# JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOHN STEINBECK'S EARLY REPORTING AND HIS NOVEL THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

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ABSTRACT

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE:
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AND HIS NOVEL THE GRAPES OF WRATH

By

Frances Miller LaBell

Before John Steinbeck wrote his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, The Grapes of Wrath, he wrote some magazine and newspaper reports on the problems of migrant workers in California. "Dubious Battle in California," written for the Nation, a journal dedicated to social justice, and "California's Harvest Gypsies," a seven-part series written for the San Francisco News, were impassioned exposes of the treatment mid-1930's Dust Bowl refugees were enduring under California's agriculture system. This study explores the relationship between the reporting and the novel. Its object is to examine the reportorial style of a great novelist and to determine what his reportage contributed to the novel.

First the paper explores the artistic setting of The Grapes of Wrath. The 1930's was the decade of the flowering of the documentary. Writers, photographers and filmmakers flocked to the back roads of America to record the faces of the rural poor because the downtrodden farmer was the heroic figure of the 1930's. Steinbeck was probably familiar with the documentary film and photography of his

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time because he was a close friend of the filmmaker Pare Lorentz, and he met Roy Stryker, a chief of a group of top still photographers who roamed the United States taking pictures. Steinbeck also got information about migrant labor in California from officials of the Resettlement Administration, the government organization which employed both Mr. Lorentz and Mr. Stryker.

John Steinbeck often used elements from real life in his early novels and stories. Later, he turned to first-hand information gathering to get material for his novels. In Dubious Battle is a good example. He got the material by visiting a strike-ridden valley and meeting strike organizers with his friend Tom Collins. His field work became more intense just before he wrote The Grapes of Wrath. His letters of the time, especially, show that he was spending a lot of his time in the field.

His reporting, done in 1936 while he was gathering information for The Grapes of Wrath, is compared in this paper with the novel to see what they had in common. Close analysis to juxtapose excerpts from the reports and the novel is employed. It is found that settings, facts, phrases and themes from the reports appeared in the novel. It is found that the reports contributed even more than documentary authenticity. Steinbeck was an emotional advocate rather than a dispassionate reporter. His unorthodox reporting style contains the germs of the novel's drama, philosophy and impact.

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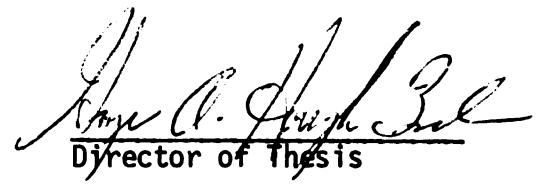
Accepted by the faculty of the School of Journalism, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree.



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By

Frances Miller LaBell

A THESIS

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# CHAPTER I

## THE FLOWERING OF THE DOCUMENTARY: ARTISTIC ATMOSPHERE CONTEMPORARY WITH THE GRAPES OF WRATH

When the farmer comes to town, with his wagon broken down,
O, the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
If you'll only look and see, I think you will agree,
That the farmer is the man that feeds them all.
The farmer is the man,
The farmer is the man,
Lives on credit till the fall.
And they take him by the hand
And they lead him from the land,
And the middleman's the one that gets it all.[1]

The Okies of the 1930's sang this song. According to the recollections of folk singer Woodie Guthrie:

> I believe the best I ever heard this song sung was out there in the cotton strikes in California, around the country mentioned in John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath." Four little girls got up on the stage and sung it together.[2]

John Steinbeck might have heard this song, too, when he traveled, lived, and worked with the Okies in the California valleys from 1936 to 1938. He never claimed that his novel The Grapes of Wrath was a true story, but its raw material was real life. The novel contains

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[1] Alan Lomax, comp., Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People, notes by Woodie Guthrie, transcribed and ed. by Pete Seeger (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), pp. 32-33.

[2] Ibid., p. 32.

more than echoes of the Okies' songs; it captured their personalities, accents and way of life.

Steinbeck succeeded in giving such an authentic picture of Okie life in the 1930's that the Okies themselves can verify it. Bud Campbell, who came to California in 1935 and settled in Weedpatch, a place that served as a setting in The Grapes of Wrath, said forty years later that the book was authentic. "He dramatized it a lot and set up some things and changed the names, but it was all based on facts, I'll tell you that," Mr. Campbell said.[3]

The Grapes of Wrath is perhaps the most famous of the many books about rural America written in the 1930's. It was controversial and wildly popular when it first came out in April, 1939. Steinbeck was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for it in 1940. It is a book that has come to be considered one of the great American novels.

John Steinbeck was only one of the people who turned their attention to rural America during the Depression. The faces and stories of sharecroppers, small farmers and migrant workers abounded in newspapers, magazines and books. The farmer became a cultural hero in a struggling society because he represented endurance in times of poverty. "The popular culture of the era represented the tenant farmer as an innocent struck down by economic forces beyond his control . . . ."[4]

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[3]Douglas Kneeland, "West Coast 'Okies' Recall Depression, Scoff at Recession," New York Times, February 22, 1975, pp. 29, 32.

[4]Michael Mehlman, "Hero of the 30's--The Tenant Farmer," Heroes of Popular Culture, ed. by Ray B. Browne, Marshall Fishwick and Michael T. Marsden (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), p. 65.

The rural poor excited the imaginations of American writers, photographers and social scientists. They flocked to the back roads to interview and take pictures, and they produced novels, photographic collections and sociological studies. Erskine Caldwell's Tobacco Road was a popular play, as was John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men. Narrative and photographs were combined in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men by James Agee and Walker Evans, An American Exodus by Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor, and You Have Seen Their Faces by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White. Sociological studies included Herman C. Nixon's Forty Acres and Steel Mules and Arthur Raper and Ira Reid's Sharecroppers All! and Tenants of the Almighty. Carey McWilliams wrote Factories in the Field, a study of California's agricultural history.

The Grapes of Wrath and some of the other books were literary experiments. The authors tried to chronicle a part of life that moved them deeply. They honed their descriptive skills to the finest edge, attempting to portray a family eating bisquits and gravy in the morning chill, or a person trying to pick enough cotton to earn his supper. They tried to help their readers see these scenes in their minds and imagine how the characters felt. To do this they tried new forms.

The novels and other books about the rural poor in the 1930's have only their subject matter in common. They cannot be classified in one genre. Each work is thoroughly infused with the personality, beliefs and artistry of its author. The comparison of the creator to a refracting lens which casts a distorted image of reality for the viewer of art is an apt comparison.

> Serious literature, realistic as well as fabulistic, never holds an entirely authentic mirror up to nature. That's the aim of journalism. Literature as opposed to journalism is always a refracting rather than a reflecting mechanism; it always to some degree distorts (or as Hemingway said, magnifies) life, if only to give it a shape or clarity that can't otherwise be detected. And the roots of literary distortion are always located in the person of the writer himself, in the individual stamp he puts on his work. It's the deflection and refraction of the material in the filter of the self that gives a piece of writing its special edge, that perhaps lifts it to levels of art. In literature it's really distortion we prize--the distortion of the uniquely individual.[5]

Steinbeck produced both journalism and a novel on the migrant workers of the 1930's. He wrote a news series on the migrant workers for the San Francisco News in October, 1936. His trip to gather information for the series did not provide his first glimpse of the migrant camps; he was already very much aware of the events around him. He made several additional research trips during the years he worked on the novel. Steinbeck's reporting is not purely a reflection of reality. He does not simply hold a mirror up to nature. Even in his reporting his strong interest in and concern for the people he met were obvious. His feelings grew as he learned more and as he became more involved in writing the novel. He completed it in a frenzy, working so hard that he had to rest for several weeks when it was finished.

Like John Steinbeck, James Agee and Erskine Caldwell had artistic achievement as their central ambition. All three grew up in areas they were later to write about, and they witnessed the life of

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[5]Ronald Weber, "Some Sort of Artistic Excitement," The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy, ed. by Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, Publishers, 1974), pp. 16-17.

the rural poor. All three had some reporting experience, and their work on the rural poor in the 1930's grew out of a desire to report. Their books presented the facts as their authors saw them. The books were works of literature that presented factual information through the refracting lens of each author's eyes and skills.

James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was written about people he observed during four weeks in Alabama in the summer of 1936. He and Walker Evans, a photographer on leave from the Farm Security Administration, lived with three tenant families in order to gather the material for their book.

Agee was a southerner, originally from Tennessee, who was educated at Exeter and Harvard. He wished to make poetry his life's work. After graduating from Harvard in 1932, he got a job on Fortune. He was elated at the chance to do an article on southern tenant farmers for Fortune, especially since the accompanying photographs were to be taken by Walker Evans, whose work Agee admired. When Fortune turned down the article, Agee decided to use the material he had collected for a book.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men wasn't published until 1941, when the subject of the tenant farmers was already stale. The 471-page text depicts the daily life of the Ricketts, Woods and Gudger families. Agee saw their world as a microcosm of human existance and he recorded it in painstaking detail, down to the grain of old wood planks, the pictures on old calendars over the fireplace and the mood of the breeze sweeping across the front porch.

In recounting the tenant farmers' lives, Agee explores the nature of reality. He was a reporter who mistrusted the premise of journalism, that a reporter could convey an idea of reality to another person. He considered it an impossible goal.

> It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family, for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of "honest journalism" (whatever that paradox may mean), of humanity, of social fearlessness, for money and for a reputation of crusading . . .[6]

Agee's ambivalence is evident in his book, for he did write a long work about tenant farmers despite his doubts. His descriptions are so unrelentingly painstaking that they communicate the author's desperation to tell the reader everything about the subject. Agee was interested in photography and he considered Walker Evans one of the finest of photographers.[7] He put more faith in the power of the camera than the power of words to transmit a flavor of reality.

> This is why the camera seems to me, next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time; and is why in turn I feel such a rage at its misuse: which has spread so nearly universal a corruption of sight that I know of less than a dozen alive whose eyes I can trust even as much as my own.[8]

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[6]James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 7.

[7]James Agee, The Collected Short Prose of James Agee, ed. by Robert Fitzgerald (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), p. 33.

[8]Agee and Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, p. 11.

> If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement. Booksellers would consider it quite a novelty; critics would murmur, yes, but is it art; and I could trust a majority of you to use it as a parlor game.[9]

Another southerner who hoped photographs would show the real conditions in the south was Erskine Caldwell. He was born in Georgia, lived in several southern states, and spent some of his teenage years in Wrens, Georgia, a small rural town. He remembered seeing impoverished sharecropper families when he traveled around the countryside with his father, who was a minister.[10] As a teenager and a young man, Caldwell tried to earn extra money as a stringer for newspapers. At age twenty-one he was a cub reporter for the Atlanta Journal.[11]

Caldwell's primary ambition was to become a successful novelist. He wrote the novel Tobacco Road, the story of a sharecropper family in Georgia in 1931. It attained popularity in the form of a play, written from the novel by Jack Kirkland. It set a record for the longest-running play in New York, seven and a half years. It was on the road throughout the United States and around the world for twelve years.

The play concerned the life of the Lesters, a sharecropper family. It depicted them as people ground down to the lowest level of

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[9] Ibid., p. 13.

[10] Erskine Caldwell, Call It Experience: The Years of Learning How to Write (New York: Duell Sloan and Pearce, 1951), p. 25.

[11] Ibid., p. 36.

existence. Wiliness, sloth, viciousness, bestiality, lethargy, and immorality were some of the components of the characters' personalities. Some audiences laughed at Jeeter Lester because they considered his actions comical antics, but Caldwell didn't intend to write a comedy. He wrote the story in a serious vein to hold a mirror up to his audience.

> Whatever effect the story does have, it was not something consciously sought for or achieved, but is the result of a desire to tell about a group of persons whose destiny it was to be born where they were born, to live where they lived, and to do what they did. All human beings, wherever they live, are, to some degree, subject to contemporary moral and economic environment. Tobacco Road, by reason of birth and circumstance was the home of a few; it, or a similar environment, might have been, or may be in the future, that of many other people.[12]

Caldwell wrote a newspaper feature series on southern tenant farmers for the New York Post in February, 1935. By that spring he had the idea for You Have Seen Their Faces.

