

The Ghost of Tom Joad: Social Activism in *The Grapes of Wrath* and its Impact on American Music and Society

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This paper focuses on the Pulitzer prize-winning novel by John Steinbeck, the controversies surrounding the book, and how it has influenced key activists as well as the American music landscape, most notably the genres of folk and folk rock.

Decades after its initial publication, *The Grapes of Wrath* continues to be one of the most commonly banned books in U.S. public schools and libraries. In it, core beliefs that Americans hold dear are trampled on, according to some readers. Sacred notions such as the democratic process of local government and the benefits of a free-market economy are treated with contempt. Some people even called Steinbeck a communist as a result.

The activists in *The Grapes of Wrath* mirror real-life activists such as Eugene V. Debs and Cesar Chavez. The novel has also influenced several noteworthy American musicians through the years including Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen.