Depictions of Fascism in 1930s American Literature: Fascist Action in Light in August, The Grapes of Wrath, and It Can't Happen Here

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore depictions of fascism in 1930s American literature. Specifically, I analyse William Faulkner's *Light in August*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. The former two novels do not explicitly engage with fascism, but aspects of the texts were linked to fascism by their authors. Faulkner retroactively referred to the character Percy Grimm from his book as a fascist, and Steinbeck linked the agriculture sector in California, which features heavily in his novel, to fascism. Lewis engages with fascism directly in *It Can't Happen Here* as he envisions a fascist dictatorship in the United States. These texts are relevant today as fascism is not a concept of the past. They can be used to discuss visions of fascism in 1930s American Literature and what fascism may look like in the United States. I use a combination of close reading and the theory provided by Robert O. Paxton in *The Anatomy of Fascism*, as well as additional sources for necessary historical context to analyse each of the novels. I will argue that while only one of the novels explicitly engages with fascism, all three texts portray fascism to some extent and can be used to identify possible bases of fascist action.

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Introduction

In 2016, Jules Stewart of *The Guardian* likened Donald Trump's presidential campaign to the contents of Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, claiming that the text "predicted the rise of Donald Trump" (Stewart). In Lewis's novel, a fictional dictator, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, successfully runs for president and subsequently suppresses his political opposition using his Militia, the Minute Men. Lewis uses the phrase "It can't happen here" to ironically deny the possibility of a fascist dictatorship in the United States. While the fascist state envisioned by Lewis is "alarming but limited and, when compared to today, easily falsified", according to Ellen Strenski (Strenski 427), Strenski argues that Lewis's book can help people understand Trump's campaign and his voters (428-429).

It Can't Happen Here is not the only piece of 1930s American literature that has been linked to fascism by its author. Although Lewis explicitly used the term in his novel, other authors linked their texts to fascism in different fashions. William Faulkner, for example, related his 1932 novel *Light in August* to fascism through the character Percy Grimm. Grimm is only physically present in the novel's nineteenth chapter, in which he forms a militia that he then uses to hunt down Joe Christmas, a man of mixed race accused of murdering a white woman, and subsequently lynches him. In a later letter, Faulkner described Grimm as "the fascist Galahad who saved the white race by murdering Christmas" (Faulkner, qtd. in Blotner 202). Additionally, Daniel Spoth notes that Faulkner called Grimm a "Nazi Storm Trooper", a quality that can be found "everywhere, in all countries, in all people" (Faulkner, qtd in Spoth 239).

Another example is John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In a letter supporting the Spanish Republican government during the Spanish Civil War, Steinbeck wrote the following about the state of California: "We have our own fascist groups out here. They haven't bombed open towns yet but in Salinas last year tear gas was thrown in a Union

Hall and through the windows of workingmen's houses. That's rather close, isn't it?" (Steinbeck, qtd in Williams 49). Charles Williams writes that with this statement, Steinbeck referred "to the repression of farm workers by the large-scale corporate farm interests that dominated California agriculture" (Williams 49). In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck tackles the state of the agriculture sector in California through a portrayal of a migrant family from Oklahoma in search of work.

It is, however, necessary to be critical of the authors' words regarding the engagement of their respective novels with fascism. The fascist state in Lewis's novel is, as Stephen L. Tanner notes, often criticised for being superficial (Tanner 61). The racial violence alone that Percy Grimm commits does not equal fascism. While Steinbeck related corporate farming in California to fascism, his words are based on his own observations. Nevertheless, I deem the authors' statements sufficient to warrant an investigation of how American authors in the 1930s, before the Second World War, understood fascism and, possibly, what they imagined an American form of fascism to be like.

Moreover, the quotes by Faulkner and Steinbeck are significant because they imply a connection between fascism and aspects of American society. Jeanne A. Follansbee points out that Faulkner relates the politics of the American South to fascism by referring to Percy Grimm, who is known for lynching a man of mixed race accused of killing a white woman, as a fascist (Follansbee 69). The same can then be said about Steinbeck's comments about corporate farm interests and fascism. The difference is, however, that Steinbeck connects fascism to capitalist powers, whereas Faulkner relates it to white supremacy. Lewis differs from Faulkner and Steinbeck in that he imagines the possibility of a fascist dictator in the United States, but this is also relevant, as it provides insight into what an American form of fascism could be.

In this thesis, I mean to analyse the depictions of fascism in each of the novels and

hope to gain more understanding of how their respective authors understood fascism. Additionally, I seek to understand how the authors imagined American fascism. Ultimately, I will need to answer the following question: How do *Light in August*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *It Can't Happen Here* portray fascism, and what perspectives on American fascism can be revealed by comparing the depictions of fascist action in these novels?

Analysing novels like *Light in August*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *It Can't Happen Here* in relation to fascism is relevant because fascism is not a phenomenon of the past. According to the author of *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Robert O. Paxton, fascism "exists at the level of Stage One within all democratic countries—not excluding the United States. 'Giving up free institutions,' especially the freedoms of unpopular groups, is recurrently attractive to citizens of Western democracies, including some Americans" (220). As discussed in the opening to this thesis, *It Can't Happen Here* is still relevant today, so its vision of fascism is worth analysing. Meanwhile, *Light in August* and *The Grapes of Wrath* also identify a basis for fascism in the United States. I hypothesise that fascist actions in the three novels are motivated by different targets but that these actions originate from similar sentiments in perpetrators across texts. For example, I expect that fascism in *Light in August* will mainly target Black people, and it will combat migrants and farm labourers in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Furthermore, I will argue that all three novels identify potential bases for American fascism.

To analyse *It Can't Happen Here*, *Light in August*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*, I will use Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism*. While the theoretical framework will elaborate on *The Anatomy of Fascism* in greater detail, it is necessary to discuss certain core aspects of the theory that make the book suitable for the present investigation. Paxton's theory divides fascism into different stages depending on its level of advancement, ranging from the conception of fascist movements to the reign of fascism. Practically, this means that analyses of fascism are not limited merely to investigations of fascist states, as fascist movements, for

example, can be used as well. As such, Paxton's theory is suitable for stories that do not feature fascism in power, like *Light in August* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, in addition to *It Can't Happen Here*, which does.

Additionally, Paxton believes that "the ideas that underlie fascist actions are best deduced from those actions, for some of them remain unstated and implicit in fascist public language" (219). Therefore, I will mainly consider the actions of the actors deemed fascist by Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Lewis to determine how they imagined their respective forms of fascism. Paxton provides a list of nine "mobilising passions" to do with the group, permitted behaviour, and the leader that underlie fascist action (219-220). I will elaborate on these passions in the theoretical framework, but for now, I need to mention that they will form the fundament used to judge fascist action in this thesis.

I will use close reading in combination with Paxton's theory to analyse how each of the texts depicts fascism. Additionally, I will use sources to Historicise each of the novels. Specifically, I will look at the significance of lynching in the United States for *Light in August*, the state of the agriculture business in 1930s California for *The Grapes of Wrath*, and what inspired Lewis to write *It Can't Happen Here*. By using these additional sources of information, I mean to paint a more complete picture of the fascisms depicted in each of the novels.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

The Anatomy of Fascism

In *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Paxton writes that strategies for understanding fascism "must come to terms with the wide diversity of its national cases" (Paxton 19-20). In fascism, the community is valued more than humanity and the individual, which leads to each national iteration of fascism adapting to "its own cultural particularism" (20). Paxton argues that fascists used whatever themes would help them motivate their mass movement, exemplifying the Norse myths as themes found in German and Norwegian fascism that would not work in Italy, where fascists recalled the Roman Empire (40). The only universal value that connects fascist movements, according to Paxton, is the Darwinian struggle that the chosen people seek to win (20). This diversity, to Paxton, is no reason to abandon the term fascism, although he acknowledges the necessity of saving it from "sloppy usage" (20-21). Instead, Paxton proposes a system where fascism is studied in five stages; "(1) the creation of movements; (2) their rooting in the political system; (3) their seizure of power; (4) the exercise of power; (5) and, finally, the long duration, during which the fascist regime chooses either radicalization or entropy" (23). This system facilitates stronger comparisons between fascist movements and regimes as both entities can be analysed within their respective stages. Moreover, it helps people understand fascism as a process rather than something static (23). Although it is necessary to reach one stage to advance into the next, stages do not have to be completed, and movement is not necessarily linear (23). Additionally, Paxton observes that "most modern societies spawned fascist movements in the twentieth century", but "only a few had fascist regimes" (23).

Paxton claims that although fascism appears to be an ideology at first glance, it lacks an explicit philosophical or intellectual foundation. Instead, it builds on popular thought regarding a particular group of chosen people, how this group has been treated unfairly, and

how it should dominate inferior groups (15-16). Fascists mean to come out on top in their struggle and make use of whatever allows them to dominate others (16). Paxton writes that fascism relies on a leader with a "mystical union with the historic destiny of his people" (17). The leader will bring the group into a state where it is aware of its supposed destiny. The participating people form a collective based on shared feelings and sacrifice their personal problems for the sake of the group. Together, they experience "the thrill of domination" (17).

Yet, Paxton notes that fascism does not completely lack an intellectual base; intellectuals made room for fascists by weakening the elite's support for enlightened values that were common in "government and liberal society", making the possibility of fascism appear conceivable, and creating a space where the left was not the only option for people driven by anger and a desire for change (18). These motivations, according to Paxton, are less prominent in the middle stages of fascism as values may be sacrificed to form alliances but reappear later when fascists become more independent from their allies (18-19). Additionally, it is necessary to mention how Paxton differentiates between fascism and authoritarianism, as he writes that the distinction is subtle (216). Paxton defines it as follows:

> Authoritarians would rather leave the population demobilized and passive, while fascists want to engage and excite the public. Authoritarians want a strong but limited state. They hesitate to intervene in the economy, as fascism does readily, or to embark on programs of social welfare. They cling to the status quo rather than proclaim a new way. (217)

At the end of *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Paxton concludes that a "short usable handle" would not adequately encompass fascism. However, Paxton writes that fascism could be defined as a type of political behaviour. Specifically, this behaviour reflects an obsession with "community decline, humiliation, or victimhood", as well as "compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity" (218). With this, Paxton means that fascists experience a sense of

being wronged and gravitate towards groups that claim to make up for this treatment through a sense of unity, powerful energy, and the group's promise of purity. Additionally, in fascism, nationalist militants form a mass movement that works with the traditional elites in an uneasy though effective alliance. This movement does away with "democratic liberties", pursues policies of outward expansion, and attempts to cleanse what is deemed impure (218). To achieve these goals, the group uses measures of violence that are not restrained by legal or moral values (218). Paxton also concludes that the ideas behind fascist acts are best visible within said acts, as these ideas may be implicit or even absent in fascist speech (219). Previously in his book, Paxton had already suggested that fascism "was an affair of the gut more than of the brain" (42), and ultimately, he concludes that the ideas behind fascism, or "mobilizing passions", as he first calls them in the second chapter of his book (41), "belong more to the realm of visceral feelings than to the realm of reasoned propositions" (219). In short, fascist action is dictated by feeling rather than thought. Paxton identifies a set of nine passions.

Firstly, fascists experience "a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions" (219). In the context of the definition of fascism discussed in the previous paragraph, it appears that the decline of the community, victimhood, and humiliation are themes that characterise this crisis. As a result of this crisis, people are led to groups that promise to compensate for the perceived wrongdoing. This is supported by the second, third, fourth, and fifth passion, each of which directly concerns the group. Fascists are concerned with "the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it" (219). What is visible in this passion is the importance that fascists attribute to unity. Additionally, there is "the belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external" (219). This reflects the

perceived victimhood that the group experiences and the measures that they are willing to use to compensate for it. Furthermore, they experience “dread of the group’s decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences” (219). This reflects the decline of the community. Finally, fascists feel “the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary” (219). This passion reflects the desire for perceived purity and the willingness to commit acts of violence to make it come true. Moreover, it displays fascism’s need to have enemies to fight.

The sixth and seventh passions concern the fascist leader. According to Paxton, fascism has “the need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group’s historical destiny” (219). Furthermore, the seventh passion highlights “the superiority of the leader’s instincts over abstract and universal reason” (219). The sixth passion accounts for the bond between the leader and the people in fascism in Paxton’s view: the people rely on a leader to shepherd them into their group’s destiny (17). Additionally, the seventh passion underlines the superiority of the leader’s authority over an intellectual basis.

The final two passions relate to the violent domination of others at the hands of fascists. Firstly, there is “the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group’s success” (219). As can be seen in this passion, violence is not merely necessary for fascists to achieve their goals; it is considered a virtue when it is performed for the sake of the group. Strength of will is likewise seen as virtuous. Finally, Paxton identifies “the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group’s prowess within a Darwinian struggle” (220). Once again, Paxton names the Darwinian struggle that fascism needs, thereby highlighting that fascists wish to be victorious over their adversaries once more. Aside from the beauty it has when it serves the group, fascist violence is not bound by

any restraints if it is used to dominate groups deemed inferior or when it feeds the fascist effort in the Darwinian struggle.

Although fascism in the United States is not the focus of his book, Paxton provides perspectives on how American fascism may present itself. Paxton claims that first-stage fascism can be found in all democratic countries according to the conditions he provides. Furthermore, he concludes that a large cataclysmic event like a march on the capital is not necessary for fascism to be established, as decisions to treat perceived enemies unlawfully may be enough (220). The potential of fascism to advance into later stages, according to Paxton, is reliant on human choices and the magnitude of the crisis to which fascists respond. Regarding the possibility of American fascism, Paxton identifies several examples of a fascist presence in the United States. He argues that antidemocratic and xenophobic movements have long been present and names "derivative fascist movements" like the Defenders of the Christian Faith and the Silver Shirts, although these groups "with an exotic foreign look won few followers" (201). Paxton considers movements "that employ authentically American themes in ways that resemble fascism functionally", such as the Ku Klux Klan, to be more dangerous (201). Paxton argues that the first KKK can be considered "the earliest phenomenon that can be functionally related to fascism" (49). In response to voting rights given to Black American men during the Reconstruction, the Klan formed a civic authority opposed to a state that they considered to go against the interests of the community. Furthermore, they adopted a uniform, utilised intimidation, and believed that violence was a just means to reach their destiny (49).

Paxton claims that there is "a 'politics of resentment' rooted in authentic American piety and nativism" (202). This phenomenon sets its sights on perceived internal enemies such as gay people and supporters of abortion rights who were previously targeted in Nazi Germany (202). According to Paxton, the themes found within an authentically American

form of fascism need to be “familiar and reassuring to loyal Americans” (202). If a sufficiently large crisis were to occur, Americans could be drawn to a movement aimed at the “First Amendment, separation of Church and State”; as well as “efforts to place controls on gun ownership, desecrations of the flag, unassimilated minorities, artistic license, dissident and unusual behavior of all sorts that could be labeled antinational or decadent” (202). As a portion of the examples mentioned above concern Christianity, it is necessary to discuss the potential of religious fascism. Paxton notes that Stanley Payne has previously dismissed the possibility, as religion would limit the power of the leader through the influence of the clergy and religious values and doctrine (203). Paxton believes that this idea applies to European fascism in a limited sense, as it holds true for Hitler and Mussolini but does not apply to the whole of Europe, as Spain, Belgium, Romania, and Finland have spawned fascist movements based on religion (203). Additionally, Paxton argues that religion may be an equally strong or even more powerful basis for identity than the nation (203-204).

1930s American Fascism

In 1935, Harry F. Ward, then national chairman of the American League Against War and Fascism (Ward 61), already discussed the development of fascism in the United States. He identified a variety of fascist groups and divided them into several categories. The first category consists of groups modelled after, and partly directed by, European predecessors, such as the Italian American Black Shirts and the German American Brown Shirts. These organisations were unsuccessful (55). The second category consists of organisations similar to the first category but with a more American character. These were still partially modelled after European groups and were open to receiving support from abroad, but they operated more similarly to the KKK. These groups were more dangerous but also did not find much success (55). Ward also describes “a highbrow, dress-shirt type of fascism”, which sought to

popularise fascism through journal publications but was doomed to fail as it did not seek the necessary broad appeal that fascism requires (55).

Ward wrote that it would be necessary for a successful American fascist group to make economic promises to a group with highly diverse incomes which he dubbed the "great majority" (56). Furthermore, it would require "the conjunction of thwarted national ambitions, extreme economic insecurity, the menace of strong anti-capitalist forces, and a magnetic and unscrupulous leader" (56). At the same time, Ward warned of the removal of democratic freedom in favour of capitalism as the capitalist economy seeks state power to ensure its success (56-57). Ward claimed that the dominant economic forces, not government bureaucrats, were truly in power as capitalist pressure determines policies (57-58). Additionally, he argued that there was a movement that meant to achieve the surrender of labourers' ability to protect themselves to the state under a false pretence of security where the state favoured the interests of employers over those of employees (58-59). Ward concluded that the economic element of fascism was developing in America but that fascist political action did not yet have as strong a presence in the United States. Nevertheless, fascist violence could still be committed, first in the name of the community and later in the name of "private interests". For example, Ward picked out the prevalence of violent acts targeting strikers in the United States (59-60). Still, Ward wrote, popular support is a required factor, which may be found upon complete economic collapse or the break out of war (60).

Based on Ward's writing, it seems that the relationship between fascism and capitalism could be significant when discussing the potential of fascism in the United States. As such, it is necessary to examine what Paxton writes about this relationship. According to Paxton, a supposed central element of fascism is "its anticapitalist, antibourgeois animus" (Paxton 10). Early fascists, Paxton writes, "attacked 'international finance capitalism' almost as loudly as they attacked socialists" and "promised to expropriate department-store owners

in favor of patriotic artisans, and large landowners in favor of peasants" (10). When fascists came to power, however, they did not enforce these promises while staying true to their vision regarding socialism. Moreover, they "banned strikes, dissolved independent labor unions, lowered wage earners' purchasing power, and showered money on armaments industries" (10). This contradiction resulted in a split among scholars' interpretations of the relationship between fascism and capitalism. Some believe that fascism is radically anti-capitalist, while others claim that fascism saved capitalism (10).

Paxton claims that fascism's supposed anti-capitalism helps explain fascism's appeal but that this position was "selective" (10). Fascists opposed international capitalism but did not have a problem with national owners of capital, "who were to form the social base of the reinvigorated nation"; the bourgeoisie was not criticised for stealing from labourers but "for being too flabby and individualistic to make a nation strong", and capitalism was criticised for its disregard to the nation and its materialism, not for being exploitative (10). Fascists did not believe "that economic forces are the prime movers of history", and its faults could be remedied by using political power to secure sufficient labour and productivity (10). Although fascists confiscated property, they did so only from political adversaries, Jewish people, and foreigners. Additionally, they rarely changed the social hierarchy, but only to change the status of individuals (10-11).

Nelson A. Pichardo Almanzar and Brian W. Kulik provide a view of American fascism in which the power of the elite is more instrumental than in its European counterparts. In their 2013 book, they study the Associated Farmers of California to determine what an American form of fascism may look like. In doing so, the authors discuss Paxton's theory. Although they have some criticisms of Paxton's book, they call the process described in *The Anatomy of Fascism* "the most comprehensive that we have seen to date", praising its flexibility, its stage system, and description of the elite and its relationship with

the leader (Kulik & Pichardo Almanzar 23). One criticism the two have is that the relationship between fascism and corporatism is not clearly explained (23). Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik claim that corporatism and elite involvement are more central to American fascism than they are to European fascism (23). This is relevant, as the two argue that corporatism and elite involvement are more central to American fascism than they are to European fascism (23).

According to Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, both American and Italian fascism used a corporate model, but corporatism played a more significant role in the United States (24). According to Paxton, corporate bodies ran each of the branches of the economy in Italy, and a "chamber of corporations" replaced parliament. These corporations were promised to represent the interests of both employers and employees but were, in reality, run by "businessmen" (Paxton 137). Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik argue that while the Italian government controlled corporations, corporations controlled the government in America (Kulik & Pichardo Almanzar 25). In the United States, corporations "had attained economic and political dominance of American life during its Industrialization" and exerted power over the American political parties (26). In response to the problems with laissez-faire capitalism and the loss of corporate power as a result of the Great Depression and the subsequent presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, corporations supported a form of fascism where they would control economic policy, which the two authors call "corporate fascism" (26-27). Additionally, they tentatively conclude that, in the case of the Associated Farmers of California, this form of fascism is "corporatist, anti-union, anti-communist, anti-immigrant and at times racist" and violent (28-29). Furthermore, they call it "palingenetic", which they claim is a universal trait of fascism (29). Palingenetic, in the context of fascism, refers to Roger Griffin's notion that "Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism" (Griffin, qtd. in

Paxton 21). In short, a core value of fascism would be a reborn sense of populist ultranationalism.

Ultimately Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik's conclusion regarding fascism in the United States seems nuanced. They argue that the country has never had a "truly fascist government in power" but express their belief that the American government has been dominated by corporations roughly since the American Civil War, which does not constitute fascism. Still, they conclude that fascism is "deeply rooted in America" (161). They ultimately decide that corporate fascism is the most accurate way to describe the Associated Farmers of California (162). The branding of the Associated Farmers differed from its German and Italian counterparts, it did not produce a single authoritarian leader, and it originated from the economic elites rather than the people (162). However, Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik claim that the Associated Farmers contained fascist elements. The organisation sought to dominate the state and use it to achieve its own economic goals (163). The two authors write that it used fascist methods to do this. The Associated Farmers organised and directed vigilante groups to commit acts of violence against farm labourers, branded farmworkers as "ethnic aliens or as communist sympathizers", restricted free speech and rights to free assembly, promoted "hyper-nationalism", emphasised community decline, and used fascist imagery by wearing armbands in fights (163). What ultimately characterises the organisation as fascist, according to Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, is "its desire to institute a corporate state wrapped in a form of American nationalism achieved through violence and grounded in a palingenetic myth" (163).

In contrast to Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, Richard Steigmann-Gall discusses ideas concerning forms of American fascism that do not originate in the elite. Like Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, Steigmann-Gall favours Paxton's understanding of fascism as a process as it allows for an analysis of fascism before it comes to power and because it considers

national diversity (Steigmann-Gall 98-99). According to Steigmann-Gall, the presence of fascism in the United States has received little scholarly attention, and scholars of American history largely agree that fascism "never 'took'" in the United States. Furthermore, it is typically assumed that fascism could not settle in the United States for ideological or organisational reasons (96). Steigmann-Gall gives a few reasons for the lack of attention to American fascism. Firstly, he identifies that fascism is associated with Europe and is seen as un-American (101). For example, Steigmann-Gall states that Gerald L. K. Smith, whom Paxton refers to as a "homegrown fascist" in the bibliographical essay that accompanies *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Paxton 248), was not classified as a fascist by his biographer Glen Jeansonne because Smith rejected the label and called fascism European (Steigmann-Gall 101). Secondly, movements like the Silver Shirts are considered in isolation rather than a larger tradition (103). Thirdly, the term fascism became overused (107-108). As a result, the word became "a term of abuse rather than of analysis" (108). A fourth reason is that American politicians who can be labelled fascists are not taken seriously (110).

However, Steigmann-Gall notes that American fascism received some attention in the 1950s. According to Steigmann-Gall, Victor Ferkiss found that fascism in the United States did not come from abroad but was rooted in agrarian-based populism (103). This tradition is characterised by nationalism, antisemitism, hostility against financial power, and a preference for agrarian over urban life. Moreover, it favoured a middle ground between business and labour interests, protection against "international conspiracies", the direct implementation of the people's will, and disliked liberal democratic institutions (103). Ferkiss, however, did not call this fascism and instead referred to it as "compatible in spirit' with the 'equivalent of' fascism" (Ferkiss, qtd in. Steigmann-Gall 103; Steigmann-Gall 103). Morris Schonbach, according to Steigmann-Gall, found similar conclusions regarding American nativist

movements and their defence of the people against the financial power of the establishment (Steigmann-Gall 103-104).