> It was to be a factual study of people in cotton states living under current economic stress. It was my intention to show that the fiction I was writing was authentically based on contemporary life in the South. Furthermore, I felt that such a book should be thoroughly documented with photographs taken on the scene.[13]

Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, a staff photographer for Life, traveled about 3,000 miles through the Southeast gathering material for the book.

Photographs and text alternate in the book. First there is a group of photographs with a quote below each one. An italicized

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[12]Jack Kirkland, Tobacco Road: A Three Act Play, intro. by Erskine Caldwell (New York: Duell Sloan and Pearce, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1952), n.p.

[13]Caldwell, Call It Experience, p. 103.

section follows, telling an individual's story as Caldwell heard it. A section of commentary by Caldwell follows.

You Have Seen Their Faces was meant to give an impression of what the South was like.

> No person, place or episode in this book is fictitious, but names and places have been changed to avoid unnecessary individualization; for it is not the authors' intention to criticize any individuals who are part of the system depicted. The legends under the pictures are intended to express the authors' own conceptions of the sentiments of the individuals portrayed; they do not pretend to reproduce the actual sentiments of these persons.[14]

In the book Caldwell explained his own view of southern tenant farming. He considered it a system that survived by demeaning human beings. The Lesters of Tobacco Road were the inevitable products of the system as Caldwell saw it, according to statements in You Have Seen Their Faces.

> Farm tenancy, and particularly sharecropping, is not self-perpetuating. It can survive only by feeding upon itself, like an animal in a trap eating its own flesh and bone. The only persons interested in its continuation are the landlords who accumulate wealth by exacting tribute, not from the products of the earth, but from the labor of the men, women and children who till the earth.[15]

Even the photographs in You Have Seen Their Faces are made to support the characterizations in Tobacco Road. Ada Lester longed for a pinch of snuff to relieve the ache of her teeth in Tobacco Road. A photograph of a worn woman in You Have Seen Their Faces has the caption, "Snuff is an almighty help when your teeth ache."[16]

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[14] Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, You Have Seen Their Faces (New York: The Viking Press, 1937), n.p.

[15] Ibid., p. 75.

[16] Ibid., p. 150.

In spirit, these books about American rural life in the 1930's have a kinship with the documentary film, which was coming into flower during the 1930's. John Steinbeck was certainly familiar with some of the contemporary documentary films. He was good friends with Pare Lorentz, who produced documentary films about American life in the 1930's and 1940's, and he was acquainted with Lorentz's work. Steinbeck himself wrote the script for a documentary film in 1953. Called The Forgotten Village, it illustrated the health care needs of people in a rural Mexican village.

The term documentary was first used in a review of Moana, a film made by Robert Flaherty, a film pioneer who also made Nanook of the North. In his 1926 review, Robert Grierson used the term documentary to refer to the fact that the film was a visual record, ". . . being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family."[17]

A documentary film has come to mean more than just a factual record since Grierson used the term. According to Lewis Jacobs, the documentary genre has gone through three phases. There was the naturalism of the early films, which paralleled the style called naturalism in literature. The second phase recorded reality, but didn't try to express a story or use narrative. Its filmmakers were interested in "art for art's sake." Toward the end of the 1920's the documentary

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[17]John Grierson, "Flaherty's Poetic Moana," The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock, sel. by Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, Publishers, 1971), p. 25.

became a vehicle for dramatizing life and advancing ideas for social betterment.[18]

John Grierson was a pioneer in making the third type of film with his Drifters, in 1928. He led the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, which was sponsored by the British government in 1928. He considered his films a means of educating Britons about their country and advancing patriotism. He believed they created interest in peacetime life, thus furthering world peace.[19]

In the 1930's the documentary, or film with a message, flourished through the craftsmanship of filmmakers all over the world. Grierson was the father of British documentary. In Germany, Leni Riefenstahl made documentaries like The Triumph of the Will to glorify the Third Reich. Joris Ivens, a Dutch filmmaker, turned from the poetic films he made in the 1920's to films with a socio-political message. The first of these, Borinage, expressed outrage at living conditions in the coal mining region of Southwest Belgium.

In the United States during the 1930's the government nurtured two groups of documentary artists, one which made films under Pare Lorentz, and one which produced still photographs, under Roy Stryker. The groups operated under the Information Division of the Resettlement Administration, which was established in April, 1935. Under Rexford Tugwell, an economist from Columbia University, the

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[18] Ibid., Lewis Jacobs, "The Feel of a New Genre," pp. 12-13.

[19] Richard Meran Barsam, Nonfiction Film: A Critical History (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973), pp. 7-8.

Resettlement Administration subsidized farm families who were on the brink of failure with small loans. Another Resettlement Administration program bought up or leased parcels of workable farm land and moved families from ruined land to supervised collective farms on the land parcels. The Resettlement Administration also created suburban communities, the greenbelt towns near Washington, D.C., Cincinnati and Milwaukee. Under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act of 1937, the Farm Security Administration took over from the Resettlement Administration and retained many of its personnel.

The agency's Film Division under Pare Lorentz produced several documentary films about American life. Lorentz was not a filmmaker, but a successful film critic for newspapers and magazines, when he came to the government with his ideas about filming American life. His first two films, made in the 1930's, The Plow that Broke the Plains and The River, won both popular and critical acclaim. The Plow that Broke the Plains showed the destruction and erosion of land that resulted from wasteful and poorly planned farming methods. The film, with a musical score by Vergil Thompson, had its first showing in early March, 1936, before President Roosevelt and senators and representatives from the Dust Bowl states. Lorentz's second film, The River, depicted life along the Mississippi and its tributaries. While the filming was going on, a devastating flood occurred and its consequences were shown in the footage of The River.

Steinbeck and Lorentz were friends during the 1930's, and Lorentz says their relationship was a friendship rather than a

professional relationship. He doesn't feel that they influenced each other in their work.

> . . . we were working men together. We enjoyed each other's company. At no time did I suggest to him that he do anything and at no time did he suggest to me that I do anything, but for a period of a few years before the Second World War we had hoped to work together. We never discussed anything called "documentary"; we talked about our country and words and worthy people. And women and politics and anecdotes--me from the hill country, and he from the Pacific Ocean.[20]

During the spring of 1940 Steinbeck and Lorentz did work together briefly. Just after The Grapes of Wrath was published Steinbeck wanted to escape his new notoriety, so he joined Lorentz in Chicago, where he was making a film about health care. "John Steinbeck briefly and hilariously was on my payroll as assistant cameraman at Government wages working on my Government movie The Fight for Life,"[21] Lorentz recalled. Although Pare Lorentz denies that he and Steinbeck influenced each other in their work, they were certainly familiar with one another's work during the late 1930's.

Another group of documentary artists working under the Resettlement Administration and later the Farm Security Administration was the Historical Section under Roy Stryker. This group's mission was to create an historical record of contemporary life by means of still photography. Roy Stryker came from Colorado to study economics under Rexford Tugwell, who later became Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration chief. Although he didn't complete

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[20]Letter, Pare Lorentz to Frances Miller, August 5, 1974.

[21]Ibid.

his Ph.D. at Columbia, Stryker gained a wide practical knowledge of American economics. As an instructor, he led a class through a series of field trips. He used his strong interest in pictures when he and Tugwell produced an economics textbook liberally illustrated with photographs.

As head of the Historical Section, Stryker served as mentor to noted photographers, including Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein and John Vachon. The photographers roamed the country for months at a time, at first covering primarily rural life and later towns and cities as well. They produced more than 180,000 photographs, which Stryker arranged to give to the Library of Congress.

Both Roy Stryker and some regional field workers of the Resettlement Administration helped Steinbeck by providing information for The Grapes of Wrath. Steinbeck met with Stryker some time in 1938 and spent several days going through the Historical Section's picture files with him.[22] People in the Administration's San Francisco office also helped provide Steinbeck with information. Two of them were Eric Thompson and George Hedley, ministers on leave from their congregations, and the third was Thomas Collins, a man who was Steinbeck's friend and his first guide through California's valleys.[23] The Grapes

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[22]F. Jack Hurley, Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), p. 140.

[23]Richard Astro, John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973), p. 129.

of Wrath is dedicated to Tom Collins and Steinbeck's first wife, Carol. From the San Francisco office Steinbeck embarked on one of his field trips to observe migrant workers. Accompanying him was a Resettlement Administration official, and both men were dressed like migrant workers.[24]

John Steinbeck wrote The Grapes of Wrath during a period when artists were using many media: writing, film and still photography, to describe the world around them. Steinbeck, like many of these contemporary artists, focused on the rural poor. They combined reporting and art in unique ways to produce new forms that educated and stirred people. Steinbeck not only worked at the same time as some great documentarists, he had contact with them and was familiar with their work.

Steinbeck may have been experimenting with a new form of literature when he wrote The Grapes of Wrath, but he was also joining an American literary tradition. Writers of the past relied on reportage for the raw material of their stories, for the cloth on which their artistry could embroider, and writers continue in this tradition.

Mark Twain, for example, was a newspaper reporter before he wrote novels, and his earliest books, like Innocents Abroad and Roughing It were comical accounts of his travel experiences. His youth and later experience as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River permeate some of his greatest books, Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. Herman Melville voyaged on a whaling ship and spent two years traveling in

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[24]Hurley, Portrait of a Decade, p. 140.

the South Sea Islands before he wrote Moby Dick and Typee. Stephen Crane was a reporter during the Spanish-American War, and some of his short stories are based on his war experiences. He knew the slum life depicted in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets because he spent several years living in poverty in New York City's slums.

Writers of the 1960's and 1970's continue to combine literary skill and reportage in a movement some people call the New Journalism. Tom Wolfe, the style's chief spokesman, said he first heard the term New Journalism used in late 1966. He realized ". . . suddenly there was an artistic excitement going on in journalism."[25] The hallmark of the style was the use of techniques usually associated with novels and short stories . . ."[26] in accurate nonfiction. While Tom Wolfe recognizes the blossoming of creativity in reporting, he also criticizes present-day literary critics for underestimating the factual content of artistic works.

> It is one of the unconscious assumptions of modern criticism that the raw material is simply "there." It is the "given." The idea is: Given such-and-such a body of material, what has the artist done with it? The crucial part that reporting plays in all story-telling, whether in novels, films, or nonfiction, is something that is not so much ignored as simply not comprehended.[27]

Seymour Krim, a veteran newspaperman, believes that the mass media, newspapers and magazines, have taken the place that novels used

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[25]Tom Wolfe, The New Journalism with an anthology ed. by Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 22.

[26]Ibid., p. 15.

[27]Ibid., p. 14.

to have in "probing the reality" of an American generation. He, too, acknowledges the vital role of reporting in the works of the finest American writers, but now, he says, applying fictional techniques to the current scene is more crucial.[28]

Another writer designates the term documentary narrative to refer to prose works which are a blend of reporting and artistry. "Documentary narrative, as I understand the term, is that kind of prose work in which the author creates the impression that he has investigated the circumstances of an actual event and that he can prove the validity of his account of the event," says Donald Pizer, professor of English at Tulane University.[29]

> By "documentary" I mean that the writer tries to create an effect of circumstantiality, either by including verifiable documents and quotation or by appearing to do so. His emphasis on seemingly verifiable detail--the names of people and places, the full listing of the objects in a room or the contents of a suitcase, and much direct quotation--achieves the effect of documentation whether or not he includes or appends his sources. By "narrative" I mean that the writer pays exceptional attention to chronology. All narrative, of course, relies to some degree on the passage of time as a structural device. But in documentary narrative the writer is recurrently and explicitly exact about events in relation to time. His narrative technique thus contributes to the effect of documentary authenticity. By placing in immediate juxtaposition two of the seemingly most verifiable aspects of experience--objects and the movement of the clock--the writer seeks to persuade us that his account is accurate and authentic, since its principal components can be checked. Some documentary narratives include time--charts, a device which has the effect of making even more "solid"--that is, observable--the relationship between objects and time, a

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[28]Seymour Krim, "The Newspaper as Literature," The Reporter as Artist, p. 173.

[29]Donald Pizer, "Documentary Narrative as Art: William Manchester and Truman Capote," The Reporter as Artist, p. 207.

> relationship which in essence is the event itself. By "art" I mean that the author imposes theme upon the event portrayed by means of his selection, arrangement and emphasis of the details of his documentation and his narrative. His theme may be merely an interpretation of a large phase of experience which the event illustrates. But as in most literary works, verisimilitude is ultimately a means towards an end rather than an end in itself, although the author of the documentary narrative may seek to suggest the contrary.[30]

Professor Pizer's definition of "documentary narrative" acknowledges both the elements of reportage and art which are combined in a work such as The Grapes of Wrath. Reporting, the observation of actual events and places, is used for the author's purposes. The means of producing the work is the author's art, the way in which he filters information taken from real life through the lens of his individuality to produce a work of art.

The Grapes of Wrath is the narrative of the Joad family's journey from Oklahoma to California and their attempts to make a living. Time is measured by their day-to-day progress along the highways and from camp to camp in California. The Joads are an exemplary family rather than a real family, but both the details of their lives and the background of American history across which they move can be verified.

John Steinbeck wrote The Grapes of Wrath during the 1930's, a period when there was a surge of documentary work being done, both in print and on film. Steinbeck was aware of some of this activity and had contact with some of the greatest documentary artists working with film in the United States. His primary ambition was to become a novelist, not a reporter, and yet, it turned out that his talent as a

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[30] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

reporter contributed heavily to The Grapes of Wrath, one of his best novels. In the novels that preceded The Grapes of Wrath, elements observed from life became more and more prominent with each succeeding one, until the blend of reporting and art reached its full flower in Steinbeck's novel about rural American people.

## CHAPTER II

### FROM FANTASY TO OBSERVATION: HOW STEINBECK TURNED TO REPORTING

I'm going down that road feeling bad,
I'm going down that road feeling bad,
I'm going down that road feeling bad, Lord, Lord
I ain't gonna be treated this-a-way.[1]

> Woodie Guthrie sang this song and it is heard on the movie soundtrack of "Grapes." He was asked: "Sing a song, just don't even think, and without thinking just haul off and sing the very first song that hits your mind--one that if a crowd of 100 pure blood Okies was to hear it, 90 of 'em would know it."[2]

Fine touches like this song lend authenticity to a book or a movie, and John Steinbeck gleaned such details for The Grapes of Wrath from personal observation. Early in his career, when he tried working as a newspaperman in New York City, he probably didn't realize how important reporting was to become when he wrote his finest novels. In November, 1925, when he was twenty-three years old, the Californian arrived in New York hoping to begin a successful career as a writer of serious literature. He got a job trundling wheelbarrows of cement to complete the building of Madison Square Garden.

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[1] Alan Lomax, comp., Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People, notes by Woodie Guthrie, transcribed and ed. by Pete Seeger (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), pp. 215-216.

[2] Ibid., p. 215.

His uncle later got him a job reporting for the New York American, a Hearst paper.

> My uncle got me a job on a newspaper--the New York American down on William Street. I didn't know the first thing about being a reporter. I think that the $25 a week that they paid me was a total loss. They gave me stories to cover in Queens and Brooklyn and I would get lost and spend hours trying to find my way back. I couldn't learn to steal a picture from a desk when a family refused to be photographed and I invariably got emotionally involved and tried to kill the whole story to save the subject.[3]

Steinbeck probably didn't realize it in 1925, but his ability to sympathize with his subjects was the quality that was to lead him to write books like The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle. It was his emotional involvement with the subjects of these books that led him to study them so carefully. Steinbeck was transferred to the Federal Courts after his first week as a reporter, although he wondered why he hadn't been fired.

> I wonder if I could ever be as kind to a young punk as those men in the reporters' room at the Park Row Post Office were to me. They pretended that I knew what I was doing and they did their best to teach me in a roundabout way. I learned to play bridge and where to look for suits and sandals (sic). They informed me which judges were pushovers for publicity and several times they covered for me when I didn't show up. You can't repay that kind of thing. I never got to know them. Didn't know where they lived, what they did, or how they lived when they left the room.[4]

Another, later account of his work for the American has a much less modest tone. It also reveals his dislike for the journalistic style of William Randolph Hearst.

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[3]John Steinbeck, "Autobiography: The Making of a New Yorker," New York Times, February 1, 1953, sec. 6, Part II, p. 26.

[4]Ibid., p. 27.

> I worked for the American and was assigned to Federal Court in the old Park Row post office where I perfected my bridge game and did some lousy reporting. I did however perfect a certain literary versatility. This was during Prohibition, and Federal judges as well as others in power were generous with confiscated whiskey to the press room. Therefore it became my duty sometimes, as cadet reporter, to send the same story to Graphic, American, Times, Tribune and Brooklyn Eagle each in its own vernacular when some of my peers were unable to catch the typewriter as it went by. Then I was fired. I learned that external reality had no jurisdiction in the Hearst press and that what happened must in no case interfere with what WR wanted to happen.[5]

After he lost his job he tried to find another, but he was unsuccessful.

> I looked for jobs--but good jobs, pleasant jobs. I couldn't get them. I wrote short stories and tried to sell them. I applied for work on other papers, which was ridiculous on the face of it.[6]

The short stories Steinbeck was trying to sell were a collection he wrote after Guy Holt, an editor for McBride and Company, encouraged him. Holt left McBride and another editor rejected Steinbeck's stories.[7] After a discouraging year in New York he returned to California the way he had come, on a freight ship by way of the Panama Canal.

Before his New York sojourn, Steinbeck had studied on and off at Stanford University and worked mostly at outdoor jobs in his native California. He grew up in Salinas, a center for growing

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[5]Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds., Steinbeck: A Life in Letters (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 9.

[6]John Steinbeck, "Autobiography," p. 27.

[7]Harry Thornton Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study (Chicago: Normandie House, 1939), p. 78.

lettuce, an area in one of California's agricultural valleys, which was much like the areas he was later to write about.

Even during high school he began taking outdoor jobs. He spent many of his high school vacations working as a hired hand on ranches. Between high school and college he spent a year working as an assistant chemist in a sugar beet factory. During the five years he spent taking courses at Stanford he took time off to work on various ranches, including one near King City in the southern part of the Salinas Valley. He helped build the first road below Big Sur and he worked for a while in an Oakland haberdashery store. For a while he returned to the sugar beet factory as night chemist.

When he returned to the West Coast from New York he also returned to the kind of jobs he had held during high school and college. He wrote his first novel, Cup of Gold during the two winters he spent as the caretaker of an estate at Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Mountains and during a job at a fish hatchery.[8] Cup of Gold is a work of historical fiction about Henry Morgan, the buccaneer of the Caribbean who captured the golden city of Panama and became governor of Jamaica after a royal pardon. The book was published in August, 1929, by McBride and Co. Steinbeck was disappointed by the low sales.

Cup of Gold is the only one of Steinbeck's works prior to The Grapes of Wrath that was not set in California. With each successive literary effort he relied more on the California he knew. His early characters were the Mexican paisanos he had observed in coastal

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[8] Ibid., p. 12.

towns, the bindle stiffs of the ranches and the citizens of the small farms. He knew the settings from his own experiences. Some of the characters and plots he based upon stories his friends and neighbors told him.

With his novels In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath he progressed further toward realism. He went from basing his work upon people and scenes which happened to be familiar to him to actively seeking information for his books. In these two novels Steinbeck studied his raw material like a reporter and portrayed the details and events of life in California's agricultural areas like a reporter. Steinbeck, however, used this information to write novels, which meant he imposed his own sense of order and philosophy upon it to develop a cohesive form.

Steinbeck's second book, The Pastures of Heaven, might have been based on some stories told to him by Miss Beth Ingels, who lived in a California valley called Corral de Tierra, for many years.[9] One family's story links all the others, the tale of a family called the Munroes in the book. They were a well intentioned, industrious group, but they seemed to be under a curse that brought misfortune to every person who had a relationship with them. In a 1931 letter to one of his literary agents, Mavis McIntosh of McIntosh & Otis, Steinbeck discussed the raw material for The Pastures of Heaven:

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[9]Richard Astro, John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973), p. 96.

> The present work interests me and perhaps falls in the "aspects" theme you mention. There is, about twelve miles from Monterey, a valley in the hills called Corral de Tierra. Because I am using its people I have named it Las Pasturas del Cielo. The valley was for years known as the happy valley because of the unique harmony which existed among its twenty families. About ten years ago a new family moved in on one of the ranches. They were ordinary people, ill-educated but honest and kindly as any. In fact, in their whole history I cannot find that they have committed a really malicious act nor an act which was not dictated by honorable expediency or out-and-out altruism. But about the Morans there was a flavor of evil. Everyone they came in contact with was injured. Every place they went dissension sprang up. There have been two murders, a suicide, many quarrels and a great deal of unhappiness in the Pastures of Heaven, and all of these things can be traced directly to the influence of the Morans. So much is true.[10]

The Pastures of Heaven was published in 1932, and To a God Unknown followed in 1933. To a God Unknown was inspired by a play begun by Webster Street, a lawyer, who was a friend of Steinbeck's. Street turned it over to Steinbeck because he was having trouble completing it.[11] Steinbeck built on Street's plot and set the story in the Big Sur country, where he had worked on a road building crew.

Until the publication of his next book, Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck wasn't making much money from his writing. During the depression years of the 1930's he was living in Pacific Grove, California, in a three-room cottage that belonged to his father. His father also gave Steinbeck and his wife, Carol, $25 a month. Their food consisted of home-grown vegetables and fish they caught in the ocean. Carol brought in some additional money from various jobs, including one as an

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[10] Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, pp. 42-43.

[11] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

assistant to Ed Ricketts, a marine biologist who ran Pacific Biological Laboratories on Cannery Row in Monterey. Ricketts and Steinbeck had been close friends since they met in 1930.

Tortilla Flat was another collection of short episodes unified by a quest theme inspired by Mallory's Morte D'Arthur, one of Steinbeck's favorite books. The characters are based on ". . . the Mexicans and Yaquis taken from the jails of northern Mexico . . ." whom Steinbeck supervised on his summer job working the night shift at a sugar beet factory.[12] Some of the stories were told to him by Susan Gregory, a resident of Monterey, to whom the book is dedicated. The purpose of the round-table theme was to unify the book, not to make a moral point, Steinbeck says in a 1934 letter to Mavis McIntosh:

> But the little dialogue, if it came between the incidents would at least make clear the form of the book, its tragi-comic theme. It would also make clear and sharp the strong but different philosophic-moral system of these people. I don't intend to make the parallel of the round table more clear, but simply to show that a cycle is there. You will remember that the association forms, flowers and dies. Far from having a hard theme running through the book, one of the intents is to show that rarely does any theme in the lives of these people survive the night.[13]

The group of four short stories that made up The Red Pony contained other scenes familiar to Steinbeck. In these stories he tried to capture the spirit of boyhood in the life of Jody, a boy growing up on a Salinas Valley ranch. Just like Steinbeck as a boy, Jody saw the Santa Lucia mountains to his west and the Gabilan mountains to the east.

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[12]Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 73.

[13]Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 97.

Of Mice and Men, In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath are Steinbeck's three 1930's works on California agriculture. Of Mice and Men was published between the other two books, but it belongs to that part of Steinbeck's work based on his background rather than his observation of the current scene. The main characters of Of Mice and Men were bindle stiffs, the wandering workers of the California ranches. George and Lenny were modeled on the solitary men who carried their belongings with them and tramped from one ranch to another in search of work. They were the original migrant workers of California and they preceded the stream of foreign-born workers imported to work on the farms as well as the Dust Bowl migrants of the 1930's. Of Mice and Men may have been inspired by scenes near King City, where Steinbeck once worked on a ranch.

