance of finding food from the river. According to Marx’s theory, Noah developed false consciousness becoming culturally conditioned to the dominant class’ natural worldview.

Class conflict is also evident in *Jews Without Money*. While Herman did not become revolutionary, his dreams of becoming like “Nathan Schiff, Baruch Goldfarb, and Zechariah Cohen” are inconsistent with his socioeconomic class (Gold, 1993, p. 208). The conflict arises as he strives to become one with the bourgeoisie who regard him as nothing but a proletariat and abuse his services. Both Baruch and Zechariah took advantage of Herman’s vulnerable circumstances. They dishonestly induced him to become a member of their private businesses knowing they had an underlying scheming agenda. Gold (1993) writes, “Baruch persuaded my delighted father to join a lodge he had just organized. It was called the ‘Baruch Goldfarb Benevolent, Sickness, Social and Burial Society.’ The dues were only ten dollars a year” (Gold, 1993, p. 208). Baruch’s sole interest lies in collecting the dues and building his empire. He did not have Herman’s interest at heart. Marx’s class conflict becomes evident as Herman endeavors



to fit in the dominant class while Baruch extorts Herman, which will spiral him deeper into his ascribed class.

Herman's desires to cross the boundaries society had established for him led him to develop false consciousness. He blindly agreed to all the superficial proposals they presented to him, not realizing that they were using his labor under false pretense of looking out for his best interest. Gold (1993) recalls his father excitedly telling his mother, "[t]hey are big men! ... They are all in business for themselves. It is good to mix with such people; one learns how to make money" (p. 211). Herman remains oblivious to the disservice that is meted out to him because he has subscribed to the notion that the bourgeoisie' ways of doing things are the most rational ways. He feels the cold hands of the bourgeoisie after falling from the scaffolding. Gold (1993) writes, "[f]or three months the Baruch Goldfarb Lodge paid my mother the sick benefit of eight dollars a week. When this income ceased, things became difficult" (p. 223). Mikey recalls the poor conditions that not only his family endured but all the neighbors. He states "on the East Side people buy their groceries a pinch at a time; three cents' worth of sugar, five cents' worth of butter, everything in penny fractions. The good Jewish black bread that smells of harvest time is sliced into a dozen parts and sold for pennies" (Gold, 1993, p. 241). Herman's hope of becoming a bourgeoisie no longer lingers with him. His socioeconomic class becomes more apparent and the enablers of the false consciousness he caroused in vanished from his surroundings. Mikey continues to say, "Zechariah Cohen paid us a visit, then forgot us. Baruch Goldfarb visited us once and forgot us. There was no place we could turn. The payments on the Borough Park house were lost, forever. Lost, too, were my father's dreams of

success” (Gold, 1993, p. 223). Herman becomes depressed and feels rejected. Society has relegated him to the material circumstances that have been constructed for his class.

In a far more aggressive manner, Le Sueur writes of the female revolutionists whose actions demonstrate their opposition to the capitalist socioeconomic system. In *The Girl*, reform activist, Amelia, mobilizes a demonstration against the bourgeoisie and their powerful economic base. Amelia’s inspiration to demonstrate on behalf of the women developed from the loss she bears of her late husband, who was killed in a previous protest. Le Sueur (1999) writes, “I said to my husband that morning it was dangerous to go to the picket line, he might be killed, and he said to me and I never forget it, ... he’d better die fighting than be a scab or live like a rat. I said a raise wouldn’t do us any good if he [were] dead” (p. 48). Knowing the intensity of the protest at that time, Amelia could only feel concern for her family. However the response she received helped her to understand the importance of identifying with her socioeconomic class. Le Sueur (1999) continues to write, “[a]nd he said we didn’t live just for ourselves. It would do the other sisters and brothers good, and all the children that come after” (p. 48). Amelia demonstrates against the dilapidated living conditions that the relief provides for women and children, and for milk and oranges to give to expectant mothers. She continues to rally the women into action through the “Workers Alliance” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 89).