Chapter Two: *Light in August* and American White Supremacism

Introduction

William Faulkner's *Light in August* portrays the arrival of two characters in Jefferson, a place in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi: Lena Grove, a pregnant woman in search of one Lucas Burch, and Joe Christmas, a man of mixed race. The Latter of these characters is accused of murdering a white woman named Joanna Burden. Burden's family moved south during the reconstruction, and while she grew up in the same house she inhabited before her death, Burden's presence is still a source of tension (Faulkner 33). Burden's death sets into motion a series of events that culminates in the murder of Christmas by Percy Grimm, whom Faulkner retroactively described as a "fascist Galahad" in a letter to Malcolm Cowley (Faulkner, qtd. in Blotner L202), and a "Nazi Storm Trooper" while speaking at the University of Virginia (Faulkner, qtd in Spoth 239).

In these statements, Faulkner did not back his claims up in great detail. Over the last two decades, however, a number of critics have investigated the depiction of fascism through Grimm. Carl Rollyson calls Grimm, despite the absence of the term from the novel, "plainly fascist" (Rollyson). Jeanne A. Follansbee claims that the treatment of fascism in *Light in August* is limited to "thematic depiction" through its portrayal of Grimm and his mob (Follansbee 69). Furthermore, she refers to Grimm's mob as a "'shirt'-style lynching mob" (69), likening the group to organisations like the Silver Shirts (67). Ted Atkinson writes that Faulkner had previously engaged with fascism indirectly in *Sanctuary* through "thematic association" using mob violence but that his depiction of fascism in *Light in August* is more explicit (Atkinson 148). In Addition, Atkinson reads Grimm as a product of "social upheaval" and an anticipation of an American form of fascism rather than an import (154), although he claims that Faulkner does not contemplate the "actual transformation to fascism as a political ideology and system" (155). Based on this quick overview of the existing

research concerning Grimm and Fascism, it appears that Faulkner, at least in the eyes of the critics mentioned above, was not mistaken to call Grimm a fascist, but that he does not explore a fascist society.

Critics also take note of qualities that make Grimm more than just a member of a violent mob. Grimm, according to Atkinson, is a nationalist and a white supremacist who uses violent and authoritarian measures and has the charisma necessary to command a group and gain the respect of the community (154). Like Atkinson, Rollyson takes note of Grimm's racism and nationalism (Rollyson). Follansbee also mentions Grimm's ability to lead and highlights his skill in forming a bond with the members of his mob, which transforms initially hesitant American Legion members into a unit (Follansbee 76-77). Additionally, Follansbee underlines the militarism of Grimm's mob (76), as does Rollyson (Rollyson). These comments reveal the qualities that critics have used in their analyses of Grimm; he is a white supremacist, a nationalist, and a militarist. Furthermore, he stands out from others because of his charisma and leadership skills. Grimm's categorisation as a fascist means that critics take Faulkner's claims about the presence of a 1932 book seriously, making it worthy of consideration in relation to early descriptions of American forms of fascism.

Interestingly, while critics describe him as charismatic and a capable leader, Grimm was unimpressive when he was younger. His father thinks that he is "just lazy and in a fair way to become perfectly worthless" (Faulkner 334). He also showed "no ability in school" (335). By the time he is introduced, however, the narrator of *Light in August* characterises Grimm as a lover of Military prowess; he suffers from "the terrible tragedy" of being too young to have fought in the First World War and frequently shows off his captain's uniform and marksman's badge, as he is a good shot (Faulkner 334-335).

Although Grimm occupies a prominent spot in the existing research concerning the depiction of fascism in *Light in August*, he does not appear frequently in the book. Grimm is

introduced in the second part of the novel's nineteenth chapter, the same chapter in which he forms a militia and murders Joe Christmas. Outside of this section, Grimm is only briefly mentioned twice (Faulkner 314, 366). Interestingly though, Cowley, recipient of Faulkner's letter about Grimm being a fascist, chose to include from *Light in August* only Grimm's section in *The Portable Faulkner*. According to Cowley, Grimm's part in *Light in August* is "not the best passage" in *Light in August*, but it is "almost the only one that tells a complete story in itself" (Cowley 525). In this chapter, I will analyse the reasons why Faulkner might write this story and, as Grimm is a fascist in Faulkner's eyes, how the novel depicts fascism through Grimm and what this means for Faulkner's perspective on fascism in the United States.

Significance of Lynching in *Light in August*

Light in August was published in 1932, but it appears that the direct inspiration for the lynching of Joe Christmas dates back to September 1908. According to Blotner, in one of his biographies of Faulkner, the lynching of Christmas could be inspired by the lynching of Nelse Patton (Blotner B704). Patton was wanted for the murder of a white woman and was caught by two sons of a deputy whom the sheriff informed of Patton's flight (B113). Blotner claims that a crowd of nearly two thousand people was turned into a mob by former senator W. V. Sullivan after Patton's arrest. This mob then assaulted the jail after the guards refused its members access to it (B113-114). Blotner describes the killing and lynching of Patton as follows: "there was a pause, then a volley of pistol shots. When the body was thrown out of the jail, it was quickly castrated and the head mutilated" (B114).

Interestingly, Patton's captors, John and Jenks Cullen, were the brothers of a classmate and good friend of the then eleven-year-old William Faulkner (B113-114). Moreover, Blotner claims that John was in the jail when the mob attacked it, had witnessed

the crowd storming in, and later saw Patton's body (B114). According to Blotner, Faulkner and the other boys in his class would have discussed the lynching of Patton as Cullen's younger brother was among them (B114). In comparison, details of the respective deaths of Patton and Christmas differ. Still, however, the events seem similar. In *Light in August*, Grimm confronts Christmas in a house (Faulkner 344), not a jail. Christmas hides behind an overturned table while Grimm runs in firing (344). While Patton initially fought back, he later crouched in the dark and was shot (Blotner B114). Similarly to the mob firing a volley of pistol shots at Patton (B114), Grimm "emptied the automatic's magazine into the table" (Faulkner 345). Based on Blotner's text, it is not clear when exactly Patton died, but Christmas dies after Grimm castrates him (345).

The fact that both Patton and Christmas were castrated deserves special attention. Robyn Wiegman suggests that white men were threatened by the possibility of Black men achieving citizenship after the Civil War (Wiegman 446).[1] According to Wiegman, lynching served to assert "white masculine supremacy within the social and economic specificities of slavery's abolition", and the use of castration within the process of lynching relates the act to "the sociosymbolic realm of sexual difference" (446). According to Wiegman, the phallus served as a symbol that connects Black men to masculinity. After the American Civil War, this meant that Black men had the privilege of having the potential for citizenship. By removing the phallus, white men could take away this privilege and reassert a difference

[1] In this thesis, I capitalise "Black" when referring to people, but I do not capitalise "white". The Associated Press started capitalising Black in 2020 to convey "an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa" (Associated Press), whereas "white people in general have much less shared history and culture, and don't have the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color" (Bauder). Although the discussion around how to correctly refer to people is still ongoing, I have decided to go along with the example of the Associated Press.

between Black and white men (446). Moreover, Wiegman claims that castration serves as a tool to feminise Black men, thereby removing the threat of the Black men's potential for "gender sameness" to white men by taking away their sign of power within a patriarchal society (450).

Before and during the murder of Christmas, Grimm exhibits similarities to W. V. Sullivan, the leader of the mob responsible for lynching Patton. The first resemblance between the men is their ability to transform a group of people. Blotner states that a crowd gathered by the jail after Patton's arrest. A judge and ministers unsuccessfully requested that people leave the case alone and go home (B113-114). Sullivan, on the other hand, took to the stage where he "harangued the crowd and by eight o'clock had succeeded in turning it into a mob" (B114). Follansbee writes that Grimm organises a "platoon" (Follansbee 76). First, Grimm insists that his followers show up armed (Faulkner 337). He then manipulates them into coming back in the morning after they leave for the night (338). Ultimately, He inspires a level of devotion to the point where his followers seem to wear a uniform without actually wearing one (340).

The second, perhaps more striking similarity, is how both men respond to the aftermath of their actions. After the death of Patton, Sullivan told the Associated Press: "I wouldn't mind standing the consequences the consequences any time for lynching a man who cut a white woman's throat. I will lead a mob in such case any time" (Blotner B114). After Grimm finishes mutilating Christmas, he says: "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell" (Faulkner 345). Comparing Blotner's account of the events surrounding the death of Patton to those around Christmas's murder shows that Christmas and Grimm resemble Patton and Sullivan, respectively. As such, it appears that Faulkner linked the confrontation between Christmas and Grimm to an event from his youth, which reinforces the idea that Grimm represents a homegrown fascism.

Moreover, concerning the connection between lynching and Faulkner's statements regarding Grimm and fascism, Follansbee traces the ultimate confrontation between Christmas and Grimm to Reconstruction Era America and claims that "lynching as a means of enforcing white dominance predates the emergence of European fascism" (Follansbee 69). Still, Faulkner's comments on the engagement of his novel with fascism bear relevance to Follansbee. Through these quotes, Faulkner relates the racial politics of the American South to that of Nazi Germany, a comparison that, as Follansbee notes, had explicitly been made by some of Faulkner's contemporaries like W. E. B. Du Bois (69). As such, Follansbee argues that Faulkner suggests that a basis for fascism is present in the "sociopolitical upheaval of the Depression-era South and in the dynamics of race and gender on display in Christmas's lynching" (69).

This emphasis on white women in the quotes of both Grimm and Sullivan is significant as there is a long tradition of using perceived threats to white women to justify violence against Black men. Wiegman writes that lynching became a "primary disciplinary tool" for perceived offences of Black people following the American Civil War (Wiegman 453). Over time, Wiegman writes, a narrative featuring "the African American male in the role of mythically endowed rapist, with the white woman as the flower of civilization he intends to violently pluck, and the white male as the heroic interceptor who restores order by thwarting this black phallic insurgence" developed (453-454). Wiegman names D. W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* as the classic example of this narrative. It contrasts "the glory and order of the Old South" with the "devastation and ruin wrought by the Civil War and its aftermath", leading to "massive black corruption" in which Black men lay "sexual claim to white women" (454). Interestingly, a dramatisation of Thomas H. Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, which inspired Griffith's film, came to Oxford, Faulkner's home town,

seven weeks after Patton was lynched (Blotner B115-116).

Fascism in *Light in August*

Going by the first of the mobilising passions described by Paxton, fascist action requires the presence of a perceived overwhelming crisis that can not be solved by any traditional means (Paxton 219). The previous paragraphs have established the link between the act of lynching and the supposed threat of Black men to white Americans. Based on his castration of Christmas and his subsequent comment (Faulkner 345), it seems clear that, to Grimm, this supposed threat serves as the crisis. Faulkner explicitly states that Grimm believes "that the white race is superior to any and all other races" (335). What is strange, however, is that Grimm initially does not admit his true intentions regarding Christmas. When Grimm initially discusses Christmas's arrest with the local commander of the American Legion, Grimm claims to stand for law and order. "'We got to preserve order,' he said. 'We must let the law take its course'" (335). Additionally, he says that "It is the right of no civilian to sentence a man to death" (335). In this passage, Grimm contrasts with the previously discussed Sullivan, who asked a deputy to shoot Patton and publicly whipped a crowd of civilians into a mob, which he then used to storm the jail (Blotner B114). Ultimately, Grimm's true colours shine through. Christmas is already incapacitated by the time Grimm assaults him with a butcher knife (345), so he can not genuinely claim that he only meant to preserve order by stopping a wanted man from escaping. Moreover, Grimm falsely states that he castrates Christmas to stop him from harassing white women (345), so he claims to punish Christmas for a sexual crime, of which Christmas is not accused. Therefore, Grimm responds to a supposed threat that Christmas poses to white people.