The novel was an experiment, an attempt to write a novel that could be performed as a play. Steinbeck wrote:

> Simply stated, Of Mice and Men was an attempt to write a novel that could be played from the lines or a play that could be read. The reading of plays is a specialized kind of reading, and the technique of reading plays must be acquired with some difficulty.[14]

A play in novel form, Steinbeck believed, would have advantages over both forms. The novel would be less symbolic and abstract than the play and thus easier to absorb, and it would be easier to read. The descriptive material in the novel would aid the reader and the potential play director in visualizing the scenes. The novel form would

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[14]John Steinbeck, ". . . the novel might benefit by the discipline, the terseness. . . ." Stage, 15, January, 1936, p. 50.

transcend the time, place and scene limitations of the play. The play had an advantage over the novel form because the spirit of live performance drew the individuals in the audience together in an emotional reaction.[15]

The experiment was attempted, but it was not entirely successful. The novel was read on the stage by a San Francisco labor-theater group in 1937, but it did not go smoothly.

> The timing was out, the curtains were badly chosen, some of the scenes got off the line, and many of the methods ordinarily used in the novel and which I used in the book, do not get over on the stage.[16]

A later version of Of Mice and Men, written especially for the stage was to become a tremendous success.

In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath used as their subject matter segments of current history. For these two novels, Steinbeck made field trips to study the people he wrote about and to gather information about their situation in life. Before writing these novels he either considered producing them as journalism, or he actually wrote news articles on the topics he was researching.

A friend of Steinbeck's, Thomas Collins, introduced him to the California agriculture scene which was to become the setting of In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath. Collins assisted Steinbeck with the fieldwork for both novels. The Grapes of Wrath is dedicated to Collins and to Steinbeck's first wife, Carol. The dedication reads,

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[15] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

[16] Ibid., p. 51.

"To Carol who willed this book. To Tom who lived it."[17] A character in The Grapes of Wrath may be based on Collins: the kindly manager at the Weedpatch migrant camp who won Ma Joad's confidence by treating her with respect. Collins did serve at the Resettlement Administration's camp for migrant workers at Arvin, California at the time Steinbeck was doing research for his novel.

Steinbeck was already considering "the Communist idea,"[18] which was to become In Dubious Battle, as early as 1934, when he was still finishing Tortilla Flat. The novel is about a strike of migrant workers in a California valley. Collins, who was working as a social worker, called Steinbeck into the fields to observe actual strikes. Collins introduced him to Communist party labor organizers who became models for the strike organizers in the novel. At first Steinbeck wrote to his friend, George Albee, he considered writing about the strike in a journalistic piece.

> You remember I had an idea that I was going to write the autobiography of a Communist. Then Miss McIntosh suggested that I reduce it to fiction. There lay the trouble. I had planned to write a journalistic account of a strike. But as I thought of it as fiction the thing got bigger and bigger. It couldn't be that. I've been living with this thing for some time now. I don't know how much I have got over, but I have used a small strike in an orchard valley as the symbol of man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself.[19]

Steinbeck prided himself on the realism of the novel, especially on the fidelity of his portrayal of its people. The characters spoke in

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[17] John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), n.p.

[18] Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 97.

[19] Ibid., p. 98.

"vulgar" language but Steinbeck defended it. "I have worked along with working stiffs and I have rarely heard a sentence that had not some bit of profanity in it."[20] When a staff member of Steinbeck's publisher, Covici-Friede, read In Dubious Battle and protested that the Communists in the book didn't follow the Communist Party ideology, Steinbeck became extremely angry.

> Answering the complaint that the ideology is incorrect, this is the silliest of criticism. There are as many communist systems as there are communists. It should be obvious from the book that not only is this true, but that the ideologies change to fit a situation. In this book I was making nothing up. In any statement used by one of the protagonists I have simply used statements I have heard used.[21]

Steinbeck maintained that his book was based on people he observed in the field, not on the intellectualizings of theorists.

> My information for this book came mostly from Irish and Italian communists whose training was in the field, not in the drawing room. They don't believe in ideologies and ideal tactics. They do what they can under the circumstances.[22]

In Dubious Battle told the story of a migrant farm workers' strike in the Torgas Valley, a fictional California valley, modeled after places Steinbeck had actually seen, such as the Pajaro Valley, north of his hometown, Salinas. Two party workers, Mac, a veteran of many strikes, and Jim, a novice, arrive in the valley of apple orchards and help instigate a strike. They convince a small farmer to allow the strikers to camp on his land. They call in Doc Burton to oversee the

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[20] Ibid., p. 99.

[21] Ibid., p. 107.

[22] Ibid., p. 110.

sanitary conditions, thus assuring that the strikers won't be evicted by the health authorities. The book's brutal battle doesn't produce a clear victory for either side; the large growers don't get their crops picked for the low wages they offer and the workers don't win higher wages or better living conditions. Individuals are killed in clashes with vigilantes backed by the growers and the martyrs become symbols which spur on the raging strife.

The scenario of strikes such as this one in In Dubious Battle is verified by Carey McWilliams, the foremost historian of California agriculture of the 1930's. A small group of Communist Party workers was helping to foment the strikes by moving in where unrest was rumored and helping to accelerate the movement from discontent to action.[23] Strikes were numerous and some were violent. Carey McWilliams counted approximately 180 agricultural strikes between January 1, 1933 and June 1, 1939, the years of the heaviest Dust Bowl migration to California. McWilliams summarized the situation:

> Strikes had taken place in 34 out of 58 counties in California: in every important agricultural community and in every major crop. The national significance of these strikes can, perhaps, best be appraised in light of the realization that California produces about 40 percent of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States. Normally employing only 4.4 percent of the nation's agricultural workers, California has been the scene of from 34.3 percent to 100 percent of the annual strikes in agriculture. The importance of the strikes themselves can be variously illustrated. Approximately 89,276 workers were involved in 113 out of a total of 180 strikes recorded during this period. Civil and criminal disturbances occurred in 65 out of 180 strikes; arrests were

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[23]Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), p. 214.

> reported in 39 strikes; property damage in 11 strikes and evictions and deportations in 15 strikes. The year 1937, which marked the height of the dust bowl migration, was also the year in which 14 "violent" strikes occurred.[24]

A strike which occurred in the San Joaquin Valley in October, 1933, has some facts in common with the strike depicted in In Dubious Battle. More than 18,000 cotton workers were involved. Some of the strikers rented land near Corcoran, California, and erected a tent camp. The strike went on for twenty-four days amidst pressure from the press, vigilante action, and harassment from government authorities. Two union workers were killed when ranchers opened fire on a union meeting and one union worker was murdered. Three thousand workers staged an orderly march through Bakersfield as part of the funeral.[25]

There was even a strike in Steinbeck's hometown of Salinas in September, 1936. About 3,500 workers left the lettuce fields and packing sheds, halting the production of 90 percent of the nation's lettuce crop, which was grown on more than 70,000 acres in Monterey County. Colonel Henry Sanborn, an army reserve officer and publisher of the red-baiting journal, The American Citizen, took over direction of the town from the sheriff and made Salinas an armed camp. Local citizens were recruited and armed in case they had to put down strike riots, and the press screamed against the strike. Strike breakers were brought in and the jails were filled with arrested strikers. A stock of tear gas was purchased and 200 rounds were used against the

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[24]Carey McWilliams, Ill Fares the Land (New York: Barnes & Nobel, Inc., 1967), p. 15.

[25]Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field, pp. 219-224.

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strikers. The growers managed to send out the lettuce crop in spite of the strike, but at a huge cost. There were barbed wire barricades around the packing sheds and guards with machine guns on the roofs.[26]

Steinbeck remembered the strike years later as if it were a comic farce. He called Colonel Sanborn "The General" and described him as a buffoon, who installed numerous telephone lines at his headquarters in a local hotel. He described the recruitment of local citizens as one of the most exciting events to happen in town in years. "Everyone was having a good time. Stores were closed and to move about town was to be challenged every block or so by viciously weaponed people one had gone to school with."[27]

After In Dubious Battle was published in 1935, Steinbeck wrote Of Mice and Men. He also took a much-longed-for trip to Mexico.

In 1936 Steinbeck resumed his field research. He made several trips to different areas of the state where migrants were following the harvests. Some of his excursions were the basis of several news articles. On these trips he was also gathering raw material for The Grapes of Wrath. During 1936-1938, except for several months in 1937, he was continually traveling in California's agricultural valleys and working on The Grapes of Wrath.

In the summer of 1936 a friend received a note from Steinbeck:

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[26]Ibid., pp. 254-259.

[27]John Steinbeck, "Always Something to do in Salinas," Holiday, June, 1955, pp. 156, 158.

> I have to write this sitting in a ditch. I'll be home in two or three weeks. I'm not working--may go south to pick a little cotton. All this, needless to say, is not for publication--migrants are going south now and I'll probably go along. I enjoy it a lot.[28]

He wrote the note from the Gridley Migrant Camp, north of Sacramento, California. His first article about the migrant situation was written for the Nation, a journal of opinion dedicated to the cause of social justice. It appeared September 12, 1936, and was called "Dubious Battle in California." The article describes the workers' plight in California agriculture. Migrants had come from a stream of foreign-born workers, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Mexicans, some imported mainly for field work. The latest stream of migrant workers were American born, Dust Bowl refugees. In this article Steinbeck focused on the individuals, such as those who were minor characters in his novel In Dubious Battle. His attention was on the people who were caught up in such strikes.

About the time Steinbeck's article appeared in the Nation, he was asked to make another field trip to see how the migrants were faring. A group of about 3,000 people was caught in heavy rains in King's County, California, and was marooned on high ground amidst soaked and flooded fields.

> I had a friend, George West of the San Francisco News, who asked me to go over there and write a news story--the first private enterprise job I could remember. What I found horrified me. We had been simply poor, but these people were literally starving and by that I mean they were dying of it.

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[28]Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 129.

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> Marooned in the mud, they were wet and hungry and miserable. In addition they were fine, brave people. They took me over completely, heart and soul. I wrote six or seven articles and then did what I could to try to get food to them. The local people were scared. They did what they could, but it was natural that fear and perhaps pity made them dislike the dirty, helpless horde of locusts.[29]

Steinbeck's trip produced a seven-part series for the San Francisco News called "California's Harvest Gypsies," which ran from Sunday, October 5 to Monday, October 12, 1936.

Steinbeck continued his visits with migrants, he explained to a friend, and things were so tense in California in the Fall of 1936 that the News delayed printing the series for about a month after it was completed.

> Now I'm working hard on another book which isn't mine at all. I'm only editing it but it is a fine thing. A complete social study made of the weekly reports from a migrant camp.
>
> Then I did an article for the Nation and a series of articles for the News on migrant labor but the labor situation is so tense right now that the News is scared and won't print the series. Any reference to labor except as dirty dogs is not printed by the big press out here.[30]

In April, 1937 Steinbeck and his wife traveled to New York and embarked from there on a trip to Europe which lasted several months. They were able to travel because sales of Of Mice and Men were bringing prosperity. Steinbeck had already started working on the book which was to become The Grapes of Wrath late in 1936. Elizabeth Otis, who was Steinbeck's literary agent and friend for many years, said she

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[29]John Steinbeck, "A Primer on the Thirties," Esquire, June, 1960, p. 90.

[30]Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 132.

knew of no particular reason for the Steinbecks to travel to Europe when they did. He never gave any explanation for the trip, but perhaps he simply wanted to take advantage of an opportunity to travel.[31]

Of Mice and Men was headed for success as a play in 1937. George S. Kaufman was working on the dramatization. Steinbeck stopped at Kaufman's farm when he returned from Europe in August, 1937, in order to put the final touches on the play. It opened November 23, 1937 in New York, and it won the Drama Critic's Circle Award for that year. Steinbeck didn't attend the opening or go to New York to accept the award because he was back in California, working on The Grapes of Wrath. When they returned from Europe, the Steinbecks bought a car and traveled west with migrant caravans, getting to know the people.[32]

After his return to California, Steinbeck made several field trips to observe and gather information about migrant workers. His main interest at the time, according to his letters, was to arouse people and the government to provide aid for the migrants. He hoped to write articles for magazines and newspapers to arouse public interest.