At the same time, the actions of the bourgeoisie help to perpetuate the conflict as they used their power base to control and subdue the lower class. In her struggles to get on the relief program, Girl recognizes that the bourgeoisie designed a system that imposes all sorts of misgivings and maladies upon the proletariat. She reports that without any basis Miss Rice, the relief worker, writes a note, which reads:

*[t]he girl is maladjusted, emotionally unstable, and a difficult problem to approach. A most unfortunate situation. A Change of environment would be helpful, with continuous casework follow-up, to inspire poise, and educational interest should be encourages as a solution. In our opinion there should be a referral to a psychiatric clinic if she shows indications of further or aggravated mental and emotional disturbance. She should be tested for sterilization after her baby is born. In our opinion sterilization would be advisable. (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 114)*

According to Marxism, the dominant class uses the superstructure and their economic base to superimpose autocratic power over the lower class. By misdiagnosing Girl's status they gained control over her future and she will be relegated to the material circumstance society has constructed for her. Le Sueur (1999) writes, " [Amelia] says , [y]ou better come with your own people, she says, you better come down to the alliance with me, she says with your own people, they're the only ones that care a tinker's damn about you Girl, your own people" (p. 113). A Marxist critic would posit that the bourgeoisie used the system to keep the lower class marginalized.

Class conflict also develops between the workers at the foundry and the bourgeoisie' management, who owns the means of production. Cognizant of the labor strike amongst the workers, Amelia warns Butch and his brother, Bill that it would be impractical to find work at the foundry at that time. As the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats brew, the powers within the superstructure deployed state military to try to maintain order. On the other hand, "Butch and Bill hung in there like they [were] afraid to go to the foundry the next morning, and they turned off the radio so they wouldn't hear that the governor had called in the state

militia to protect the scabs” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 14). Desperate to make ends meet, the brothers submit to the government’s promises that “[t]hey’re giving a bonus” to men who were willing to work despite the strike” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 14). The brothers realized the job was a set-up. Butch was severely beaten while Bill was shot dead. The dominant class created a situation where the working class showed resistance even to their own members. According to Marxism, class conflict develops because of a disparity in economic gains. The dominant class became too preoccupied with their desires for profits that they preyed on the helplessness of the workers without giving much thought to the dangers that might have awaited the brothers.

According to Marxism, Butch and many other proletariats developed false consciousness as they gravitate towards the cultural conditioning of the bourgeoisie, who proposed to open opportunities for many proletariats to own and operate their own service stations. However, in his dying moments he learns the promises of the bourgeoisie were unfavorable. One victim tells him, “I put everything me and my wife had into this place, [gas station] ... and now the Standard Oil is going to take it away from me” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 89). Still convinced about the bourgeoisie’ ideology, of empowering the lower class by granting them lease ownership of service stations, Butch questioned what he heard. The victim continues to say, “O sure, [the lease] is a racket, they make you feel like you got your place, like you’re going to be the boss, a big shot. They take all your dough and they got it fixed so you can’t make good” (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 89). The bourgeoisie lead the working class to accept a flawed system that would prove to be unfavorable for them. Eager to rise out of their poverty-stricken conditions, the proletariats gladly accept their proposals without questioning. The victim continues to say, “[y]ou could work twenty-eight hours out of twenty-four, you could starve your wife and kids and throw them

in with it. They got you milked from both ends. It's a racket. They hold the cards, you can't win. And when you give up, when they've sucked you dry, they get another sucker" (Le Sueur, 1999, p. 89). The bourgeoisie designed a system with hidden agendas that could be used to extort the working class, who became helpless victims. Their ambitions to elevate themselves led to a futile venture.

Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* also underscores class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. As a result of the huge explosion, which killed fourteen (14) workers and left Chinatown blind, all the steel mill workers excluding the Blacks, formed an alliance and decided on joining a union to defend their working conditions. Attaway (1969) writes, "[a]s yet nobody knew where black men stood with respect to the union" (p. 167). Although the Slavs, Italian, and Irish commingled with the Blacks at the mills, they were not welcomed to join the union. As the tension intensifies, the union headquarters posted "placards on every telephone pole and fence" urging workers to join the planned meeting (Attaway, 1969, p. 166). The capitalist system not only creates division between the dominant class and the lower class, but also causes division among the lower class themselves. The Moss brothers realize the other steel workers no longer embraced them as before. As they walked through the Slav's neighborhood, they had a stunning experience when "stones began to whiz in the air around their heads. A stone caught Big Mat on the chest. It sounded a deep note and fell at his feet" (Attaway, 1969, p. 170). The class conflict that had developed between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats spilled over onto the Blacks, whom the other workers now marginalized. According to Marxist theory, a capitalist society will experience class conflict because of the disparity in their economic system. Such disparity was quite evident among the steel workers and the owners of the mill.

Big Mat remained naïve of the labor unrest that prevailed therefore becoming very susceptible to the deputies whom the bourgeoisie called in to maintain order. He relished in the hogwash that the deputies said to brainwash him to act as deputy in the expected strike. Attaway (1969) writes, “[j]ust remember Monday that you’re the boss in this here town. Anythin’ you do is all right, ‘cause you’re the law. So don’t take no back talk” (p. 196). Big Mat’s vulnerability lends itself to the deputies who took full advantage of the circumstances. He thought about how many times he had been subjugated and that,

He had been called ‘nigger’ since childhood. ‘Nigger, nigger never die ..’ was the chant. The name that they gave to him had become a badge signifying poverty and filth. He had not been allowed to walk like a man. His food had been like the hog slops, and he had eaten. In the fields he had gone to the branch and gotten down on his belly. He had drunk his water like a dog left too long in the heat. They had taken his money and his women. They had made him run for his life. They would have run him with dogs through the swamps. They would have lynched him. He would have been twisting torch. And he had escaped the South. (Attaway, 1969, p. 196)

The deputies’ offer appeared genuinely reasonable to Big Mat especially because he had become accustomed to being subservient. All his life he had a ‘boss’ and now he has an offer to actually become the ‘boss.’ Big Mat could not resist the offer and did not stop to think whether he should question the truth about the deputies’ intent. He remained oblivious that the bourgeoisie aimed to convince him to become a deputy, which served their self-interests. His thoughts traveled back to his present moment.

He thought about the fact that even,

[n]ow here in the North he was hated by his fellow workers. He was a threat over their heads. The women covered their faces at the sight of him, the men spat; the children threw rocks. Always within him was that instinctive knowledge that he was being turned to white men's uses. So always with him was a basic distrust of a white. But now he was a boss. He was the law. After all, what did right or wrong matter in the case? Those thrilling new words were too much to resist. He was a boss, a boss over whites.

(Attaway, 1969, p. 196-97)

According to Marxism, Big Mat developed false consciousness by accepting the bourgeoisie' flawed system, which will eventually prove unfavorable for him. He acknowledged the deputies arguments as logical and became culturally conditioned to the bourgeoisie' system.

In applying the key tenets of Marxism to the studied novels, this research has revealed that the line of division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats existed because there was disparity in wealth distribution. The bourgeoisie controlled the wealth simply because they owned the means of production. The proletariats became subservient to the dominant class since they had no control over production.

## Curricula Implications

Table 3: National Council of Social Studies.

NCSS

Theme One	Culture	How does culture change to accommodate different ideas and beliefs?
Theme Two	Time, Continuity, and Change	Human beings seeking to understand their historical roots, and to locate themselves in time
Theme Three	Individuals, Groups, and Institutions	How institutions such as schools, churches, families, and government agencies play an integral role in people's lives.
Theme Seven	Production, Distribution, and Consumption	Understanding people's wants, available resources, production of goods and services, distribution of goods and services, and consumption of goods and services.
Theme Ten	Civic Ideals and Practices	An understanding of civic ideals and practices of citizenship critical to preservation of goods and services.