Atkinson argues that the addition of Grimm near the end of the book seems strange but that it makes sense if Grimm is read "in relation to the discourse around fascism

developing in the cultural context of the novel" (Atkinson 149-150). Atkinson explains that Faulkner presents Grimm as "an inevitable product of the social disruption depicted in the text" (149-150). Joanna Burden, whom Christmas killed, and her family have been a source of conflict in the town of Jefferson. When she dies, however, she becomes a "violated white woman" and a symbol of social upheaval in the community (150). This is ironic, considering that earlier in the book, it is made clear that the community considers her a stranger and a Northern foreigner whose family moved to Jefferson after the Civil War. Additionally, she is accused of being a "Yankee" and a lover of Black people (Faulkner 33). Moreover, when workers at the planing mill see the Burden estate burning, they joke about it, with one of them recalling how people used to say that the house "ought to be burned, and with a little human fat to start it good" (35).

Atkinson writes that Christmas is not just a source of social upheaval in the eyes of the community because he kills Burden; his ambiguous racial identity contributes as well. The effect of Christmas's racial ambiguity is first visible in the novel's second chapter when Christmas arrives at the planing mill. The narrator says that all the workers are looking at him, taking note of his dirty clothes and "dark, insufferable face" (22). After learning his name, the foreman asks the superintendent: "Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas" (23). In this passage, Christmas is still considered white by the people around him, but it is made clear that Christmas seems strange to them. According to the people of Mottstown, Christmas is generally perceived as a white man, but he angers people by behaving neither as a white nor a Black man (259-260). To Atkinson, this section represents how Christmas does not conform to "social expectations", which "presents an irreconcilable contradiction" to the community (Atkinson 150-151). The resulting disruption of the social order then allows for Grimm's violence (151).

To the white community, the supposed crisis at hand in *Light in August* appears to be

the corruption that Black people bring to white society. As discussed, Burden is martyred by the community when she dies. Aside from Grimm's comment after mutilating Christmas, this is perhaps best visible when the sheriff of Mottstown speaks to a crowd and states that Christmas will get a fair trial, to which a member of the crowd responds: "Fair, hell. Did he give that white woman a fair trial?" (Faulkner 263). The sheriff claims that he does not sympathise with Black murderers either but that his duty is more important (263). This section reveals that there is a narrative among the community that the group has been victimised by a Black man and that Christmas does not deserve a fair trial. This is in line with the third passion that underlies fascist action, as measures against perceived enemies are justified using the belief that the group is a victim (Paxton 219).

Paxton's fourth and fifth mobilising passion behind fascist action, the fear of the group's decline under corrupting forces and a desire for a "purer" community (Paxton 219), are both visible in the way Grimm sexualises Christmas's acts. Grimm castrates Christmas and subsequently says that he will no longer be able to harass white women (Faulkner 345). In doing so, Grimm implies that Christmas committed sexual crimes, which is false. In the narrative described by Wiegman, the corruption that Black men supposedly bring results in sexual relations between Black men and white women (Wiegman 454). By castrating Christmas, Grimm means to remove a source of this presumed corruption, and he believes that he purifies the community.

Based on the previous paragraphs, it seems clear that *Light in August* depicts Grimm as a white supremacist. white supremacism in itself, however, does not constitute fascism, though it can form a solid basis for it. Therefore, it is necessary to determine how Grimm's behaviour translates to his interactions with the group. In fascism, according to Paxton, individuals are inferior to the group, and their rights come second to their duties to said group (Paxton 219). In addition to being a white supremacist, Grimm is also convinced that "the

American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men" (Faulkner 335). This belief manifests itself several times throughout the chapter. For example, Grimm attacked a former soldier whose anti-French sentiment he interpreted as anti-American (334). This ex-soldier, to Grimm, betrayed the group. Additionally, Grimm finds it difficult to believe that the sheriff could be home when the community is supposedly threatened by Christmas and asks a member of his mob: "Now? What's he doing at home now?" (337). When he learns that the sheriff is eating, Grimm says, with a "cold and detached expression", "at home", and "Eating" (337). It appears that Grimm condemns the sheriff for not being sufficiently devoted and daring to go home. This all shows that Grimm has extreme responses to what he considers a betrayal of the community; he fights the soldier who, in his eyes, insults the United States. Grimm also holds the sheriff who dares to go home in contempt. As such, Faulkner presents him as zealous in his devotion to the group.

Aspects of Paxton's sixth passion, "the need for authority by natural chiefs", which leads to one leader "who alone is capable of incarnating the group's historical destiny" (Paxton 219), are relevant for Percy Grimm. Grimm claims that he does not necessarily want to be in charge when he speaks with the commander of the American Legion: "'But if they dont want me to command, that's all right too. I'll be second, if they say. Or a sergeant or a corporal.' And he meant it. It was not vain glory that he wanted. He was too sincere" (Faulkner 336). Still, it is clear that Grimm wants a position of authority, and when he becomes the leader of his mob, The narrator says that "he had gained his original end: he was now in command" (336). These examples reveal that Grimm considers himself a natural leader, not a follower. Additionally, Grimm manages to get his followers devoted to him through manipulation. When his followers leave for the night, Grimm does not protest and instead watches them "coldly" (338). Grimm does not realise it, but because his followers feel that their devotion does not equal that of their leader, "they would return tomorrow if just

to show him" (338). As such, the followers' devotion is fed by guilt, not necessarily a belief in the group's destiny.

Paxton's seventh passion, the instincts of the leader being superior to "abstract and universal reason" (Paxton 219), holds true considering Grimm's reputation in the town: "the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs" (Faulkner 339). Furthermore, Grimm's men "were almost at the pitch where they might die for him, if occasion rose" (339). Again, it seems that the people are specifically devoted to Grimm. What complicates the matter is that Grimm has not yet revealed his true nature. Officially, Grimm is there to keep law and order, specifically to stop civilians from sentencing "a man to death" (335). He claims to be enforcing the government's stance (336). If anything, Grimm argues that he is trying to keep the people in line rather than riling them up against Christmas or the people who shelter him from the public. According to Paxton's views regarding the difference between fascism and authoritarianism (217), this would make Grimm more akin to an authoritarian.

Grimm's relationship with the community is further complicated by Paxton's point about the beauty of violence (219). Faulkner describes the response of the followers to Grimm's mutilation of Christmas as follows: "When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit" (Faulkner 345). This passage reveals several things. First, Grimm's followers do not join him in his murder of Christmas. They do not stop him either. One of the followers is shocked and vomits. As such, Grimm seems more willing to commit violence for the sake of the group than the others. Moreover, aside from Grimm's reaction, the only response that Faulkner informs his readers of does not reflect that violence in the name of the community is

beautiful. However, as no one stops Grimm, it is possible to interpret his murder of Christmas as a tool to preserve a white supremacist system.

Along with the beauty of violence, Paxton discusses "the efficacy of will" for the group's sake (Paxton 219). In this aspect, Grimm also distinguishes himself from the others. The efficacy of Grimm's will is visible throughout the chase scene in *Light in August*. When Grimm realises that Christmas has escaped, he reacts "definite and immediate" (Faulkner 340). He orders one of his followers to sound the fire alarm and starts chasing Christmas (340-341). In one motion, Grimm holsters his pistol, commandeers a bicycle, and mounts it (341). Cycling after Christmas, Grimm seems possessed by "certitude, the blind and untroubled faith in the rightness and infallibility of his actions" (341). The chase scene shows again how zealously devoted Grimm is. Additionally, Grimm appears commanding and physically competent. In his fight with the former soldier, he loses, but does not give up and needs bystanders to hold him back, and later wears the scars with pride (334). It is interesting that Faulkner first chose to let the narrator reveal that Grimm was unimpressive in his youth, but also presents him as strong-willed and resilient. As such Grimm has transformed into a champion for white supremacists.

Finally, there is the passion concerning "the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law" (Paxton 220). This passion is not only found in Grimm. While Grimm is the only person who is seen physically harming Christmas after the escape, it needs to be noted that no one, except for Gail Hightower (Faulkner 344-345), attempts to intervene. Furthermore, Grimm is not the only character who openly desires to harm Christmas. There is the crowd in Mottstown (263), and Christmas's grandfather calls for a lynch mob (313). Because Grimm is the only character who directly contributes to the murder of Christmas, it is possible to interpret Grimm as the instrument used to preserve the chosen people's right to dominate others. Remembering Faulkner's

comment about Grimm being a fascist Galahad and saving the white race (Faulkner qtd in. Blotner 202), it appears that Faulkner envisions American fascism as a tool to keep the racist status quo intact.

In short, it is fair to describe Grimm as a fascist. Thematically, he ticks many boxes. Grimm is a white supremacist and a nationalist. His militarism is remarkable, even more so, as he seemed quite useless before he found the military. Crucially, he means for white Americans, his group of chosen people, to dominate others through violent means. However, Grimm's engagement with the community limits Faulkner's depiction of fascism. Grimm's actions are authoritarian, but he does not try to rally the community against Christmas or the people keeping him from being lynched. This tactic gains him the respect of the town and his men, but it shows that the community is primarily attracted to Grimm's authority and charisma. Ultimately Grimm is the only person who actively participates in the castration and murder of Christmas. This does not mean that clearing the supposed corruption that Christmas represents from the community is an unpopular ambition. While Grimm's interactions with the community are more authoritarian than fascist in nature, the notion that Grimm is a tool used to preserve the status quo shows that conservatives may be inclined to form an alliance with fascists. What Grimm reveals about Faulkner's vision of American fascism is that fascism in the United States can be found in the American white supremacist tradition and could be used to assert or reassert existing hierarchies.

Chapter Three: *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Agriculture Sector in California

Introduction

The Grapes of Wrath follows the members of the Joad family and some of their associates as they make their way from Oklahoma to California so they can find a better life. Additionally, Steinbeck uses chapters outside of the main story to contextualise the novel. In one of these chapters, the narrator explains the process that causes the need for families like the Joads to move. Typically, the landowners send representatives to speak with the tenants. Some "owner men" are kind and hate what they do, some are angry because they do not want to be cruel, and others "were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold" (Steinbeck 36). According to the narrator, the owners explain that they are enslaved by banks and finance companies. These banks and companies are described as monsters with machines. Meanwhile, the land that the tenants work on becomes poorer as it is only used to grow cotton, and while the tenants wish they could rotate the crops, the owners tell them that it is too late (36-37). The owners argue that the monsters are stronger than people, and though a person can own land if they are capable of feeding themselves and paying taxes, the monsters require constant growth and sustenance from profits and interests (37). As a result, the tenants need to be replaced by a man with a tractor (38).

As the banks and finance companies are portrayed as monsters owning people and menacing farmers using machines, the novel takes an anti-capitalist stance early in the text. The novel favours workers, which is a theme that is perhaps best summed up by the Joads' matriarch after she is unable to buy the necessary food supplies with the wages seven people earned: "'I'm learnin' one thing good', she said. 'Learnin' it all the time, ever' day. If you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones'" (444). Additionally, in a conversation with her son Tom, the novel's protagonist, she argues that rich people are weak and will "die out", whereas other people can take a beating

and “keep-a comin’”, which makes them tough (330). Moreover, she predicts that a “different time’s comin’” (330). Here, the novel presents the case that the weakness of the rich will be their downfall because they can not stop other people.

Fittingly, the novel dedicates a chapter to explaining the fears of “the great owners”. The narrator explains that they strike out against a bigger government, labour unity, taxes, and “plans” in response to their nervosity caused by: “the beginning change” (175). As the Joads are driven off away and journey to California, they continuously encounter attempts to thwart workers’ attempts to make a living, such as deputies claiming that squatters’ camps are a health risk and subsequently burning them down (279-280), and committing acts of violence against strikers (452). During the novel’s climax, actions against improved labour rights lead to the death of Jim Casy, a former preacher who travels to California alongside the Joads, when he is accused of being a “red son-of-a-bitch” (456).

