

Differences from the novel

The first part of the film follows the book fairly closely. However, the second half and the ending in particular are significantly different from the book. While the book ends with the downfall and break-up of the Joad family, the film switches the order of sequences so that the family ends up in a "good" camp provided by the government, and things turn out relatively well for them.^[11]

In the novel, Rose-of-Sharon ("Rosasharn") Rivers (played in the film by Dorris Bowdon) gives birth to a stillborn baby. Later, she offers her milk-filled breasts to a starving man, dying in a barn. These scenes were not included in the film.

While the film is somewhat stark, it has a more optimistic and hopeful view than the novel, especially when the Joads land at the Department of Agriculture camp – the clean camp. Also, the producers decided to tone down Steinbeck's political references, such as eliminating a monologue using a land owner's description of "reds" as anybody "that wants thirty cents an hour when we're payin' twenty-five," to show that under the prevalent conditions that definition applies to every migrant worker looking for better wages.

The film emphasizes Ma Joad's pragmatic, forward-looking way of dealing with their situation despite Tom's departure, as it concludes with her spiritual "We're the people" speech.^[12]

Ivy and Sairy Wilson, who attend to Grandpa's death and travel with the Joads until they reach California, are left out of the movie entirely. Noah's departure from the family is passed over in the movie. Instead, he simply disappears without explanation. In the book, Floyd tells Tom about how the workers were being exploited, but in the movie he does not appear until after the deputy arrives in Hooverville. Sandry, the religious fanatic who scares Rose-of-Sharon, is left out of the movie.

Vivian Sobchack argued that the film uses visual imagery to focus on the Joads as a family unit, whereas the novel focuses on their journey as a part of the "family of man". She points out that their farm is never shown in detail, and that the family members are never shown working in agriculture; not a single peach is shown in the entire film. This subtly serves to focus the film on the specific family, as opposed to the novel's focus on man and land together.^[13]

In the film, most of the Joad family members are either reduced to background characters – in the case of Al, Noah, and Uncle John – or to being the focus of only one or two relatively minor scenes – like Rose-of-Sharon and Connie. Instead, the film is largely concerned with Tom, Ma, and (to a lesser extent) Jim Casy. Thus, despite the film's focus on the Joads as a specific family rather than a part of the "family of man", the movie explores very little of the members of the family itself.

Soundtrack

- Henry Fonda – "Red River Valley" (Traditional)
- Eddie Quillan – "Going Down the Road Feeling Bad" (Traditional)
- "A-Tisket, A-Tasket" (Words and music by Ella Fitzgerald and Van Alexander)

Production

Executive producer Darryl F. Zanuck was nervous about the left-wing political views of the novel, especially the ending. Due to the red-baiting common to the era, Darryl Zanuck sent private investigators to Oklahoma to help him legitimize the film.