> I don't know whether I'll go south or not but I must go to Visalia. Four thousand families, drowned out of their tents are really starving to death. The resettlement administration of the government asked me to write some news stories. The newspapers won't touch the stuff but they will under my byline. The locals are fighting the government bringing in food and medicine. I'm going to break the story

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[31]Interview with Elizabeth Otis, McIntosh & Otis Literary Agent, New York, N. Y., July 3, 1974.

[32]Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 141.

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> hard enough so that food and drugs can get moving. Shame and a hatred of publicity will do the job to the miserable local bankers.[33]

This letter, written to Miss Otis on February 14, 1938, demonstrates Steinbeck's zeal. According to a March 7, 1938 letter to Miss Otis, he had his literary agency working to place such an article.

> Just got back from another week in the field. The floods have aggravated the starvation and sickness. I went down for Life this time. Fortune wanted me to do an article for them but I won't. I don't like the audience. Then Life sent me down with a photographer from its staff and we took a lot of pictures of the people. They guarantee not to use it if they change it and will send me the proofs. They paid my expenses and will put up money for the help of some of these people.
>
> I'm sorry but I simply can't make money on these people. That applies to your query about an article for a national magazine.
>
> So don't get me a job for a slick. I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this but I can best do it through newspapers.[34]

Although Steinbeck hoped to produce some more articles, there are no records of any appearing after his 1936 efforts. Even Life never published a Steinbeck article on the migrants. The magazine did use the pictures, after The Grapes of Wrath was a best-selling novel and a movie version had come out. Several photographs appeared in the February 19, 1940 issue interspersed with stills from the film. The idea was to show that the portrayal of the Joads in the movie was authentic.[35]

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[33] Ibid., p. 159.

[34] Ibid., pp. 161-162.

[35] "Speaking of Pictures . . . These by Life Prove Facts in Grapes of Wrath," Life, February 19, 1940, pp. 10-11.

The Grapes of Wrath went through several drafts. In March, 1938, Steinbeck wrote Miss Otis that he destroyed the novel he had been working on. He described it as being about vigilantes, local Californians who harassed the migrants. He complained that he wasn't making the progress he had hoped for:

> I don't seem to know any more about writing a novel than I did ten years ago. You'd think I would learn. I suppose I could dash it off but I want this one to be a pretty good one. There's another difficulty too. I'm trying to write history while it is happening and I don't want to be wrong.[36]

During the Spring of 1938 Steinbeck visited the migrants and worked on the draft of his novel that was to become The Grapes of Wrath. He wrote part of the novel in a country store near a Resettlement Administration camp, according to the recollections of Bud Campbell, who came to the area with the migrant tides in 1935.

> He said Steinbeck lived in a tent in the Sunset Camp down the road for about six months and was a frequent visitor to the store.
>
> "Steinbeck sat there and wrote part of The Grapes of Wrath in that little store," Mr. Campbell continued. "I don't know what he was doing, but he'd write on a big pad of paper. He came back later and asked what I thought about The Grapes of Wrath. I said it kind of lowered the people and it kind of lowered the state of California." He said, "Yes, but it made me a lot of money."[37]

He had earlier help from the Resettlement Administration in information gathering. As mentioned above, Steinbeck met with Roy Stryker and reviewed the Administration's picture file, which was filled with the work of some of the nation's best photographers, who traveled around

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[36]Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 162.

[37]Douglas E. Kneeland, "West Coast 'Okies' Recall Depression, Scoff at Recession," New York Times, February 22, 1975, p. 32.

making a photographic record of the era. He also had help from the San Francisco office of the Administration, which sent Steinbeck with one of its workers on a field trip.

Steinbeck's information gathering in the field provided the raw material for his novels In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath. Being in the midst of his subject matter was both an aid and a handicap. He had the benefit of being close to his subject, close enough to observe the finest details. Yet there was a danger, he believed, of losing perspective on the situation. He might grasp the immediate picture, but lose sight of its meaning in the perspective of human history. Steinbeck's aim in journalism was to influence public opinion in order to help the migrants. His aim in his novels was to use the specifics of life to illustrate the progress of mankind, to use the microcosm to illustrate the macrocosm. Steinbeck explained this in a letter to an editor in which he refused to write an article about In Dubious Battle.

> I wish I could write the article you suggest more for my own good than for yours. But man! I don't know enough. There are fine retirements into one terminology or another. I haven't been able so to protect myself. The very frightened, use the academy, research into one kind of microscopic detail or another or bury themselves in some old time and its equipment feeling safe because that time is over.
>
> The changes go on so rapidly and it is so hard to see! Sad that it will be so easy in fifty years. Of course there is the larger picture one can feel. I suppose the appelations communist and fascist are adequate. I don't really think they are. I'm probably making a mistake in simply listening to men talk, watching them act, hoping that the projection of the microcosm will define the outlines of the macrocosm.[38]

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[38]John Steinbeck, "The Way it Seems to John Steinbeck," Occident (Fall, 1936), p. 5.

Steinbeck was aware that he was attempting a large-scale task when he wrote The Grapes of Wrath. His information gathering provided the raw material for the novel. Steinbeck attempted to do more than describe migrant life. He meant to describe the human condition. He alludes to this in a letter to Pascal Covici:

> And still one more thing--I tried to write this book the way lives are being lived not the way books are being written.
>
> This letter sounds angry. I don't mean it to be. I know that books lead to a strong deep climax. This one doesn't except by implication and the reader must bring the implication to it. If he doesn't it wasn't a book for him to read. Throughout I've tried to make the reader participate in the actuality, what he takes from it will be scaled entirely on his own depth or hollowness. There are five layers in this book, a reader will find as many as he can and he won't find more than he has in himself.[39]

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[39]Steinbeck and Wallsten, Steinbeck: A Life in Letters, p. 178.

## CHAPTER III

## JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE: STEINBECK'S REPORTING AND THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Lots of folks back east, they say,
Leavin' home every day,
Beatin' a hot old dusty trail
To the California line.
Cross the desert sands they roll,
Gettin' out of the old dust bowl;
They think they're goin' to a sugar bowl;
Here's what they find:

The police at the port of entry say,
"You're number fourteen thousand for today:

If you ain't got the Do Re Mi, boys,
If you ain't got the Do Re Mi,
Better go back to beautiful Texas,
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee.[1]

A ragged man returning from California gives the Joad encampment exactly the advice expressed in this Woodie Guthrie song. The ruined scarecrow who speaks in The Grapes of Wrath goes on to describe how California's labor system exploits the workers, how growers try to attract thousands of people to do the work of a few hundred, but the advice he gives is the same as the song's.[2]

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[1] Alan Lomax, comp., Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People, notes by Woodie Guthrie, transcribed and ed. by Pete Seeger (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), pp. 230-231.

[2] John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), pp. 257-261.

The Grapes of Wrath does much more in its 619 pages than point out the inequities of California's agricultural system. As Steinbeck said in a letter to his publisher, there are five different levels to the novel.[3] The five strands are skillfully interwoven to compose the fabric of the novel. The most obvious level is the Joad family's story, how the Joads left their home in Sallisaw, Oklahoma, journeyed across the country to California, and once there, tried to find work and settle down. Less obvious is the level of biblical allegory. The Joad family's story is an allegory of the Exodus in which the Dust Bowl is Egypt, the Joads' trip across Route 66 and the California desert is like the Israelites' wanderings in the desert, and the Joads' efforts to find work in California are like the Israelites' battles for the land of Canaan.[4]

Another subtle theme running through The Grapes of Wrath is that of Steinbeck's own philosophy or world-view. It was a naturalistic philosophy derived from his readings and his studies of biology and it envisioned society as an organic whole with individuals serving as components of the larger being. In The Grapes of Wrath the optimistic side of this philosophy is revealed. Society is depicted as

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[3]Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds., Steinbeck: A Life in Letters (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 178.

[4]H. Kelly Crockett, "The Bible and The Grapes of Wrath," College English, 1962, XXIV, 193-199.

making progress toward the surrender of individual goals in favor of the advancement of all.[5]

On another level, The Grapes of Wrath is a documentary novel. The Joads exemplified what was happening to thousands of Americans during the 1930's. The fact that many shared the Joads' experiences is demonstrated by Steinbeck's device of interchapters. These chapters are interspersed throughout the novel, and they generalize about how the conditions affecting the Joads affected the mass of people. The combination of the Joads' experiences and the interchapters showed that the book was not just the story of one family, but the chronicle of American history.

> By employing this double method, Steinbeck also did what he could to protect himself against the attacks some people launched against the book. By presenting the problems he was concerned with in terms of their effect upon an individual family, he forced his readers to visualize the problems as they affected particular persons and denied them the consolation of the sociology textbook that treats depressed persons in numbers too large to be individually meaningful.
>
> On the other hand, by using the generalized method, he denied in advance the charge that the history of the Joads was unique. By making what happened to the Joads representative of general situations he depicted, he avoided precisely the error made by those who attempted to "answer" The Grapes of Wrath by presenting a unique case and implying it was typical. In the interchapter Steinbeck found exactly the device he needed to make his novel simultaneously a general and an intensely personal history of the travails of a culture in transition.[6]

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[5]Richard Astro, John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973), pp. 124-126.

[6]Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 96-97.

The technique of combining the particular and the general is like the documentary filmmaker's technique. The interchapters are like broad sweeps of the camera across the landscape which set the scene. The focus on the Joad family is like the filmmaker's use of a particular group of people to illustrate a general situation. In support of the parallel between the form of The Grapes of Wrath and the documentary film is the fact that the novel was smoothly transformed into a film version in 1940, by 20th Century Fox for a screen version written by Nunnally Johnson and directed by John Ford.[7] In the film, devices such as shots of tractor or jalopy caravans and sequences of passing road signs, serve, like the interchapters to provide a general picture.

> These devices have the effect of generalizing the conflicts of the Joads, of making them representative of typical problems in a much wider social context. In every reversal, in every act of oppression, we feel the pressure of thousands.[8]

Steinbeck also seems to have employed his concept of a combination of novel and play which he first attempted with Of Mice and Men. The Grapes of Wrath contains dialog which translates easily to the screen and descriptions which serve as settings and stage directions.

> Except for the freewheeling omniscience of the interchapters, the novel's prose relies wholly on dialogue and physical action to reveal character. Because Steinbeck's style is not marked by meditation, it resembles, in this respect, the classic form of the scenario. Even at moments of highest tension, Steinbeck scrupulously avoids getting

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[7]George Bluestone, "Novel into Film: The Grapes of Wrath," in A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath, ed. by Warren French (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), pp. 165-166.

[8]Ibid., p. 182.

> inside the minds of people. . . . Although this is Steinbeck's characteristic style, it can also serve as precise directions for the actor. There is nothing here that cannot be turned into images of physical reality. Critics who seem surprised at the ease with which Steinbeck's work moves from one medium to another may find their explanation here. Precisely this fidelity to physical detail was responsible, for example, for the success of Of Mice and Men first as a novel, then as a play, then as a film.[9]

Another level of the novel, and one which it has in common with some of the great documentaries is the fact that it stirred up a reaction. These ranged from denials of the facts from Oklahoma,[10] case histories of happy, successful migrants, such as Grapes of Gladness,[11] to sarcastic attacks such as the one called The Wrath of John Steinbeck, or St. John Goes to Church.[12] Two Congressional investigations were spurred by the book, The United States Senate Education and Labor Committee, Hearings on Violations of Free Speech and Assembly and Infractions of the Rights of Labor,[13] and the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens.[14]

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[9] Ibid., p. 183.