In this chapter, I will discuss *The Grapes of Wrath* in the context of Steinbeck’s views on fascism in 1930s California, specifically in relation to the great owners that he mentions in his book. Steinbeck’s views matter because he, like Faulkner, envisioned a form of fascism native to his own surroundings. This vision is related to the power of big business, which is why I will discuss the workings of a relevant example in the form of The Associated Farmers of California, which, according to Kulik and Pichardo Almanzar, had fascist elements. Additionally, I will look at Steinbeck’s thoughts on fascism in California, as well as mass movements.

Steinbeck on Fascism and Mass Movements

Based on Steinbeck’s other writing, as discussed in Williams’s article, it appears that Steinbeck has clear opinions on the owners and other Californians who respond to the migrants. I have previously discussed Steinbeck’s letter in which he compared fascism in

Spain to attacks on workers in California, stating that Californian towns have not yet been bombed, but that tear gas has been used in Union Hall and workers' homes (Steinbeck, qtd in Williams 49). This letter is not the sole occasion where Steinbeck would relate the agriculture business in 1930s California to fascism. Williams writes that Steinbeck was concerned about the economic and political power of the alliance of corporate farms with "banks, newspaper publishers, and politicians" (Williams 49). Furthermore, Steinbeck worried that the state of the agriculture sector in California threatened democracy as it required "the creation and maintenance at any cost of a peon class", which, according to him, meant that "California agriculture is economically unsound under a democracy" (Steinbeck, qtd. in Williams 50). Moreover, Steinbeck claimed that "Fascistic methods are more numerous, more powerfully applied, and more openly practiced in California than any other place in the United States" (Steinbeck qtd. in Williams 50).

Williams writes that "Steinbeck's understanding of fascism was rooted in an analysis of mass politics that he developed in the early 1930s" (52). According to this theory, certain conditions could transform individuals into a "group entity"; or a phalanx (52). Steinbeck writes that "when acting as a group, men do not partake of their ordinary natures at all" (Steinbeck, qtd. in Williams 52). Moreover, he attributes this theory to, among other things, "the impulse which has suddenly made Germany overlook the natures of its individuals and become what it has" (Steinbeck, qtd. in Williams 52). Relevant impulses are "emotions of which the unit [individual] man is incapable. Emotions of war, of migration, of hatred, of fear" (Steinbeck, qtd. in Williams 52). According to Steinbeck: "Hitler did not create the present phalanx in Germany, he merely interprets it" (Steinbeck, qtd. in Williams 53). This means that someone like Hitler can steer a phalanx without being the cause of its creation (Williams 53).

Williams claims that fascism, to Steinbeck, "thus involved a kind of mass

mobilization rooted in emotional and destructive impulses that overwhelmed individual identity" and believed business interests to be manipulating the phalanx into serving their cause (53). Furthermore, smaller farms might be inclined to treat workers better but still require aid from financiers, and large farms hold enough power over the media to influence small farms (55). Additionally, "If the terrorism and reduction of human rights, the floggings, murder by deputies, kidnappings, and refusal of trial by jury are necessary to our economic security", Steinbeck argues, "it is further submitted that California democracy is rapidly dwindling away" (Steinbeck, qtd. in Williams 55). According to Williams, Steinbeck portrayed the migrants as a phalanx pushed towards California in *The Grapes of Wrath* (Williams 57-58). Additionally, he depicted the "mob mobilized by proto-fascist business interests" as a phalanx as well, although this phalanx is driven by fear of the migrants (58).

The California Agriculture Business

In the theoretical framework, I discussed that Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik found that the Associated Farmers of California used fascist methods to oppress farm labourers (Kulik & Pichardo Almanzar 163). In the novel, Steinbeck names one of the organisations fighting against workers' interests the "Farmers' Association" (Steinbeck 346). Based on the name of the organisation alone, it appears that Steinbeck did the bare minimum to distinguish his fictional association from the real-life Associated Farmers of California. Therefore, exploring the methods of the Associated Farmers can provide valuable insight into the oppressive acts directed against the workers in Steinbeck's novel.

Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik write that the rank and file of the Associated Farmers "consisted primarily of white rural individuals" who worked alongside law enforcement And that the organisation used citizens in a populist fashion, which distinguished the organisation from others, and allowed it to "unleash a reign of terror" against workers (Kulik and Pichardo

Almanzar 107). Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik describe these efforts as “perhaps the most coordinated campaign of vigilantism in American history” and claim that the lack of grip on the labour strikes of the authorities was used to justify the vigilantes (107). While the Associated Farmers organised its own citizen groups, it also incorporated or allied with pre-existing vigilante groups. These groups were often linked to organisations such as the American Legion, of which several members occupied important positions within the Associated Farmers (107-108).

Californian citizens supported the Associated Farmers for a number of reasons. First, there is the interaction between industry and corporations. Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik write that citizen support was especially prominent in areas where people relied on one or a few corporations. Communities in rural California depended on the success of the agriculture industry, which meant that setbacks in the sector would affect a large portion of the community (108-109). Second, people feared economic retaliation for not supporting vigilantism. Smaller business owners and farmers depended on support from stronger forces, such as financiers, for their own livelihood. Small farmers also benefited from low labour costs as others determined prices (109). Third, there were ideological motivations behind support for vigilantism. According to Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, rural Californians “have a long history of conservatism as manifested in racist, xenophobic actions” (109). The Associated Farmers used perceived threats against the “way of life” of rural Californians to recruit citizens to protect the organisation’s interests.

Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik claim that the Associated Farmers essentially “sought to utilize institutional channels in noninstitutional ways; to ignore the limiting factor of institutional channels (its fixed set of standards and rules) despite the active oversight of federal and state agencies” (112). The authors state that the vigilantes were deputised and that local authorities were willing to go along with the “constitutionally improper behavior” of the

Associated Farmers (112). Additionally, the Associated Farmers would "write, finance, campaign for, and pass local anti–picketing ordinances", leading to a reduction of strikers' rights (112). It also attempted to sway public opinion in its favour by leaning into patriotism, anti-communism, and a false image according to which the Associated Farmers was largely made up of "family farmers" (112). In addition to this, the organisation invested in an intelligence wing to collect and distribute information. It gathered information on communists, labour organisers, and people "they believed to be prominent Communist agitators" (112-113). Moreover, the Associated Farmers attempted to reach the public using pamphlets, bulletins, press releases, and news reports, as well as radio broadcasts meant to educate people on communist parties and how to break strikes (113). The Associated Farmers also worked hard to communicate its own message using "speakers" who were given specific information (113).

Fascism in *The Grapes of Wrath*

In the following paragraphs, I will analyse *The Grapes of Wrath* using the mobilising passions from *The Anatomy of Fascism*, starting with the crisis (Paxton 219). Steinbeck does not hide what drives the owners. The narrator describes "the great owners" as "nervous, sensing a change, knowing nothing of the nature of the change" (Steinbeck 175). Additionally, the narrator lists what the owners target: "the immediate thing, the widening government, the growing labor unity; striking at new taxes, at plans" (175). These passages reveal that the owners, sensing a change and not liking it, take measures to secure their own wealth, manage labourers, and limit the extent to which the government can interfere with their activities. In the next section, the narrator identifies the source of the owners' nervosity, "a hunger in a stomach, multiplied a million times" (175). This hunger is not limited to the dimension of food; the people feel a widespread hunger for joy and security as well.

Additionally, people's muscles and minds experience a desire to work, learn, and build a life (175). The narrator notes that the workers' feelings are "multiplied a million times", thereby emphasising that the workers are legion while the owners are few. Moreover, the narrator comments on humans' ability to grow: "For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments" (175). The owners, however, limit people's development. The narrator compares the owners to bombers, with the strikers as targets. "Fear the time when the bombs stop falling while the bombers live—for every bomb is proof that the spirit has not died" (176). It seems that the crisis at hand for the owners is the spirit of the workers.

Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik note how the Associated Farmers used anti-communist propaganda, which could explain the anti-communism that *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts. In the novel, this sentiment manifests itself as a sentiment against more egalitarian policies for workers. People who support such policies are typically signified as "reds". The definition of red is perhaps best visible in a conversation recalled by Tom's co-worker Timothy between an owner named Hines and his employee. The employee asks what "goddamn reds" are, to which Hines replies: "A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're paying twenty-five" (350). According to this definition, reds want higher wages, but the term is, for example, also used for picketers (448). Moreover, the employee states that he and everybody else would rather be paid thirty cents than twenty-five. According to Hines's definition, they would all be reds (350). As such, it appears reds, in the narrative of *The Grapes of Wrath*, is a buzzword used to dismiss others. As the owners fear a fighting spirit among labourers, they rally the Californian citizens against Oklahomans and "reds" to get them on their side. In order to avoid overgeneralising Californians, it is necessary to mention that when Steinbeck writes about the people of California and their hostility toward migrants

and the left, he means the opposition encountered in the story.

Additionally, *The Grapes of Wrath* portrays hostility against Oklahomans, or "Okies", in particular as a tool to direct vigilantism. When Tom Joad first learns about the term Okie, a man tells him the following: "Well, Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means that you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum" (Steinbeck 241). The man discusses how there is no space for Oklahomans in California, claiming that everything is already owned, and states that "them people that owns it is gonna hang on to it if they got ta kill ever'body in the worl' to do it. An' they're scairt, an' that makes 'em mad" (241). In this passage, it becomes clear that Californians fear losing what they own, which causes them to turn on Oklahomans, who have become vilified by virtue of their former place of living. In short, the Californians see the Oklahomans as a threat to their way of life.

Next are the primacy of the group, the belief in the group's victimhood, and the right of the chosen people to dominate others (Paxton 219), which are all visible in the anti-Oklahoman sentiment depicted in the novel's twenty-first chapter. The narrator states that: "In the West there was panic when the migrants multiplied on the highways" (332). People fear for their property and see hunger and desire in the eyes of the migrants. In response, "the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad, as a man must do before he fights" (332-333). What the narrator claims here is that victimhood is necessary to justify violence, a sensation that rural Californians experience during the events of the novel. The "invaders" are not simply a problem because they migrate. In the eyes of the gathered men, the "goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate sexual maniacs. These goddamned Okies are thieves. They'll steal anything. They've got no sense of property rights" (333). Additionally, they are considered filthy and bringers of disease (333). In this passage, the novel confronts its readers with the lengths to which the Oklahomans are

dehumanised, which is necessary to justify the response of the defenders. The defenders require an enemy that they can consider inferior in preparation for their Darwinian struggle against said enemy. The novel details how “The local people whipped themselves into a mold of cruelty. Then they formed units, squads, and armed them—armed them with clubs, with gas, with guns” (333). As such, concerned citizens are consumed into a collective actor. This is in line with Steinbeck’s phalanx theory; as the collective actor operates based on assumed emotions of fear and hatred regarding the migrants.

The fourth and fifth of fascism’s underlying passions, a fear of the group’s decline and the desire for a purer community (Paxton 219), are both visible in the reception of the Oklahomans in California. At one point in the story, a policeman confronts Tom’s mother. He says that the family can not stay and tells her: “If you’re here tomorra this time I’ll run you in. We don’t want none of you settlin’ down here” (Steinbeck 251). He makes clear that the Joads are unwelcome because they are from Oklahoma. “You’re in California, an’ we don’t want you goddamn Okies settlin’ down” (251). The policeman is willing to use violence to prevent Oklahomans from integrating into the community. Later in the novel, people observing the family at a service station have the following to say: “Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain’t human. A human being wouldn’t live like they do. A human being couldn’t stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain’t a hell of a lot better than gorillas” (260). Again, the dehumanisation of the Oklahomans is visible. The observers then conclude that Oklahomans can withstand their journey because they are “so goddamn dumb” and “don’t know any better” (260). Based on this exchange, it becomes clear that the migrants are not just unwanted; they are seen as an inferior form of human. In the chapter detailing the panic in the West, the defenders, referring to the Oklahomans, say: “We can’t have them, in the schools. They’re strangers. How’d you like to have your sister go out with one of ’em?” (333). It is clear that the rural Californians dread that the

Oklahomans integrate into the group. Furthermore, the novel depicts law enforcement fighting migrants as if they are disease-carrying vermin. The deputies raid Hoovervilles where migrants live, claiming to represent the Department of Health to justify burning down the camp (279).

The remaining mobilising passions outlined by Paxton, those concerning the relationship with the leader (Paxton 219-220), complicate the depiction of fascism in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Paxton's point about the authority of natural leaders, which results in one leader who guides the chosen people to their destiny (219), is not visible in Steinbeck's novel, as there is no leader. By extension, this means that Paxton's point about the superiority of the leader's instincts is also not visible. Looking at what Steinbeck wrote about people like Hitler directing the phalanx and what Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik discussed regarding the propaganda of the Associated Farmers of California, the owners, as Steinbeck calls them in his book, direct the phalanx. In this chapter, I previously discussed that the owners act against workers and government interference to secure their own wealth, and based on what Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik write about the propaganda machine of the Associated Farmers, it is conceivable that the owners use a fascist narrative to gain public support by pitting Californians against migrants and reds. However, they do not mean to lead a group of chosen people into their historical destiny.

Based on the narrator's description of the owner's goals in the chapter about the panic in the West, it seems more accurate to call them opportunists who noticed that fascist methods could further their agenda. Families, who had previously lived off a plot of land, are pushed westwards by industrial farming (332). They become migrants, and as was mentioned earlier in this chapter, they are seen as invaders by the Californians (332-333). Due to the influx of migrants, more people are willing to work for less money, resulting in lower wages, which is beneficial for the owners, who send "handbills to bring more people in" (333-334).

The narrator provides another example of how the owners run their businesses. One owner buys a cannery and lowers the price of fruit while the price of canned products stays the same, resulting in small farmers losing their businesses. These businesses are subsequently bought by owners while the small farmers join the crowd looking for work (334). Steinbeck's novel makes abundantly clear that the owners are the enemy of the people. However, the narrative that migrants and reds are the enemy leaves them in power. According to the narrator, however, this method is unsustainable: "And the companies, the banks, worked at their own doom and they did not know it" (334). The narrator explains that "the line between hunger and anger is a thin line" and names examples of products that the owners spend money on instead of wages: "gas, for guns, for agents and spies, for blacklists, for drilling" (334). Ultimately, the owners are trying to become more wealthy and powerful by oppressing workers.

Finally, there is the matter of violence and strength of will, and if these, in the eyes of the people who, according to Steinbeck, followed a fascist cause, are virtuous. Two examples where the reader is directly informed of violence aimed at perceived agitators come to mind. The first example is a deputy trying to shoot Floyd, a man whom the family encounters in a Hooverville. The deputy misses and shoots off the fingers of a woman standing nearby after Tom trips him. Jim Casy, the former preacher accompanying the Joads, then kicks him unconscious (311). This section of the novel shows that deputies are more than willing to use violence, though the deputy fails to use it to achieve his goal. In the second example, a man named George murders Casy. Before he dies, Casy says: "You fellas don' know what you're doin'. You're helpin' to starve kids" (456). His murderer replies: "Shut up, you red son-of-a-bitch" (456). Casy's emphasis on the starving children, and George calling him red, means that the murder is politically motivated. As such, the violence serves the cause in George's eyes. While his companion appears shocked, the killer believes the murder was justified:

"Serve the son-of-a-bitch-right" (456). Tom then kills George. In both examples, the perpetrators do not appear heroic. The deputy falls, misses his shot, and is knocked out (311). George attacks Casy with a pick handle before Casy can feasibly defend himself as he is still trying to reason with his killer (456).

In conclusion, *The Grapes of Wrath* is primarily an anti-capitalist novel. This anti-capitalism is particularly visible in the book's handling of the relationship between the rich owners and the poor workers. According to Tom Joad's mother, the rich are weak and unkind, while the poor are tough and helpful. Additionally, the novel makes abundantly clear that the owners fear the power of the workers. However, it is in the measures that the rich take against the workers where the novel's fascist elements are visible as the owners use violent measures to suppress any attempts to improve labour rights. Additionally, the novel depicts the dehumanisation of the Oklahoman migrants. This dehumanisation is necessary for the people whom Steinbeck calls the defenders to rally against the migrants. The collective actor that the defenders become represents Steinbeck's phalanx theory.

Chapter Four: *It Can't Happen Here* and an American Dictator

Introduction

Of the three novels discussed in this thesis, Sinclair Lewis's 1935 book *It Can't Happen Here* engages with fascism most explicitly. The book's premise is that a fascist dictatorship can happen in the United States. Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, the novel's dictator, runs on a platform centred around a philosophy called "The Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men" (Lewis 61-64). Of these points, three are particularly appealing to voters; a promise of increased taxes on the rich, a condemnation of Black people, which "elevates a dispossessed farmer or a factory worker" by providing someone to look down on, and a supposed promise of "the average toiler" receiving five thousand dollars or more a year (86).

When he becomes president, Windrip addresses the public, stating that the "*real* New Deal" has begun, takes the White House, and incorporates the Minute Men, the militia supporting him, into the Military and issues them automatic pistols, rifles, bayonets, and machine guns (134). Additionally, Windrip demands "complete control of legislation and execution" (134). Furthermore, the Supreme Court may not block him (134). When both Houses of Congress reject his demands, Windrip proclaims martial law and has the Minute Men arrest more than a hundred members of Congress (134). He also gets rid of others who might pose a threat, including journalists, the army's chief of staff, and his former ally Bishop Prang, who was unsatisfied with Windrip's lack of attention to Christianity (136-139). After this, Windrip claims that "powerful and secret enemies of American principles", supposedly an alliance of Wall Street and Soviet Russia, want to take action against his presidency, so he installs a military dictatorship until the crisis is over, which he promises will only take a few months (139). In addition to this, Windrip abolishes all political parties, save "The American Corporate State and Patriotic Party" (154), and starts using concentration camps (215).

Additionally, Windrip installs a corporate state similar to that of Mussolini's Italy

(154). According to Paxton, this would mean that parliament is replaced by a chamber of corporations that runs the branches of the economy. While the Italian corporate state promised to represent both employers and employees, it was, in reality, directed by "businessmen" (Paxton 137). As such, Windrip's corporate state serves business interests. Doremus Jessup, the protagonist of *It Can't Happen Here*, also comes to this conclusion after losing his business "once it seemed worthwhile to the Big Business which Corpoism represented to get rid of him" (Lewis 307). While the narrator states that Doremus does not believe in a "dictatorship of the bankers and utility-owners", the text also makes clear that Doremus needs to keep telling himself that "stoutly" (307). As a result, it appears that the novel predicts such a dictatorship.

Ellen Strenski calls the prediction of fascism in *It Can't Happen Here* "alarming but limited", pointing out that Windrip is a career politician, does not execute congressional representatives, and, aside from his advisor and a military presence, has a conventional inner circle (Strenski 428). However, this does not mean that Strenski has not found value in the book's treatment of fascism. Strenski writes that the novel's handling of Windrip's supporters is useful and portrays why people like Windrip appeal to those who feel ignored by the system (431-432). This point is crucial, as analysing the regime's supporters may provide insight into what drives the regime's rank and file. Using the mobilising passions behind fascist action that Paxton describes in *The Anatomy of Fascism* can, therefore, provide insight into what makes Windrip so appealing and, by extension, how fascism could appeal to Americans. First, however, I will provide context regarding some of the influences on Lewis's novel.

Lewis's Inspirations

According to Frederick Betz and Jörg Thuneke, Lewis produced his 1935 novel in four months (Betz & Thuneke 36). Betz and Thuneke suggest that Lewis "must have felt that he had no time to waste" in writing a warning against the threat of American fascism, which was becoming more of a possibility at the time (36). They write that Roosevelt's first New Deal was threatened by American fascists influenced by fascists in Italy and Germany but that the more substantial threat came from demagogues like Louisiana senator Huey Long and Father Coughlin (36). The former had a large amount of power in his home state where he, according to Betz and Thuneke, almost completely controlled "the legislature, the judiciary, public works, business, as well as guaranteed election results, even though a majority of Louisianans enthusiastically supported Long anyway" (36). Long and Coughlin criticised Roosevelt's attempts to deal with the Great Depression, and "each had founded organizations ostensibly to deal with the economic and social problems of the time" (36-37). They were considered to be a possible threat to Roosevelt (37).

Betz and Thuneke claim that Lewis's writing process was largely influenced by the events going on in Europe and the information he received from his own social circle (36). They consider Lewis's then-wife, Dorothy Thompson, who interviewed Hitler, compared Hitler to American figures and organisations, and "crusaded unremittingly against Nazi Germany in numerous articles, lectures, and books", the greatest influence on *It Can't Happen Here* as Lewis would have learned "about the origins and rise, the theory and practice of the Nazis" (38). They suggest that Thompson also influenced Lewis's perception of domestic politics as she studied and wrote about the New Deal, as well as the alternatives offered by socialists, communists, Coughlin, and Long, the last of whom she interviewed (38-39). Additionally, Betz and Thuneke credit George Seldes, the couple's neighbour, for supplying Lewis with information. Seldes authored *Sawdust Caesar: The Untold Story of*

Mussolini and Fascism, was expelled from Italy after criticising Mussolini, and, like Thompson, he had worked as a correspondent in Berlin (39). They note how Seldes recalled Lewis questioning him about Mussolini and fascism, as well as fascism in the United States (39). Seldes also likened the "impatience with parliamentary government, economic unrest, disillusionment, discontent, and even hunger" in the United States to the circumstances that preceded Mussolini and Hitler's respective rises to power but that there was not yet an American Führer (39-40). Betz and Thuneke claim that Long would have been the prime candidate "by consensus" (40). Paxton states that Long was "frequently labeled fascist at the time" but that the label of "share-the-wealth demagogue" is more accurate (Paxton 201). While Paxton does not consider Long a fascist, it is important to note that he was commonly associated with fascism in the discourse of the time.

Fascism in *It Can't Happen Here*

The first of the mobilising passions in *The Anatomy of Fascism* is a crisis beyond the reach of any traditional means that motivates fascist action (Paxton 219). It is possible to identify this crisis in Windrip's platform. In the first of his fifteen points, Windrip states that all of the nation's finance "shall be under the absolute control of a Federal Central Bank, owned by the government and conducted by a board appointed by the president" (Lewis 61). This board will subsequently nationalise "all mines, oilfields, water power, public utilities, transportation, and communication", all for "the Profit of the Whole People" (61). By dedicating this point to the economy, Windrip tries to appeal to people by telling them what he thinks they want to hear, that he will be a president for them, not the rich and powerful. As Windrip claims that he will install a system that serves "the Whole People", he implies that such a system is not yet in place.

Moreover, in his fifth point, Windrip claims that he means to limit the amount of

money an individual is allowed to earn per year, as well as a person's "accumulated fortune" and received inheritances (62). In doing so, Windrip accentuates his supposed goal of being a president for "the Whole People", not the elite. Windrip presents two more economic points. In his eleventh point, Windrip claims that other projects to combat poverty, such as Huey Long's proposal to provide every family with five-thousand dollars a year, will be honoured (63). According to point fourteen, all bonuses promised to soldiers will be paid in full (64). Based on these points, the crisis that Windrip addresses is the financial struggle of the American people. This makes sense as Lewis wrote his book when Roosevelt's tactics for dealing with the Great Depression were being criticised by figures such as Huey Long and Father Coughlin (Betz & Thuneke 36).

In the second of the mobilising passions behind fascist action, Paxton details that the group comes first, and the individual comes second (Paxton 219). First, however, it is necessary to talk about the third and fourth passion underlying fascist action, the experience of the group's victimhood which justifies actions against internal and external enemies, and "the fear of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences" (219). In the following paragraphs, I will discuss these passions by analysing the groups that Windrip's regime targets.

