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### The Grapes of Wrath AE (Ch 18-20)

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is a slow burning American tragedy that challenges contemporary American's ideals of white currency and the race hierarchy. Steinbeck makes a valiant effort to replicate an authentic poor white man's experience during the Great Depression era, and I feel that his largest vehicle of accomplishing said authenticity is his deliberate word choice. He intentionally sacrifices the clarity and fluidity of his work to employ the words he finds necessary to convey the message he finds fit. This practice includes misspelling words, making words up, and prioritizing the verbal narration over grammatical correctness. I mention these instances to attest that the in-depth employment of Steinbeck's lexicon is concise and riddled with meaning. In the following text, I want to shed light on the specific literary choices that introduce uncharted notions of the white folks being niggers.

Despite a consistent narration of the Joad's experience as cruel and unforgiving, chapter 18 hosts multiple insertions that allude to the white man's status and experience as similar to the negro. The first offense I choose to engage is a conversation between Tom and "The Old Man" along the Colorado River. We are introduced to the derogatory term "Okie" which the Old Man interprets to mean "dirty son of a bitch scum". The employment of a word with othering and derogatory intent parallels that of the white man's use of the word nigger. However, it is notions added by the old man that extend my beliefs as he opined the word Okie used to mean you were from Oklahoma and that it has since taken on additional meaning. Drawing parallels between the N word, the term negro is of Spanish and Portuguese decent, which originally meant nothing more than Black skin, until it took on additional meaning. Steinbeck's inclusion of the term's history leads me to believe he was deliberate in his insertions to create a connotation surrounding the term Okie as similar to the N word.

The second indirect assertion that the Joad's were parallel to Negros comes shortly after during the same conversation when the Old Man attest that finding steady work is not feasible, and that Tom would find himself picking cotton, certain that the scales were not honest. The

connotation surrounding “picking cotton” certainly draws upon the ideals of slaves working in the field, and dishonest scales are a direct reference to the practice of white slave masters in the antebellum south. Although Steinbeck mentions many nefarious jobs the Joad’s might find themselves doing, picking cotton informs reader perception in a way that picking oranges does not, and leads us to interpretations of the working-class whites as similar to the negroes.

The third and final insertion that suggest the Joad’s status as white negroes comes during a conversation between Ma and a police officer, where the Sheriff threatens to arrest the Joad’s if they do not vacate the land. Ma retaliates, mentioning that they aren’t used to being ordered around by police, and the officer informs her that she is in California now must do what she is told. This interaction in and of itself reigns parallel to the forced migration of black people to the African Diaspora, but the critical choice of words comes as Steinbeck writes, “Ma’s face blackened with anger.” Describing her frustration with a physical description like blackening serves as the white folk’s assimilation into blackness. These three instances are of many derogatory moments in the *Grapes of Wrath*; however, I find there is a distinct difference that must be noted when describing white folks as poor bottom-feeders, and describing them as negroes.