## Classroom Implications

### *Effective Teaching Strategies*

- Using student reading guides
- Mapping geographical locations
- Using pictures and historical documentation films about the lives of the people caught up in the Great Depression (**ESOL**)
- Organizing group or individual activities to explore the big questions associated with this era (**ESOL**)
- Having students respond with high-order thinking skills
- Analyzing statistical charts and graphs
- Showing the 1940s movie *The Grapes of Wrath* (**ESOL**)



### *Assessment Strategies*

#### *Formative*

- Ask probing questions to drive discussions while correcting misconceptions
- Quizzes

#### *Summative*

- Written paper about some aspects of the books
- Give students photograph of the Great Depression and have them write about the people portrayed

## CONCLUSIONS

### Call for Action

According to the core principles of Marxism, the findings of this thesis answer the core question: How did American authors represent poverty during the Depression Era. The novels present an accurate representation of both the sociological and psychological states of the American lower class during the Depression Era. The working class became subjects of an impoverished society because they had no control over the means of production. The proletariat and social reform authors studied in this thesis utilized literature to appeal for changes to the plight of the proletariats. All four authors demonstrated the desperate needs of the working class and their deplorable living conditions. The authors echoed the same outcry as a call for action from the bourgeoisie who controlled the means of production. They demonstrate the extreme poverty of the American lower class populace and the division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats.

According to Bressler (2011), “[i]n America, ... the capitalists exploit the working classes, determining for them their salaries and their working conditions, among many other elements of their lives” (p. 176). The preceding Marxist literary critical analysis examined and exposed the failures in the ideologies of the dominant class. Although Le Sueur wrote her manuscript in 1930, the bourgeoisie refused to have it published because “[l]iterature is a particularly powerful tool for maintaining the social status quo [since] it operates under the guise of being entertainment, making it possible to influence an audience even when its members are unaware of being swayed” (Dobie, 2011, p. 4). As such, it took decades before the society at

large could read Le Sueur's firsthand accounts of the experiences of many heroic women who suffered adversely from the electrical shock treatments administered by the relief organizations, and women who were discriminatorily misdiagnosed with psychological illnesses during the Depression Era. The proletariat authors penetrated the status quo using their novels to call for social action on behalf of the working class.

### **Massive Job Losses**

The novels present a wide geographical representation - Oklahoma, New York, Minnesota, Kentucky – of the lower socioeconomic class' state of affairs during the decade long Depression. In all four regions, the material circumstances of the lower class had relegated them to not only a sociological impoverished life but also a psychological one. Although the Great Depression had plunged the nation and world in a chronic recession, the brunt of the fall spread like wildfire amongst the proletariats who suffered massive job losses, which left the American lower class homeless since their lands were repossessed by the bourgeoisie. This resulted in considerable migration across states as the poor, white, tenant farmers, European Jewish families, women, and Black-sharecropping farmers embarked on a quest to find work. Lawson (2008) states, “[t]he anticipation and fear along the road builds to a climax, and the [Joads] family arrives at California only to find that, rather than the promised land, they have come to a place of despair, hunger, and vanished dreams” (p. 60). Similar to the Joads and other families of Sallisaw, Oklahoma, the European Jewish families, and Black Migrants from the South encountered the same fate. All four authors represented the extreme poverty of the working class, which resulted from the considerable job loss.

## Dehumanizing Living Conditions

All four authors represented the dehumanizing conditions that the working class lived in. According to Lawson (2008), “Steinbeck’s accurate portrayal of the Okies was disturbing, passionate, and empathetic. It portrayed hunger and despair in a land of plenty” (p. 60). The Joads and the many other sharecropping farmers pitched their tents, most of which were made from cardboards and scraps found in the dumpsters, along the roads as they settled into the dilapidated conditions that became homes for them. The government Hooverville camps were not equipped with the basic amenities found in homes and the families resorted to the river to satisfy their human needs. The Eastern European migrant Jews lived in tenements infested by rats, roaches, bed bugs and every possible crawling creature. The derelict buildings often get flooded because of broken pipelines. During the summer, Herman and his family resorted to sleeping on the roofs of the tenements due to the lack of air conditioning units. Sewage with dead animals floating around ran along the roadsides without any care or concern from those who controlled the means of production. The children did not escape the dehumanizing conditions. For recreation, young Mikey and his friends played in the sewage, ignorant of the health hazard it poses. Similarly, the women in *The Girl* crammed in the decrepit relief homes the government had provided for them. With no other recourse, the women slept on a few square inches of floor space, which they each claimed as their own. The old abandoned building bore the resemblance of a garbage dump with boarded windows and very little light or ventilation. The Moss brothers also suffered dehumanizing living conditions in the bunkhouse that the Steel Mill operators provided for the working class. To relief their body waste they had to resort to the

bushes and outdoor environs. The dehumanizing conditions that the working class experienced during the Great Depression underscore the poverty that prevailed amongst that class.

### **Demoralized Patriarchs and Destitute Families**

The pursuits of these families proved futile as they became deeper entrenched in the conditions the capitalist economic system had constructed for them according to Marxist theory. The patriarchs of each family stood humiliated because of their inability to provide the basic needs of their families. They were stripped of their pride. Resisting their marginalized positions, the Joads sacrificed family members, grandmother and grandfather, to cross over the desert and to get into California in search of jobs. Their socioeconomic position did not allow them to arrange a proper burial for their parents. The family continued to fall apart as the eldest brother, Noah, and son-in-law, Connie, conceded to the social construction that the bourgeoisie' system had designed for them. The women, Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon, suffered psychological traumas as they watched their kinsmen slowly become demoralized and incapacitated under the strains of poverty and the numerous failing attempts to find jobs in order to support their families. "The rich and powerful, however, are actually insecure and scared by the coming of thousands of hungry people who seek the most basic needs of humankind" (Lawson, 2008, p. 60). Echoing the ideas of Karl Marx, "Steinbeck portrayed the owners as selfish bourgeoisie, exploiting the poor for their own gain" (Lawson, 2008, p. 60). The bourgeoisie grew terrified of the influx of desperate families and set up oppressive defensive measures that would protect them from the foreseeable defeat.

Similarly, in the Golds' family, Herman pursued every possible path to create an income stream that would enable him to adequately provide for his family. However, the bourgeoisie rewarded his efforts with a leash of deceptions, which led to him becoming disabled and his daughter's untimely death. Hungry children and parents who have no recourse of finding food or providing the basic amenities for their families became hopeless of any change. The women in Le Sueur's novel, *The Girl*, resorted to prostitution. Girl and her companions also suffered immensely under the relief aid, the power base, which the government had constructed for them. The dilapidated living conditions and the humiliations inflicted by the relief workers stripped them of all their pride. The women agonized daily from the emotional and psychological traumas that the bourgeoisie' system imposed on them. Hopelessness prevailed throughout all four novels, as the proletariats had no recourse to resolve the national crisis. According to Marxism, the powers of the superstructure ensured the families remained poverty stricken by constructing an economic system that presented little or no opportunity for the lower class to elevate themselves.