Firstly, the group targets left-wing politics. According to the second of his fifteen points, Windrip will appoint a "commission" to determine which labour unions should be allowed and eliminate "pretended labor organisations, whether 'Company Unions,' or 'Red Unions,' controlled by Communists and the so-called 'Third International'" (Lewis 61). In the third point, Windrip promises that "Private Initiative and the Right to Private Property" are guaranteed, in "contradistinction to the doctrines of Red Radicals" (61). Additionally, in his thirteenth point, Windrip details that people "advocating Communism, Socialism, or Anarchism, advocating refusal to enlist in any case of war, or advocating alliance with Russia

in any war whatsoever" will be tried for high treason and risk punishment ranging from a minimum sentence of twenty years of hard labour to the death penalty (63-64). The presence of this anti-left-wing sentiment is already clearly visible in the novel's first chapter, when Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, "veteran of a hundred campaigns against subversive Reds", proclaims that the country has gone "money-mad", with labour unions and workers propagandising higher income taxes so "that the thrifty and industrious have to pay for the shiftless ne'er-do-wells" (6).

In practice, the anti-left sentiment means that Windrip's supporters use violent tactics to deal with anything or anyone they consider left-wing. For instance, before Windrip is elected, the novel details how a group of around thirty Minute Men attack a small group of communists. When others come to the aid of the communists, the police step in and arrest the communist speaker and the speaker representing the newly created Jeffersonian Party who tried to help. Under Windrip's regime, measures against communists, or alleged communists, are enforced, most prominently in the case of Doremus, who is not a communist and, upon denying the accusation that he is, gets castor oil poured down his throat and is repeatedly hit with a steel fishing rod (300). When he is subsequently tried for the crime of being a communist and threatening the corporate state, he is sentenced to a minimum of seventeen years in a concentration camp and to be shot, though this last punishment is suspended (303). In this example, the victimhood of the group, the perceived threat to the corporate state from the left, and the subsequent measures taken in response to this sensation can be seen.

Secondly, Windrip's supporters target Jewish people. In the novel, Jewish people are central targets of conspiracies. For instance, quarry owner Francis Tasbrough accuses Jewish communists and Jewish financiers of working together to control the nation (15). The influential Bishop Prang expresses hope that a corporate system akin to Italy's will block "International Jewish Finance and, equally International Jewish Communism and Anarchism

and Atheism" from taking part in "all activity" (41). Windrip, as part of his fifteen points, claims to condemn discrimination against Jewish people and states that they will continue to be considered "fully Americanized", which is false as he adds that this will be the case "only so long as they continue to support our ideals" (62). Moreover, he later expresses the desire to attack the Jewish financiers who, according to him, enslave the American people (98).

A telling example of violence against Jewish people under Windrip's regime is the shooting of Rabbi Dr Vincent de Verez and Dr Willy Schmidt by Secretary of Education Hector Macgoblin. The drunk Macgoblin and his bodyguards show up at De Verez's house, provoke De Verez and Schmidt by repeatedly insulting them for being Jewish and accuse them of insulting "us – insulting the whole by God Corpo state and the M.M. uniform" when they dare talk back (168-170). Macgoblin then utters a command to kill the two men before shooting them himself. While De Verez survives the initial shooting and attempts to escape, he is shot at by Macgoblin's guards before being killed by a traffic police officer (170). The case goes to trial, where the honest account of "the Rabbi's Russian-Polish houseman" faces that of Macgoblin.

Predictably, De Verez and Schmidt are proven guilty of having been Jewish, and of working together to lure "innocent Corpos into De Verez's house and performing upon them what a scared little Jewish stool pigeon called 'ritual murders'" (170). In this kangaroo court, the shooting is deemed self-defence, and Macgoblin and his guard receive compliments. They are praised "for having defended the Commonwealth against human vampires and one of the most horrifying plots known in history" (170). This section of the novel encapsulates the narrative according to which Jewish people are considered natural enemies who need to be killed to end their plots against America. The ridiculous charges coupled with the fact that Schmidt was not Jewish reveal that the law only follows the words of the Corpos and not any proper standards.

Thirdly, the regime targets Black people. Windrip announces that he wants to prohibit Black people from "voting, holding public office, practicing law, medicine, or teaching in any class above the grade of grammar school" (63). They will also be heavily taxed and may only be recommended for a small pension if they have devoted at least forty-five years to labour by the age of sixty-five and are not deemed lazy.

Under Windrip's regime, Black people are subjected to violence. According to the narrator, Black people in Southern counties with a large Black population rise up. The narrator notes how their leaders claimed that they responded to massacres of Black people at the hands of Minute Men, but Macgoblin, then Secretary of Culture, calls this unpleasant and considers it unhelpful to mention it (157). This shows that violence against Black people is not condemned by the regime.

The hatred against Black people is fuelled by pitting white people against them. I already mentioned earlier in this chapter that the regime wants dispossessed farmers and factory workers to look down on Black people (86). In the novel, this is best visible in an interaction between Oscar "Shad" Ledue, Doremus's former handyman and prominent Minute Man, and the Black professor Dr Lionel Adams. Shad is irritated that Adams does not speak bad English, is furious because he looks like "a bronze statue", and cannot stand that Adams wears a tuxedo (320). When Adams mentions that Black people can be competent, Shad has his squad arrest him for inciting a rebellion and has him thrown in a concentration camp (320). This passage displays the rage that people like Shad feel when Black people do not act according to their role as designated by a racist society.

Noticeable in the instances discussed above is that it is not necessary to be left-wing or Jewish to be accused, as seen in the examples of Doremus and Schmidt. The group perceives threats from the left, Jewish people, and Black people. In response to these supposed threats, the group acts violently. As such, the ninth passion behind fascist action,

the right of the chosen people to dominate others without any restraints in a Darwinian struggle (Paxton 220), is also met in the novel. There are additional threats, such as untraditional roles for women and free speech. Tasbrough's son Malcolm expresses hope that Windrip will "put a damn quick stop to all this radicalism – all this free speech and libel of our most fundamental institutions" (Lewis 89). Moreover, the burning of "bad books" is prevalent in Windrip's America (219-221). According to Windrip, women employed outside of "such peculiarly feminine spheres of activity as nursing and beauty parlors" will "be assisted to return to their incomparably sacred duties as home-makers and as mothers of strong, honorable future Citizens of the Commonwealth" (63). The suspicion against perceived threats, and modern values displays the dread of the group's decline.

The primacy of the group over the individual, as well as the fifth passion behind fascism, the integration of a purer community (Paxton 219), are visible when the novel deals with the importance of conformity to the group. In the opening chapter, this can be seen when Brigadier General Herbert Y. Edgeways praises the beating of "no less than fifty-nine disloyal Red students" (Lewis 8). According to Edgeways, if someone does not share the beliefs of the group, it is good to beat it out of them.

The conformist sentiment is put into practice when Windrip abolishes the other parties. After doing so, Windrip jokes: "there are two parties, the Corporate and those who don't belong to any party at all, and so, to use a common phrase, are just out of luck!" (154). Here, Windrip expresses a sentiment according to which individuals are either in favour of the corporate state or against it. Windrip's "partisans" call themselves "Corporatists" or "Corpos". The narrator notes that while their opponents may call them "the Corpses", this term "would more correctly, and increasingly, have applied to their enemies" (154). If an individual is considered an opponent of the corporate state, it becomes increasingly likely that this individual ends up dead.

In line with the eighth passion behind fascist action, “the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will” for the sake of the group (Paxton 219), *It Can’t Happen Here* typically depicts Windrip’s supporters enjoying committing acts of violence against their perceived enemies. For example, When the Minute Men attack the small group of communists before the election, the narrator describes the scene as follows: “The thirty M.M.’s cheerfully smashed into the communists. The Battalion leader reached up, slapped the girl speaker, dragged her down from the wheelbarrow. His followers casually waded in with fists and blackjacks” (Lewis 94-95). The Minute Men enjoy committing violence. At the same time, their casual approach signals that this violence, to them, is normal. In contrast, Doremus witnesses the event and becomes “more nauseated, feeling more helpless than ever” (95). The Minute Men, however, are not almighty in this confrontation; once the numbers of their opponents grow, the tide turns, and the police step in to rescue them (95). It is also worth remembering the feelings expressed by Edgeways at the beginning of the novel regarding the beating of “Red students” (8). In the same section, Edgeways praises how most colleges have “military-training units under discipline as rigorous as the Nazis” and that young people now demand to be trained in “warlike virtues and skill” (8-9). Under Windrip, universities, according to the narrator, teach “really useful subjects for the formation of the new-world mind and character”, like “cultivation of will power” (208). Additionally, sports are more important in university and include training in military skills (208). It appears that the universities no longer care about science and now function to mould students into pawns of the regime.

Finally, it is time to discuss Windrip’s qualities as a fascist leader. In the seventh and eighth passion behind fascist action; Paxton discusses the necessary authority of natural chiefs, which leads to a “national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group’s historical destiny”, and “the superiority of the leader’s instincts over abstract and universal

reason" (Paxton 219). Based on the amount of praise he receives from his supporters, several of whom have already appeared in this chapter, it seems clear that Windrip is incredibly popular. The narrator describes Windrip as "a tireless traveler, a boisterous and humorous speaker, an inspired guesser at what political doctrines the people would like, a warm handshaker, and willing to lend money" (Lewis 26-27). Furthermore, the narrator explains how Windrip adapts to his audience by revealing what he drinks with different groups of people (27). In other words, Windrip excels at appealing to people no matter where he goes. To the Militiamen, he is "their general and their god" (27). Windrip's book, *Zero Hour – Over the Top*, is "the bible of his followers" (29), making him their prophet. Later in the book, people start referring to Windrip as "the chief", which Doremus notes is "a sound American variant of 'the leader' or 'the Head of the Government,' as a popular title for Mr Windrip" (101). Windrip is presented as the natural leader whose word is command or prophecy to his followers, so it appears that passions seven and eight are met.

However, the matter of Windrip's leadership is more complicated than that, considering that Windrip's success is largely attributed to his secretary, Lee Sarason. According to the narrator, Sarason, after having been a socialist and an anarchist, "believed now only in resolute control by a small oligarchy. In this he was a Hitler, A Mussolini" (28-29). The narrator also credits Sarason with writing *Zero Hour*, the Bible of Windrip's supporters, although he likely "based it on notes dictated by Windrip" (29). Behind the scenes of his presidency, the novel depicts Windrip as a paranoid man and a bad shot who needs his guards to help him shoot his other guards (258-259). Unlike Sarason, however, Windrip is a "Professional Common Man" (71). The "other Commoners could understand his every purpose, which was exactly the same as their own, they saw him towering among them, and they raised their hands to him in worship" (71). As such, it seems that Sarason is the true dictator behind the scenes and uses Windrip as the face of the movement to appeal to the

masses. This idea is reinforced less than a year into Windrip's presidency. During this first year, Windrip seemed like a man of the people, and the Minute Men were regarded as polite (282). Within this period, however, this started to change, and Doremus, while reading the books he hid, started seeing "something like a biology of dictatorships, all dictatorships" (282-283). This biology is summed up as follows: "The universal apprehension, the timorous denials of faith, the same methods of arrest" (283). Furthermore, in contrast to Windrip's promises, only a select few became wealthier, while the others became "much poorer" (283). Here, Doremus perceives that dictatorships tend to be mostly the same, and seems to take the stance that American fascism will functionally be similar to European variants.

Before he concludes that dictatorships are essentially the same, Doremus is "perplexed" at the possibility of "a dictator seemingly so different from the fervent Hitlers and gesticulating Fascists and the Cæsars with laurels round bald domes" (142). Here, Doremus presents his American view of European fascists. Afterwards, Doremus explains that Windrip is "a dictator with something of the earthy American sense of humor of a Mark Twain, a George Ade, a Will Rogers, An Artemus Ward. Windrip could be ever so funny about solemn jaw-drooping opponents, and about the best method of training what he called a 'Siamese flea hound'" (142). In short, Doremus perceives Windrip as different from other dictators because of his American humour. While Doremus initially questions whether this makes him more dangerous, he concludes that it does as he then compares Windrip to the pirate Henry Morgan "who had thought it ever so funny to sew a victim up in wet rawhide and watch it shrink in the sun" (142).