[10] Martin S. Shockley, "The Reception of The Grapes of Wrath in Oklahoma," American Literature, XV, 1944, pp. 351-361.

[11] Marshall V. Hartrangt, Grapes of Gladness (Los Angeles: De Vorss & Co., 1939).

[12] Robert Bennett, The Wrath of John Steinbeck, or St. John Goes to Church (Los Angeles: Alberson Press, 1939), (pamphlet).

[13] U.S., Congress, Senate, Education and Labor Committee, Hearings on Violations of Free Speech and Assembly and Infractions of the Rights of Labor, Parts 46-75 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939-1940).

[14] U.S., Congress, House, Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, Reports of Hearings in Cumulative Index of the 74th to the 85th Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959).

In The Grapes of Wrath these five strands are woven into whole cloth thanks to Steinbeck's skillful writing, fueled by the energy of his great compassion and concern for the migrant people. Steinbeck's feelings for the migrants are evident in his journalistic work done in the Fall of 1936. First, in his article for the Nation, "Dubious Battle in California," which appeared in the September 12, 1936 issue, Steinbeck turned his attention from the strikes that wracked California agriculture to the people who were involved in them.

The article provides a brief description of the agriculture system in California from Steinbeck's point of view. It tells that most of the farms were owned by large growers and farmed by hired migrant labor. The migrants had come from a stream of foreign minorities, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Mexicans since the 19th century. In his 1936 article Steinbeck notices an addition to the migrant population, Americans from the South and Midwest who came to California in the wake of the Depression and the Dust Bowl.

As the Mexicans were trying to unionize, the growers were trying to have them deported, Steinbeck noted. The growers took advantage of the American families, desperate for work, who entered California during the Mexican drive for unionization. Steinbeck saw the Americans trying to organize for their own protection as well.

> The usual repressive measures have been used against these migrants: shooting by deputy sheriffs in "self-defense," jailing without charge, refusal of trial by jury, torture and beating by night riders. But even in the short time that these American migrants have been out here there has been a change. It is understood that they are being attacked

> not because they want higher wages, not because they are Communists, but simply because they want to organize.[15]

Steinbeck's notice shifted from the labor picture of In Dubious Battle to the common troopers whose fate would be affected by the struggle.

> Unlike the Chinese and the Filipinos, the men rarely come alone. They bring wives and children, now and then a few chickens and their pitiful household goods, though in most cases these have been sold to buy gasoline for the trip. It is quite usual for a man, his wife, and from three to eight children to arrive in California with no possessions but the rattletrap car they travel in and the ragged clothes on their bodies.[16]

The picture Steinbeck painted of the welcome these families found in California was not a pleasant one. They could live in a few camps with sanitary facilities and a place to pitch their tents, but most farms didn't even have facilities up to this standard. Some farms charged rent for the shacks they provided, or they deducted the rent from wages. Migrants couldn't collect relief because they couldn't meet county residency requirements. They lived in squalor and poverty, with the family earning from $150 to $400 per year. Health conditions were bad and epidemics were hard to fight.

Former small farmers and farm hands from the Midwest wouldn't be intimidated as easily as the foreign-born migrants, Steinbeck said.

> In the first place, the migrants are undeniably American and not deportable. In the second place, they were not lured to California by a promise of good wages, but are refugees as surely as though they had fled from destruction by an invader. In the third place, they are not drawn from a peon class, but have either owned small farms or been farm hands in the early

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[15]John Steinbeck, "Dubious Battle in California," Nation, September 12, 1936, p. 304.

[16]Ibid., p. 303.

> American sense, in which the "hand" is a member of the employing family. They have one fixed idea, and that is to acquire land and settle on it. Probably the most important difference is that they are not easily intimidated. They are courageous, intelligent, and resourceful. Having gone through the horrors of the drought and with immense effort having escaped from it, they cannot be herded, attacked, starved, or frightened as all the others were.[17]

Steinbeck ended the article by portraying the state of California as the site of opposing camps arming themselves for war. He expresses the hope that such war may be averted.

> There is now in California anger instead of fear. The stupidity of the large grower has changed terror into defensive fury. The granges, working close to the soil and to the men, and knowing the temper of the men of this new race, have tried to put through wages that will allow a living, however small. But the large growers, who have been shown to be the only group making a considerable profit from agriculture, are devoting their money to tear gas and rifle ammunition. The men will organize and the large growers will meet organization with force. It is easy to prophesy this. In Kern County the grange has voted $1 a hundred pounds for cotton pickers for the first picking. The Associated Farmers have not yielded from seventy-five cents. There is tension in the valley, and fear for the future.
>
> It is fervently to be hoped that the great group of migrant workers so necessary to the harvesting of California crops may be given the right to live decently, that they may not be so badgered, tormented, and hurt that in the end they become avengers of the hundreds of thousands who have been tortured and starved before them.[18]

The article "Dubious Battle in California," took the form of an essay which explained why, in Steinbeck's opinion, a conflict between migrants and growers was brewing in California. First, he analyzed the structure of California agriculture, its domination by

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 304.

the large landowners and its dependence on the exploitation of labor. Then he explained the position of the latest migrant group. He described the pressures that were building as a result of the latest entry of American migrants into the existing system. His conclusion was that tensions were building toward open conflict. His ideas on possible solutions are also present in the article. He suggested solutions in several passages of the article: that agriculture should be reformed to offer workers decent wages and adequate living conditions.

Steinbeck's attitudes and personal concerns are evident in the article. It begins with a measured, explanatory tone as he reviews the past and begins describing the present situation. His feelings toward the large landowners who exploited the workers are evident in a sarcastic descriptive passage about one farm.

> One such ranch, run by a very prominent man, has neat single-room houses built of whitewashed adobe. They are said to have cost $500 apiece. They are rented for $5 a month. This ranch pays twenty cents an hour as opposed to the thirty cents paid at other ranches and indorsed by the grange in the community. Since this rugged individual is saving 33 1/3 percent of his labor cost and still charging $5 a month rent for his houses, it will be readily seen that he is getting a very fair return on his money besides being generally praised as a philanthropist. The reputation of this ranch, however, is that the migrants stay only long enough to get money to buy gasoline with, and then move on.[19]

Another characteristic of Steinbeck's article is his chauvinism on behalf of native-born American workers. He calls them "courageous, intelligent, and resourceful . . . not easily intimidated."[20] His

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

sympathy goes to the family groups with their "pitiful household goods . . . rattletrap car . . . and ragged clothes."[21] The article ends with the "fervent hope" that migrants will be treated decently and conflict will be avoided.[22]

It was also during the Fall of 1936 that Steinbeck produced a series of news articles for the San Francisco News at the request of Associate Editor George West, who was Steinbeck's friend. Steinbeck visited King's County, where 3,000 people had been caught in heavy rains. They were living on high ground amidst soaked and flooded fields. Steinbeck produced a seven-part series for the San Francisco News called "California's Harvest Gypsies." The series ran from Monday, October 5 to Monday, October 12, 1936, excluding Sunday. It got moderately prominent play in the newspaper. Each section of the series appeared at the top, center of its page underneath a headline that varied in size each day from 24 to 36 points. There was a kicker after each headline amplifying upon it. The series never made page one, but the first two sections made page three and the third, page six. The next three sections dropped back to pages 16, 14 and 14 respectively, and the concluding part was on page 8. Each section appeared under Steinbeck's byline and a short paragraph by the editor to introduce him to the readers.

> John Steinbeck, author of "Tortilla Flat" and other books, followed the people who follow the crops in California, to see their working and living conditions. He

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

> tells his story at first hand. Migrant labor is at once the salvation of the fruit and vegetable farmer, and the most important social-economic problem faced by the state.--The Editor.[23]

Each section of the series was illustrated with one to four photographs of the people and scenes described in it. The photographer or photographers did not get credit lines. The photograph which illustrates the first part of the series is unmistakably Dorothea Lange's classic photograph "Migrant Mother." Miss Lange was working for the Resettlement Administration, later the Farm Security Administration, as one of the team of photographers working under Roy Stryker. She was the only member of the photography group working on the West Coast. In the photograph a worried, worn-looking woman wearing a checked dress and a sweater holds an infant on her lap. A shaggy-haired child leans his head on her shoulder. The caption in the San Francisco News reads: "The family of a Nipomo pea picker--a 'picture story' of child innocence and maternal apprehension. How long here--and where to next?"[24]

Analysis of the series reveals its relationship to The Grapes of Wrath. The series is related to the novel in the same way an artist's charcoal or pencil sketches are a preparation for a magnificent landscape painted in oils. Echoes of the series abound in the novel in descriptive passages and statements by the characters.

Chapter I of the series contains the germs of many themes and incidents that were to flower in the novel. It is an overview of

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[23]John Steinbeck, "California's Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 5, 1936, p. 3.

[24]Ibid.

California agriculture, and in it Steinbeck poses and answers the question, who are the migrant workers? He proposes, "Let us see what kind of people they are, where they come from, and the routes of their wanderings."[25] To answer this question in the novel, The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck used about twenty of the book's thirty chapters.

Steinbeck establishes early in Chapter I of the series that migrant labor is necessary to harvest California's crops, and that it is seasonal labor, requiring hundreds of workers one week and only a dozen the next on a particular farm. In Chapter I of the series, and later, in the novel, Steinbeck states that the newest wave of migrants are Americans, unlike the foreign-born workers of the past, and they are refugees from the Dust Bowl. He emphasizes their good qualities, that they are proud, hard-working people with a special feeling of closeness to the land. Steinbeck says that such a feeling is alien to the huge farms of California and the increasingly mechanized enterprises in the Midwest. He also says that the incoming migrants are met with hatred and derision because they are the hungry strangers who seem to pose a threat to native Californians.

He tells why migrants left their homes in Chapter I of the series:

> They are small farmers who have lost their farms, or farm hands who have lived with the family in the old American way. They are men who have worked hard on their own farms and have felt the pride of possessing and living in close touch with the land.

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[25] Ibid.

> They are resourceful and intelligent Americans who have gone through the hell of the drought, have seen the top soil blow away; and this, to a man who has owned his land, is a curious and terrible pain.[26]

The first eleven chapters of The Grapes of Wrath describe in detail how the Joads and others like them were driven from their land by the soil erosion and the nation's tough economic conditions. Chapter I of the novel, an introductory interchapter, describes the dust storms, the final result of gradual land erosion after the grasses were plowed off the prairies. It describes how the dust killed off the young corn crop and left the desperate farm people wondering what to do. "After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant."[27] Tom Joad observes the ruined corn and sparse cotton rows on his way home from McAlester prison. "'Ever' year,' said Joad. 'Ever' year I can remember, we had a good crop comin an' it never come. Granpa says she was good the first five plowin's, while the wild grass was still in her.'"[28]

Another point made in Chapter I of the series is that, small farmers, the people who became migrants had no contact with the industrialization of farming until they were tractored off their land or they saw the gigantic farming operations in California.

> And they are strangely anachronistic in one way: having been brought up in the prairies where industrialization never penetrated, they have jumped with no transition from the old agrarian, self-containing farm where nearly everything used

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 6.

[28] Ibid., p. 37.

> was raised or manufactured, to a system of agriculture so industrialized that the man who plants a crop does not often see, let alone harvest, the fruit of his planting, where the migrant has no contact with the growth cycle.[29]

In contrast to the small farmer's closeness to the land, the men on tractors in The Grapes of Wrath are unfeeling toward the work they are doing. After the banks took over the mortgaged farms, or landlords dismissed the sharecroppers, the tractors arrived.

> He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth. He sat in an iron seat and stepped on iron pedals. He could not cheer or beat or curse or encourage himself. He did not know or own or trust or beseech the land. If a seed dropped, did not germinate, it was nothing. If the young thrusting plant withered in drought or drowned in a flood of rain it was no more to the driver than to the tractor.[30]

Tom Joad arrives at his family's farm later in the novel only to find the land plowed over, the house smashed by the tractor and the family gone.[31]

Steinbeck exalts the pioneer roots of the migrants. He traces them back to their ancestors who first settled on the plains. He praises them and attaches the same aura of romance and legend to them as is associated with the American pioneer saga. In Chapter I of the series he repeats this theme several times.