### **Extreme Poverty Resulted in Deaths**

During the Depression Era, death became a recurring theme amongst families. The Joads sacrificed their parents, simply because they were determined to take the long journey to California to find jobs so they could feed their family. The impoverished circumstances of Mikey's family became increasingly unbearable after his father lost his job. This resulted in the need for his mother to seek employment in order to provide food for their family. The rippling effects of Herman's disabled conditions trickled down to the daughter who had to take over the

mother's chores. As a result of the impoverished circumstances of her family, she loses her life as she searches for wood to supply heat for the dilapidated tenement house. The impact of the pervasive unemployment reduced the patriarchs in most every family to humiliation as was evident with Girl's father. Mortified that he could no longer sustain his family, he positioned himself in a situation where death was inevitable. Both men and women engaged in illegal activities selling bootleg liquor and attempting a bank robbery. The antagonist, Butch and his accomplices died from gunshot wounds during a shootout that ensued as they tried to rob the bank. Massive job losses resulted in extreme poverty, which left the working class with little options for an honest means of survival. Their material circumstances according to Marxist theory caused them to become subjects of an impoverished society, which the dominant class had constructed for them.

The Moss brothers too felt the biting fangs of the dominant class. They tried to escape the poverty in the south but soon realized that geographical location did not determine their class. In the north, the brothers became even more aware of the socioeconomic class society had constructed for them. They too experienced the cold hands of death, which claimed their patriarch figure, Big Mat. According to Attaway's portrayal, Big Mat's violent death resulted from the extreme poverty his family experienced. According to Marxism, the bourgeoisie ensured the economic system operated in a manner that kept production going while they remained indifferent to the workers who provided the forces of production. The proletariats' material circumstances remained intact, just as society had constructed for them.

## **Poverty Led to Acceptance of the Bourgeoisie's Ideologies**

Marxist theorists posit that a capitalist society will gain control over the beliefs of the proletariats by exerting the power they have in the economic base and superstructure. Given that the division of a capitalist society has two basic structures according to Marx, the dominant class, whom he refers to as the bourgeoisie and the owners of the means of production, enjoys power and prestige from the goods and services manufactured by the proletariats, who provide the forces of production but gain little or no benefits from profits generated (Dobie, 2011, p. 89).

Steinbeck illustrates this ideology as he presents the tractor driver who in a desperate need to provide food for his family does away with his beliefs by accepting the reality of his circumstances as defined by the bourgeoisie, which Gramsci coined as hegemony. Comparably, Gold demonstrates Gramsci's theory through Mikey's father, Herman, who became sucked into the beliefs that the bourgeoisie' system is ideal and should be adopted into his own family in order to gain success and leave the dilapidated East Side village. According to Marxism, the bourgeoisie use their economic power base to influence the beliefs of the proletariats thereby strengthening their positions. Le Sueur's story emphasizes the underworld of the bourgeoisie' economic base and superstructure. They perpetuate their economic power using any means, illegal or corrupted, as long as they can maintain authority. Girl and her friends become entrapped in the bourgeoisie' ideologies because of their economic powerlessness, which results in Gramsci hegemony theory that the proletariats meaning of life is shaped by the assumptions and values of the bourgeoisie (Bressler, 2011, p. 172). In like manner, the Moss brothers embraced the influences of the bourgeoisie effortlessly. The brothers remained powerless under the bourgeoisie knowing that their very existence depended on the empathies of the dominant



class. Attaway's representations of the brothers underscore Gramsci theory, as they had not a slim chance to voice their feelings about the strikes. According to Marxism, those who own the means of production control the economic power base in a capitalist society.

Striking evidences of Marxist theory of commodification were visible in the studied novels. Not only did the lower class exhibits insecurities and desires to be like the dominant class, but also the dominant class creates a need for competition of material possessions. On the one hand, we see Herman longing for the luxuries the bourgeoisie possess not because of their use value but for their sign value. On the other, Zechariah creates an air of competition for Herman to match his amenities. So, both men desired to use their material possessions to impress others. In the same way, Anna and Clara yearned to have exorbitant consumer items in order to impress others rather than for their use. According to Marxism, their desires will help to perpetuate the capitalists' economic system. Despite their underprivileged circumstances, the lower class got caught in the entrapments of the bourgeoisie.