In conclusion, Windrip uses the economic crisis to appeal to the masses. In addition to this, he presents himself as a man of the people. Windrip's regime targets anything left-wing, as well as Jewish people, Black people, women's freedom, and free speech. The group commits violence to suppress any suspected threat from perceived enemies and typically

praises the perpetrators of these acts. The United States is ruled by one party only, that of Windrip; anyone who opposes it is not part of the group. People are expected to give in to the group's demands and are punished if they refuse. *It Can't Happen Here* largely adheres to the mobilising passions behind fascism from *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Considering the conclusion of the novel itself, *It Can't Happen Here* takes the stance that American fascism will functionally be similar to the fascisms of Europe. However, the book predicts that fascism in the United States will initially present its dictator as "a professional common man" with an "earthy" American sense of humour, different from the wildly gesturing or Roman Empire-appropriating dictators of Europe.

Conclusion

In the past three chapters, I have analysed William Faulkner's *Light in August*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* using context relevant to each novel and Paxton's theory on the mobilising passions that underlie fascist action as described in *The Anatomy of Fascism*. During my analyses of the books, I noticed that I would typically group these passions into three categories related to the crisis and the group, violence and willpower, and the relationship to the leader, although there is overlap between the three. First, I will summarise what I have learned using these categories. Afterwards, I will deliver my conclusions on literary depictions of American fascism in 1930s America based on the three novels.

The group that Faulkner depicts in *Light in August* consists of white Americans. In the eyes of white supremacists, Joe Christmas poses a threat to white people. This is the case, firstly, because he is accused of killing a white woman. This white woman, Joanna Burden, is initially considered an outsider because her family came to Jefferson from the North during the Reconstruction. Additionally, the community considers her a lover of Black people. Yet, the community martyrs Burden after her death. Secondly, Christmas is a man of mixed race. In the eyes of the community, this means that Christmas should not be allowed to behave like a white person. Grimm then becomes a tool to preserve white supremacy. By lynching Christmas, Grimm responds to the racist narrative according to which Black people threaten white women sexually, even though Christmas is not wanted for a sexual crime.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, there are two groups worthy of mention. First, Steinbeck portrays a group consisting of capitalist powers typically referred to as the owners or the great owners. This group acts out of greed and fear of workers. Capitalist forces such as banks and financial companies are monsters who require profits and growth. They do not care about the human lives that they sacrifice to achieve their goals. For their own gain and out of

fear of workers, owners strike out against such things as labour unity and taxes. Additionally, the novel depicts violence against workers. The second group is made up of Californians who oppose migrants. In the book, this opposition is aimed mostly at Oklahomans, as the Joads are from Oklahoma. The Californians see the Oklahomans as a threat to their way of life and respond by dehumanising them and preventing them from settling down.

In *It Can't Happen Here*, Buzz Windrip claims to be a people's president and makes financial promises in response to the financial struggles of Americans. In practice, Windrip means only those who conform to the standards of the Corporate Party. People are expected to adhere to the corporate state and not be left-wing. The regime punishes those it considers offenders. Moreover, Black and Jewish people are excluded by default. The Windrip campaign appeals to white voters by presenting racist laws against Black people. Under Windrip's regime, people are allowed to commit acts of violence against Black people. Shad, for example, has a Black professor arrested and thrown in a concentration camp for not behaving according to society's racist expectations of Black people. Jewish people are the centre of conspiracy theories typically aimed at undermining the American people and the corporate state. As a result, they also feel the wrath of the Corpos. The Corpos decide who is part of the group, so people can be punished based on false allegations if the Corpos desire it.

Faulkner's portrayal of Grimm in light of violence and willpower is somewhat complicated. According to the narrator, Grimm was unimpressive in his youth, but at the time of the novel, Grimm exudes military pride. During his section of the book, Grimm is zealously devoted to his goal, which he claims is maintaining order, though he, in reality, wants to be in charge and lynch Christmas. This way, he manages to gain the respect of the community and inspire devotion in his followers. Furthermore, Faulkner presents Grimm as physically well-coordinated during his chase of Christmas. When Grimm lynches Christmas, one of his followers starts to vomit. This may seem like a sign of disapproval, but while

Grimm is the only one who physically assaults Christmas, the town empowers him to do so and accordingly, no one stops him. In the eyes of a white supremacist community, Christmas is a threat, and Grimm's brutality is a tool to combat it.

In *The Grapes of Wrath,* Characters use both anti-left sentiments and dehumanising narratives according to which migrants are their enemies to justify violence. There are two occasions where the novel directly depicts violent acts: the shooting in a Hooverville where a deputy shoots off a woman's finger and the murder of Jim Casy. Both of these examples show that lethal violence is an acceptable way to deal with agitators as the deputy recklessly starts firing in a camp full of people, and Casy's murderer kills without thinking twice. Both perpetrators, however, look bad committing their respective acts of violence. It is more accurate to say that Steinbeck, in his novel, attributes resilience and strength of will to the workers, who are kind and do not give up after taking a beating. The rich, in contrast, are weak.

In *It Can't Happen Here*, military discipline is a virtue, and violence is an acceptable tool for the followers of the corporate state. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Brigadier General Edgeways praises universities for supplying military training programmes comparable to those of the Nazis, as well as the beating of non-conforming students. Additionally, before and during Windrip's presidency, the Minute Men are frequent perpetrators of violent acts. When Doremus witnesses one of these acts, he feels nauseous, whereas the Minute Men delight in the violence. Additionally, as discussed in the previous section, violence against the supposed enemies of the group is frequent.

The obvious pick for a fascist leader in *Light in August* is Percy Grimm. According to the narrator, Grimm sincerely claimed that he does not necessarily wants to be in charge, but when he starts leading a mob, the narrator states that being in command was Grimm's original goal. His followers grow increasingly devoted to him, and he commands the respect

of the townspeople. However, based on Paxton's theory on the difference between authoritarianism and fascism, it appears that Grimm's leadership style is more authoritarian than fascist. If he had a more fascist style of leading, he would, like Sullivan, the man behind the lynching of Nelse Patton, have rallied the town against Christmas. Instead, Grimm works under the guise of a desire to keep order.

The Grapes of Wrath does not feature a clear fascist leader. Corporate farm interests represented by the owners seem to direct oppression from the shadows, but as the novel mainly focuses on migrant workers, the reader does not experience much of this. The text provides the clearest examples of insight into the owners' practices in the chapter where the fears and goals of the owners are described. They fear the workers and desire to keep oppressing them for the sake of financial gain. One corporation is named in *The Grapes of Wrath*: the Farmers' Association. Based on its name and the tactics depicted in the novel, the organisation conceivably represents the Associated Farmers of California, which, as Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik conclude, used fascist methods.

Unlike the other two novels, *It Can't Happen Here* features a dictator. Windrip is charismatic and expertly adapts to the people surrounding him, which allows him to appeal to people wherever he goes. To his followers, Windrip's supposed teachings are a bible. To his militia, Windrip is a general. As such, it appears that Windrip, in the eyes of his followers, is trying to lead his chosen group to their destiny. However, it is relevant that not Windrip but his secretary Lee Sarason is the brain behind the operation. Behind the scenes of his presidency, Windrip is portrayed as paranoid and unimpressive. Regarding Windrip's status as an American dictator, an important theme in the novel is that Windrip initially stands out from other dictators as a result of his American sense of humour, although the novel's protagonist later concludes that dictatorships are similar around the world.

Of the three novels discussed in this thesis, *It Can't Happen Here* is most in line with

the mobilising passions underlying Fascism as described by Paxton in *The Anatomy of Fascism*. A likely explanation for this is that *It Can't Happen Here* was directly inspired by what Lewis noticed of the events going on in Europe and what he learned from Dorothy Thompson and George Seldes. While Paxton based his theory on what fascists did, Lewis applied his knowledge of fascism to the United States but attempted to make it seem more American by presenting Windrip as a typically American dictator through his sense of humour and the way he appeals to voters.

In contrast, Faulkner and Steinbeck found inspiration for their respective texts closer to home. Faulkner set his novel in a fictional location in his native Mississippi. The story's climax, the lynching of Joe Christmas by Percy Grimm, shows parallels to an event that happened nearby during Faulkner's youth. It is likely that Nelse Patton, a man lynched for killing a white woman, inspired Christmas, whereas Grimm could be based on W. V. Sullivan, who led the mob that lynched Patton. Interestingly, if Grimm had rallied the town to his cause instead of claiming to keep order to work towards his actual goal of being in charge and lynching Christmas, his behaviour would have been more fascist. Ultimately, though, Grimm is presented as a fascist tool that conservatives use for the preservation of white supremacy.

For *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck looked to the California agriculture sector. He observed the sector and, in his correspondence, compared the treatment of workers to fascism in Spain. He also called the alliance between corporate farm interests with other powers such as newspapers, banks and politicians fascist. In chapters diverging from the main story, Steinbeck offers insight into the motivations of capitalist powers, as well as Californians opposed to migration, but the text mainly focuses on the dehumanisation and resilience of migrant workers. As such, it is more accurate to call *The Grapes of Wrath* an anti-capitalist novel rather than a story about fascism. This is not to say that the capitalist powers and the

opposition to migration do not use fascist tactics. Interestingly, this means that, like Faulkner, Steinbeck portrayed fascism as a tool. In Steinbeck's book, this tool is used to oppress workers and secure financial gain.

The perspectives that the novels offer on the potential bases of fascism in the United States differ. In *Light in August*, fascist action originates from a desire to preserve white supremacy. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, fascist action is used to safeguard capitalist power and to stop migration. However, in both stories, fascist action is fuelled by fear. In *Light in August*, the cause of this fear, in the eyes of white supremacists, is Black people, specifically, the narrative detailed by Wiegman, according to which Black people pose a sexual threat to white women and a threat of equality to white men after the Civil War. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, migrants and workers are a source of fear.

Like *Light in August*, *It Can't Happen Here* presents racism against Black people as a basis for fascism as Windrip's campaign and regime appeal to white voters by oppressing Black people. Additionally, Windrip's campaign makes vague financial promises in response to the financial hardships of voters, which suggests that a financial crisis can inspire fascism in the United States. Windrip's regime is also antisemitic. In Lewis's novel, Jewish people are often the target of conspiracies that are typically centred around Jewish people financially exploiting others or conspiring against America. Finally, like in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the fascism in *It Can't Happen Here* targets left-wing politics and serves big business interests.

Violence and lies are commonly used tactics used in fascist action throughout all three books. By Grimm in Faulkner's book, by the deputy and Casy's murderer in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and by the Minute Men in *It Can't Happen Here*. Faulkner stands out, however, as he is the only author who presents his fascist actor as physically competent. Steinbeck turns the idea of power around as the resilience of workers and migrants is a major theme in his novel. The Minute Men and other Corpos rejoice in violence, but only if they can overwhelm people

with numbers or backing from other authorities. Additionally, the fascist actors in the books typically assume false narratives as justification for their violence.

In conclusion, Faulkner and Steinbeck present American phenomena, American white supremacy and the exploitation of workers in California, respectively. Through their statements concerning a character, in Faulkner's case, or the agriculture sector in Steinbeck's letters, they related these phenomena to fascism. Lewis differs from them in that he observed fascism in Europe and applied what he learned to the possibility of fascism in the United States. Based on the novels, American fascism can be born from white supremacism, antisemitism, hatred of left-wing politics, anti-migrant sentiment, or business interests. This is not to say that American fascism can not target any other groups, but these are the examples given in the works studied in this thesis. Religion did not play a major role in any of the novels. As far as an American dictator goes, of the three authors, only Lewis presented one. According to his book, this dictator would present himself as "a Professional Common Man" with an "earthy" American sense of humour. Finally, an important takeaway from the novels is that the United States does not need to have a fascist dictator for fascism to be a threat. People like Percy Grimm may use fascist methods to start movements, and business interests can use fascist tactics for their own gain.

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