> Often they patched the worn-out tires every few miles. They have weathered the thing, and they can weather much more for their blood is strong.

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[29]Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

[30]Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 48.

[31]Ibid., p. 54.

> They are descendents of men who crossed into the middle west, who won their lands by fighting, who cultivated the prairies and stayed with them until they went back to the desert.
>
> And because of their tradition and their training, they are not migrants by nature. They are gypsies by force of circumstances . . .
>
> The names of the new migrants indicate that they are of English, German and Scandinavian descent. There are Munns, Holbrooks, Hansens, Schmidts.[32]

The farm families in The Grapes of Wrath are, like the people described in the series, of pioneer stock. In an interchapter, Steinbeck describes men thinking: "Grandpa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes."[33] In a later interchapter, Steinbeck has the migrant describe his long roots in America. "We ain't foreign. Seven generations back Americans, and beyond that Irish, Scotch, English, German. One of our folks in the Revolution, an' they was lots of our folks in the Civil War--both sides. Americans."[34]

Another theme in Chapter I of the series that appears in The Grapes of Wrath is the hatred and fear which the Californians felt toward the migrants. In the series Steinbeck explains:

> Thus, in California we find a curious attitude toward a group that makes our agriculture successful. The migrants are needed, and they are hated. Arriving in a district they find the dislike always meted out by the resident to the foreigner, the outlander. This hatred of the stranger occurs in the whole range of human history, from the most primitive village form to our own highly organized industrial farming. The migrants are hated for the following reasons, that they

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[32]Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

[33]Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 45.

[34]Ibid., pp. 317-318.

> are ignorant and dirty people, that they are carriers of disease, that they increase the necessity for police and the tax bill for schooling in a community, and if they are allowed to organize they can, simply by refusing to work, wipe out the season's crops. They are never received into a community nor into the life of a community. Wanderers in fact, they are never allowed to feel at home in the communities that demand their services.[35]

In an interchapter of The Grapes of Wrath Californians use the very words Steinbeck used in Chapter I of the series when they describe the migrants as "Outlanders, foreigners."[36] Just after the Joads cross the California border they meet a disappointed man returning from the state who told them:

> They hate you 'cause they're scairt. They know a hungry fella gonna get food even if he got to take it. They know that fallow lan's a sin an' somebody 'gonna take it. What the hell! You never been called "Okie" yet. . . .
>
> Well Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it.[37]

As the Joads set out to cross the desert into California's agricultural valleys, two gas station attendants remark after the departing family:

> Them Okies? They're all hard-lookin'.
> "Jesus, I'd hate to start out in a jalopy like that."
> "Well you and me got sense. Them goddam Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas.[38]

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[35] Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

[36] Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 321.

[37] Ibid., p. 280.

[38] Ibid., p. 301.

In Chapter I of the series Steinbeck described the labor situation that migrants found in California. The labor was seasonal, requiring many workers at harvest time and only a few during the rest of the year. Migrants, often many more than were needed, flocked to areas where there was rumored to be work. Since there were so many workers, the landowners could offer a very low wage and the migrants would accept it. In the series Chapter I Steinbeck gave an example:

> For example, a large peach orchard which requires the work of 20 men the year round will need as many as 2,000 for the brief time of picking and packing. And if the migration of the 2,000 should not occur, if it should be delayed even a week, the crop will rot and be lost.[39]

In The Grapes of Wrath Tom Joad meets a young man in a Hooverville who explains the labor situation in phrases very similar to the description in the series.

> "They's a big son-of-a-bitch of a peach orchard I worked in. Takes nine men all the year roun'." He paused impressively. "Takes three thousan' men for two weeks when them peaches is ripe. Got to have 'em or them peaches'll rot.[40]

In Chapter II of the series Steinbeck focused on a specific area of migrant life. He described living conditions in a Hooverville. He described three families who occupied a camp, each one presenting a more advance stage of deterioration in its physical condition, living quarters and morale. In The Grapes of Wrath the Joads' camp at a Hooverville which is similar to the one described in the series.

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[39]Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

[40]Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 335.

The three families Steinbeck described in Chapter II of the series are called the upper class, middle class and lower class of the camps. The upper class family has been in the camps the shortest amount of time. It has tried to construct a house out of corrugated paperboard, but the house will be washed away in the first downpour. The parents have tried to keep their home and their clothes clean and they send their children to school when they are in one place long enough. Their first worry is finding food.

> Here in the faces of the husband and his wife, you begin to see an expression you will notice on every face; not worry but absolute terror of the starvation that crowds in against the borders of the camp. . . . He is a newcomer and his spirit and his decency and his sense of his own dignity have not been quite wiped out.[41]

The second family lives in a ragged tent, and there is one bed for the six people. Neither the cooking utensils nor the children have been cleaned. The children hide instead of going to school because the teachers resent them and the other children jeer at them. The father is a slow worker because his strength has eroded and his spirit is breaking, thus his earning power is reduced.

> The dullness shows in the faces of this family, and in addition there is a sullenness that makes them taciturn.
>
> This is the middle class of the squatters' camp. In a few months this family will slip down to the lower class.
>
> Dignity is all gone, and spirit has turned to sullen anger before it dies.[42]

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[41] Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 6, 1936, p. 3.

[42] Ibid.

The third family, which represents the lower class of camp dwellers, lives in a house of willow branches driven into the ground and filled in with wattling weeds, tin, old paper and strips of carpet. The three-year-old child who sits in front of the dwelling is described as near death. He has malnutrition and he lacks the energy to brush flies away from his face. His mother has recently given birth to a dead baby. Cleanliness and sanitary habits have been completely abandoned by this family. The father is described as completely lacking in the will to persist under these conditions.

> The husband was a share-cropper once, but he couldn't make it go. Now he has lost even the desire to talk.
>
> He will not look directly at you, for that requires will, and will needs strength.
>
> But he hasn't the will nor the energy to resist. Too many things have happened to him. This is the lower class of the camp.[43]

Outsiders are received suspiciously in the squatters' camp because they bring trouble, according to the series. The sheriff raids the camp occasionally and if there is labor trouble, vigilantes may burn down the entire camp. Steinbeck said that camp conditions make the people so desperate that they may even break the law.

> And if these men steal. If there is developing among them a suspicion and hatred of well-dressed, satisfied people, the reason is not to be sought in their origin nor in any tendency to weakness in their character.[44]

In Chapter 20 of The Grapes of Wrath the Joads camp overnight in a Hooverville. It is described in a realistic manner in the novel

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

as compared to the description by example in the series. The action that takes place in the Hooverville is like a dramatization of the series Chapter II. As the Joads enter the camp they see a collection of dwellings like those described in the series.

> There was no order in the camp; little gray tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random. The first house was nondescript. The south wall was made of three sheets of rusty corrugated iron, the east wall a square of moldy carpet tacked between two boards, the north wall a strip of roofing paper and a strip of tattered canvas, and the west wall six pieces of gunny sacking. Over the square frame, on untrimmed willow limbs, grass had been piled, not thatched, but heaped up in a low mound. . . .
>
> Next to the shack there was a little tent, gray with weathering, but neatly, properly set up; and the boxes in front of it were placed against the tent wall. A stovepipe stuck out of the door flap, and the dirt in front of the tent had been swept and sprinkled. A bucketful of soaking clothes stood on a box. The camp was neat and sturdy. A Model A roadster and a little homemade bed trailer stood beside the tent.
>
> And next there was a huge tent, ragged, torn in strips and the tears mended with pieces of wire. The flaps were up, and inside four wide mattresses lay on the ground. A clothes line strung along the side bore pink cotton dresses and several pairs of overalls.[45]

This description of the Hooverville in the novel demonstrates the three classes of people in the camps just as the series does. The lowest class comes first in the passage above, the upper class second and the middle class third. As in the series, the condition of the dwellings indicates the condition of the people.

When the Joads first enter the camp they encounter people who have been beaten into submission like the lower class camp dwellers.

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[45]Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 328-329.

> The flaps of the first shack parted and a woman looked out. Her gray hair was braided, and she wore a dirty, flowered Mother Hubbard. Her face was wizened and dull, deep gray pouches under blank eyes, and a mouth slack and loose.[46]

The woman's husband is incapable of answering Pa Joad's questions about the camp. A young man explains that the old is "bull-simple."[47] He says, "I guess cops push 'im aroun' so much he's still spinning."[48]

Later in Chapter 20 of the novel, as Steinbeck mentioned in the series, a contractor and a sheriff's deputy visit the squatters' camp, ostensibly to round up workers for a harvest in another area. They meet quiet resistance from most of the migrants and open opposition from Tom Joad. Tom hits the deputy, knocking him out, after the man tries to arrest his friend, Floyd Knowles, who questions the contractor's tactics. The deputy also fires his gun in the camp, shooting off a woman's fingers. Casy the preacher claims that he, not Tom, hit the deputy, and is taken away by four armed men. The Joads pack up and leave the camp because they realize that the armed men will probably return. As the Joads drive away from the camp they can hear people screaming, and see the flames flare and spread as the remaining migrants are burned out. Floyd Knowles explains why the police may be harassing the migrants.

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[46] Ibid., p. 330.

[47] Ibid., p. 332.

[48] Ibid.

> Some says they don' want us to vote; keep us movin' so we can't vote. An' some says if we set in one place we'd get organized. I don' know why. I on'y know we get rode all the time. . . .[49]

The theme of lawlessness is introduced in Chapter II of the series. Steinbeck concluded the chapter by stating that the migrants may break the law because they are desperate, not because they are scoffers. As the Joads are leaving the Hooverville, Tom expresses his hostilities to Ma.

> "Ma," he said, "if it was the law they was workin' with, why, we could take it. But it ain't the law. They're a-workin' away at our spirits. They're a-tryin' to make us cringe an' crawl like a whipped bitch. They tryin' to break us. Why, Jesus Christ, Ma, they come atime when the on'y way a fella can keep his decency is by takin' a sock at a cop. They're workin' on our decency."
>
> Ma said, "You promised Tom, That's how Pretty Boy Floyd done. I knowed his ma. They hurt him."[50]

This statement is a foreshadowing of what will happen to Tom during the course of the novel. He tries to join Casy in a meeting to organize migrant labor. When Casy is killed, Tom kills his assilant and becomes a fugitive.

In other cases in the novel, the law is broken because the migrants can't afford the niceties of society. They are forced to ignore regulations because they have no choice. After Rose of Sharon's baby is born dead Uncle John is asked to bury the body. He protests that it's against the law to bury a body without the county's

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[49] Ibid., pp. 332-333.

[50] Ibid., p. 381.

authority. Someone remarks, in reply, "They's lots of things 'gainst the law that we can't he'p doin'."[51]

In Chapter III of the series Steinbeck explained the power structure of California agriculture. He discussed the control mechanisms of the large landowners and businesses which led to the conditions faced by the Joads and others like them. Steinbeck explained that most of the farmland in California was divided into huge tracts owned by absentee landlords and corporations. Small farmers, those with 5 to 100 acres, tried to treat the migrants humanely and often sided with them in labor disputes. In spite of their sympathies, the small farmers had to work within the system to stay in business. They depended on the banks for loans, and the banks might have been landlords themselves. Bank officers might have been landlords or the banks might have depended on farmers' associations for their business. The small farmer might have been locked into the system against his will.

As a result the large farms were run by superintendents who were only doing a job, not carrying responsibility for the treatment of people. In the series Steinbeck described the housing that might be provided on a large farm.

> The houses, one-room shacks usually about 10 by 12 feet, have no rug, no water, no bed. In one corner there is a little iron wood stove. Water must be carried from a faucet at the end of the street.[52]

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[51] Ibid., p. 608.

[52] Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 7, 1936, p. 6.