The worldview of a society according to Marxism can be determined not by religious or philosophical ideology of the people but by the interdependency of the socioeconomic classes and a close study of the superstructure. In light of the fact that the dominant class controls the superstructure and how power is allocated, the worldviews of the lower class will be false. Marxism suggests that the basis of a society's worldview is firmly rooted on the economic base, which therefore shapes their reality.

The studied authors revealed that the societies' reviewed maintained a false worldview because the economic base undergirds their reality. Herman, Girl, Clara, and Anna all got enveloped in the bourgeoisie' material world upon which they formed their opinions of reality.

The material world of the bourgeoisie created by the powerful superstructure shaped Herman's, Clara's and Anna's personal views of whom they are as individuals and how they viewed their societies. As a result, the characters suffered immeasurably and experienced catastrophic downfalls. A Marxist critic would advocate that the characters' downfalls resulted not because of their imperfect personalities, religious, or philosophical beliefs but because of the material world in which they lived. The proletariats became alienated and felt powerless from the dominant class.

### **Poverty Resulted into Class Conflict**

Hunger breeds anger. Class conflict emerged among the working class as they struggled to find jobs. The bourgeoisie perpetuated class conflict amongst the working class as the proletariats bought into the ideologies of the dominant class. According to Marxism, a capitalist society cannot avoid class conflict because the powerful superstructure and economic base thrive on the material world constructed and the profits gained from the labors of the working class, which will inevitably lead to unequal distribution. While the dominant class relishes in the prestige they gain from the labor force of the working class, the working class agitates about the little benefits they gain from their labor and become nonconformists. They reject the bourgeoisie' natural worldview and call work strikes to implement social reform, which results in class conflicts. On the other hand, according to Marx, the working class develops a false consciousness when they conform to the dominant class's natural worldview.

The numerous confrontations between the white, tenant farmers, and the contractors and government officials in *The Grapes of Wrath* show the class conflict Marx alludes to. While the

farmers aim to rebuild their families, the contractors aim to strengthen their dominance by extorting the forces of production. The discrepancies between the socioeconomic classes ultimately will lead to conflicts. Class conflicts will not necessarily always result in revolutionary actions as is demonstrated in *Jews Without Money*. However, class conflict does exist. Gold uses his father's circumstances to show Marx' false consciousness. Herman desires to integrate into the dominant class conflicts with the material conditions society prescribed for him. Herman accepts the natural worldviews of the dominant class without questioning.

According to Lawson (2008), "Steinbeck creates a moving portrait of the dispossessed. The novel ends with little hope for material and physical comfort, but the Joads have risen above their condition of abject poverty, spiritually and emotionally, to show the dignity and humanity of the poor" (p. 61). The preceding novels underscore the levels of poverty amongst the American people during the Great Depression Era. From the study, readers would have realized that the working class across the regions studied remained downtrodden and underprivileged although their bourgeoisie counterparts continued to live in luxury and prospered. According to Marxist literary critical analysis, the novels present an accurate representation of both the sociological and psychological states of the lower class during the Depression Era. The working class became subjects of an impoverished society because they had no control over the means of production. While the authors' representations of the Depression Era are not as striking today, inequality of the nation's wealth remains more or less the same as represented in the focused novels, where the richest one (1) percent in the United States now own more wealth than the bottom ninety (90) percent (Cagetti and De Nardi, 2006, p. 1).

## **APPENDIX A: RESEARCH TIMELINE**

### **Timeline – Summer and Fall 2014**

Proposal Submitted to Committee:	July 18, 2014
Proposal Approved by Committee:	July 29, 2014
Submitted Proposal to Burnett Honors College:	August 1, 2014
Begin Writing Semester:	August 18, 2014
<b>Start Critical Analysis</b>	
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (1939):	August 18, 2014
<i>The Girl</i> (1939):	September 8, 2014
Jews Without Money (1930):	September 22, 2014
<i>Blood on the Forge</i> (1941):	October 10, 2014
Formatting Review Approved:	October 20, 2014
Thesis Defense:	November 13, 2014
Complete Thesis:	December 1, 2014

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