**The Wizard of Oz**

**Political Symbolism in U.S. History**

The Wizard of Oz, the story is of a young girl who gets picked up from her farm in Kansas and carried off to another land unlike any she's ever seen before. In Munchkin Land, after her house has fallen on, and killed, the Wicked Witch, the Munchkins welcome her to their land, and then the Glinda, the nice witch, explains to her that she must follow the yellow brick road to talk to the Wizard of Oz about getting home. Along the way, she meets new friends who all wish to ask something of the great wizard, themselves. However, once they've finally gotten to the wizard in Emerald City, they find that he is merely a fraud, and they all had what they were searching for within themselves.

Whatever it is you've heard or seen from this classic movie or book, many people don't know that The Wizard of Oz is suspected to have referenced several political issues of the late 1800's. Speculation of the parallels between the book and history in the United States began with a history teacher in the 1960's. Henry Littlefield used the film as part of his lecture, and he had his students help him pull out the parallels between the movie and real life. In 1964, these parallels were published in American Quarterly, sparking years of debate.

Whether or not any of the speculations are true, well, no one knows for sure, but here are some of the suggested symbols in The Wizard of Oz.

**The Symbolism:**

**Dorothy:** Dorothy is thought to represent the American people or values. She proves herself to be determined, resourceful, and loyal. Another speculation is that she represents Theodore Roosevelt, the United States president. Some people believe this theory more than the other because of the similarities in the names. (Think: Dor-o-thy and The-o-dore).

**Toto:** Small and seemingly going unnoticed, Toto is the one who reveals the Wizard for the fraud he is. He is thought to be another representation of the average American people.

**Uncle Henry:** In the late 1800's, there was a famous farmer who was the editor of a leading farm magazine. His name was Henry Cantwell Wallace, and everyone called him Uncle Henry.

**Cyclone:** The tornado is thought to represent political upheaval, or the free silver movement. During the time period in which this story was written, farmers were suffering from federal deflation; they were receiving less money for their goods, and their debt was getting larger. They wanted the value of a dollar to have a fixed ratio of both silver and gold. Some politicians were behind this movement while others were not.

**Munchkins**: The munchkins were little people who represented the common folk. They were ordinary citizens of the United States. And in the same breath, the Lollipop Guild is said to represent child labor.

Silver Slippers: In the book, the slippers that appear on Dorothy's feet are silver, rather than ruby. Silver relates to the monetary political issues. Farmers wanted the value of a dollar to have a fixed ratio of both gold and silver. Some have also speculated that the silver slippers represent the power to vote.

**Yellow Brick Road:** This represents the gold standard, such as a brick of gold. The road of gold leads to power.

**Oz:** Oz is an abbreviation for gold, which was a hot political topic with people rallying for a fixed ratio of silver and gold.

**Tin Woodman:** The Tin Woodman has a more obvious meaning. He represented the industrial workers who were often dehumanized. He was rusted an immobile, which is a feeling that many factory workers when businesses began shutting down because of a nation-wide depression. After losing their jobs, they felt helpless.

**Scarecrow:** The scarecrow is thought to represent the western farmers. While his complaint was that he didn't have a brain, he ended up being the most clever problem solver of the four travelers.

**Cowardly Lion:** There was a politician named William Jennings Bryan in the late 1800's who supported the free silver movement. The Cowardly Lion is said to represent Bryan, who was seen has having a loud roar, but no bite, or no power.

**Wicked Witch of the East and West:** The Wicked Witch of the East is the eastern business while the Wicked Witch of the West is William McKinley, who ran against William Jennings Bryan during the free silver movement, and won.

**Good Witch of the North and South:** The Good Witch of the North is thought to represent the workers of the north, whereas the Good Witch of the South is thought to represent the farmers of the south. This contrasts the wicked industrialists of the east and the railroad moguls of the west.

**Flying Monkeys:** Flying monkeys were used in political cartoons to poke fun at politicians. While this may be the case, another speculation is that the flying monkeys represent Native Americans. When Dorothy and the gang meet up with the monkeys she is told, "Once we were a free people, living happily in the forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruit and doing just as we pleased without calling anybody master...This was many ears ago before Oz came out of the clouds to rule over this land." This seems to relate well with Native Americans who were pushed off of their land by migrating eastern Americans.

**Emerald City and Emerald Palace:** If Emerald City represents Washington D.C., as it is believed to represent, then Emerald Palace represents the White House.

**Wizard:** The Wizard of Oz is thought to be Mark Hanna, the chairman of the Republican party, or the president of the United States. In the original story, each of the characters, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man saw the Wizard differently. This shows a cynicism in politics for the way politicians change face for different people.