The Joad family is given a house like this one when it starts work at a peach orchard in Chapter 26 of the novel.

> Ma opened the door of the house and stepped inside. The floor was splashed with grease. In the one room stood a rusty tin stove with nothing more. The tin stove rested on four bricks and its rusty stovepipe went up through the roof. The room smelled of sweat and grease.[53]

Steinbeck described in the series how the migrants are further brought under the landowner's control by the credit system. The farm store extended credit to the migrants and they bought their food on credit. Often the wages they earned didn't keep pace with the credit they owed. Ma Joad encounters a situation like this at the peach orchard. The entire family's earnings for a day of picking peaches amount to a dollar. Ma Joad goes to the nearest store, which is owned by the ranch, to buy food for supper. She finds that the food items are inferior in quality and higher in price than the goods she could get in town. She uses the entire dollar to buy bread, meat, potatoes and coffee. Even though this is the best meal the Joads have eaten in some days, the portions are small and the family's hunger isn't completely satisfied.[54]

Tom Joad encounters a small farmer who is locked into the system. The farmer treats him fairly and wants to pay him a decent wage for digging a ditch. Then the farmer explains that he has to reduce the wages because of pressure from the Farmers Association.

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[53]Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 504.

[54]Ibid., pp. 510-517.

> Now do you know who runs the Farmers Association? I'll tell you. The Bank of the West. That bank owns most of this valley, and it's got paper on everything it doesn't own. So last night the member from the bank told me, he said, "You're paying thirty cents an hour. You'd better cut it down to twenty-five.' I said, 'I've got good men. They're worth thirty.' And he says, 'It isn't that,' he says. 'The wage is twenty-five now. If you pay thirty, it'll only cause unrest. And by the way,' he says, 'you going to need the usual amount for a crop loan next year?'"[55]

In the series Steinbeck described the conditions on the large ranches. He said that hatred and suspicion among the workers and their employers was growing. Some farms or ranches turned into armed camps where terror not only prevented revolts, but complaints.

> The will of the ranch owner, then is law; for these deputies are always on hand, their guns conspicuous. A disagreement constitutes resisting an officer. A glance at the list of migrants shot during a single year in California for "resisting an officer" will give a fair idea of the casualness of these "officers" in shooting workers.[56]

The Joads encounter terrorism of this sort when they go to work on the peach orchard in Chapter 26 of The Grapes of Wrath. When the Joads arrive at the orchard they are quizzical about the armed men they see near the entrance. They don't realize that they are unwitting strike-breakers until later. They are shown to their quarters by two men armed with shotguns. Guards with guns patrol the camp's living quarters.[57]

Chapter IV of the series describes the government camps set up by the federal government's Resettlement Administration. There

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[55] Ibid., p. 402.

[56] Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

[57] Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 503-504.

were several such camps established in California in the 1930's to offer migrants a wholesome place to live, like the camp at Arvin, California managed by Steinbeck's friend, Tom Collins. In The Grapes of Wrath Ma meets the camp manager, Jim Rawley, whose portrait Steinbeck may have based on Collins.

> A little man dressed all in white stood behind her--a man with a thin, brown, lined face and merry eyes. He was lean as a picket. His white clean clothes were frayed at the seams. He smiled at Ma. "Good morning," he said.[58]

Ma's initial suspicion changes to joy after she realizes that Jim Rawley is treating her in a friendly, respectful manner.[59]

Chapter IV of the series provides a description of the camp's physical facilities, social organization and accomplishments. Chapters 22 and 24 of The Grapes of Wrath portray just such a camp in action. The camps described in the series and the novel had basically the same physical setups. Each family was provided with a place to pitch its tent. Communal sanitary facilities included washrooms, toilets and showers. There was a sanitary facility for each block of tents. Both the camp in the series and the camp in the novel had entertainment facilities. In the novel there was an open-air platform for dances and a croquet court. In the series the camp had some courts for games, which were built by the inhabitants, in addition to a place for entertainment. Individual garden plots for subsistence farming had also been started in the camp described in the series.

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[58] Ibid., p. 415.

[59] Ibid., pp. 415-417.

Social organization of the camps as described in both the series and the novel is practically identical. The camp inhabitants were responsible for the maintenance and government of the camps. They had to keep the facilities clean, and they were offered the option of paying a low weekly rent or doing chores if they couldn't afford the rent. Camp members elected representatives to a central governing committee. The committee created and enforced the rules. It had the power to first reprimand, and then eject any camp dweller who broke the rules. A group of women called the Good Neighbors in the series and the Ladies' Committee in the book helped newcomers get settled and made sure they had sufficient food, clothing and household goods.

Steinbeck pointed out in the series that the camps had their own democratic, effective form of order.

> The result of this responsible self-government has been remarkable. The inhabitants of the camp came here beaten, sullen and destitute. But as their social sense was revived they have settled down. The camp takes care of its own destitute, feeding and sheltering those who have nothing with their own poor stores. The central committee makes the laws that govern the conduct of the inhabitants.
>
> In the year that the Arvin camp has been in operation there has not been any need for outside police. Punishments are the restrictions of certain privileges such as admission to the community dances, or for continued anti-social condict, a recommendation to the manager that the culprit be ejected from the camp.[60]

This order is tested in Chapter 24 of The Grapes of Wrath. The camp is holding its Saturday night dance and Tom receives a warning that vigilantes are planning to disrupt the dance, providing an excuse for

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[60]Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 8, 1936, p. 16.

deputies to raid the camp. Tom tells the Central Committee, which organizes patrols. The patrols manage to intercept the vigilantes before they can start fights. They eject the vigilantes from the camp and the armed men waiting outside have no pretext for entering the camp.[61]

Steinbeck explained what he meant by dignity in Chapter IV of the series. In Chapter II of the series he had introduced the theme of dignity, showing how a person's dignity deteriorated along with his living conditions. In Chapter IV he defined dignity as each person's sense of worth which enabled him to live in human society.

> In this series the word "dignity" has been used several times. It has been used not as some attitude of self-importance, but simply as a register of a man's responsibility to the community.
>
> A man herded about, surrounded by armed guards, starved and forced to live in filth loses his dignity; that is, he loses his valid position in regard to society, and consequently his whole ethics toward society. Nothing is a better example of this than the prison, where the men are reduced to no dignity and where crimes and infractions of rule are constant.
>
> We regard this destruction of dignety, (sic) then, as one of the most regrettable results of the migrant's life since it does reduce his responsibility and does make him a sullen outcast who will strike at our government in any way that occurs to him.[62]

In this passage Steinbeck made it clear that he was not a radical or revolutionary who wanted American society to be destroyed. He saw faults in the society and he wanted them corrected so all people could share in its rewards. Steinbeck praised the camps in Chapter IV of the series for helping the migrants regain their dignity and rejoin society.

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[61]Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 452-472.

[62]Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

He also said he hoped the camp system would be expanded and would provide long-term homes for migrant families with the addition of small farm plots.

> They will allow the women and children to stay in one place, permitting the children to go to school and the women to maintain the farms during the work times of the men. They will reduce the degenerating effect of the migrants' life, they will reinstil (sic) the sense of government and possession that have been lost by the migrants.
>
> Located near to the areas which demand seasonal labor, these communities will permit these subsistence farmers to work in the harvests, while at the same time they stop the wanderings over the whole state. The success of these Federal camps in making potential criminals into citizens makes the usual practice of expending money on tear gas seem a little silly.[63]

Steinbeck continued to say that the camp system would destroy the arguments of those who objected to it. The hiring of extra police would not be necessary because the camps could keep their own order. Extra school costs should be borne by the community, he said, as a social responsibility to the workers who made the agriculture system possible. The camps would not lower land values, he said, because standards of cleanliness would be maintained.[64] Steinbeck closed Chapter IV of the series by refuting a newspaper editor's arguments against the camps.

> The fourth argument, as made by the editor of the Yuba City Herald, a self-admitted sadist who wrote a series of incendiary and subversive editorials concerning the Marysville camp, is that these are the breeding places for strikes.
>
> Under pressure of evidence the Yuba City patriot withdrew his contention that the camp was full of radicals. This will be the argument used by the speculative growers' associations. These associations have said in so many words that

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

> they require a peon class to succeed. Any action to better the condition of the migrants will be considered radical to them.[65]

In The Grapes of Wrath the government camp does not solve the Joad family's problems. Since they can't get enough work in the area near the camp, they decide to move on in search of jobs.

Chapter V of the series described California's relief program and the problem of poor diet, which hastened the migrants' downward spiral. The Joads in The Grapes of Wrath did not get involved with the relief system as described in the series, but they did suffer from the effects of a poor diet.

The inability to procure a wholesome diet was caused by the migrants' low and irregular income.

> According to several Government and state surveys and studies of large numbers of migrants, the maximum a worker can make is $400 a year, while the average is around $300, and the large minimum is $150 a year. This amount must feed, clothe and transport whole families.
>
> Sometimes whole families are able to work in the fields, thus making an additional wage. In other observed cases, a whole family, weakened by sickness and malnutrition has worked in the fields, making less than the wage of one healthy man. It does not take long at the migrants' work to reduce the health of any family. Food is scarce always, and luxuries of any kind are unknown.[66]

The Joads in The Grapes of Wrath follow the same pattern. The richness of their diet depends on whether they can get work. The longer they are in California, searching for work, eating poorly, the weaker they get, which impairs their earning power. At the Hooverville Ma manages

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 9, 1936, p. 14.

to prepare a stew of meat and potatoes. There is little enough for the family, but she gives some to the Hooverville children who stand by hungrily while she cooks.[67] The next morning in the government camp Ma prepares corn pone, which is fried cornmeal dough, and gravy with coffee for the family's breakfast.[68] Tom finds work the first day at the government camp so Ma feels she can afford a good dinner. She says:

> "John, you go find Pa. Get to the store. I want beans an' sugar an'--a piece of fryin' meat an' carrots an' tell Pa to get somepin nice--anything--but nice--for tonight. Tonight--we'll have--somepin nice."[69]

Tom is the only Joad who can get work during the Joads' month-long stay at the migrant camp and the family is weakened from poor diet.

> "We got to do somepin," she said. And she pointed at Winfield. "Look at 'im," she said. And when they stared at the little boy, "He's a-jerkin' an' a-twisten' in his sleep. Lookut his color." The members of the family looked at the earth again in shame. "Fried dough," Ma said. "One month we been here. An' Tom had five days' work. An' the rest of you scrabblin' out ever' day, an no work. An' scairt to talk. An' the money gone. You're scairt to talk it out. Well, you got to. Rosasharn ain't far from due, an' lookut her color. You got to talk it out. Now don't none of you get up till we figger somepin out. One day' more grease an' two days' flour, an' ten potatoes. You set here an' get busy!"[70]

The Joads leave the government camp and get jobs at a peach orchard. The entire family earns a dollar that day and Ma spends it at the ranch

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[67] Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 350-352.

[68] Ibid., pp. 413-414.

[69] Ibid., p. 443.

[70] Ibid., p. 478.

store for hamburger meat, potatoes, bread and coffee.[71] The Joads remain several more days at the peach orchard and they cut down on food to save money for gas because they realize they're in the midst of a labor dispute. The meals consist of fried dough and coffee or cornmeal mush. Winfield's condition deteriorates further from a poor diet and he gets the "skitters" from gorging on peaches.[72]

The Joads' diet was better than the typical meals Steinbeck described in the series. In good times, for example, a family of eight would eat: boiled cabbage, baked sweet potatoes, creamed carrots, beans, fried dough, jelly and tea. In tough times the same family would eat dandelion greens and boiled potatoes.[73] Steinbeck said that the diet consisted mostly of starches and it was impossible to maintain health.

> It will be seen that even in flush times the possibility of remaining healthy is very slight. The complete absence of milk for the children is responsible for many of the diseases of malnutrition. Even pellagra (sic) is far from unknown.[74]

Chapter V of the series next discussed the problem of childbirth among migrants. Prospective mothers worked in the fields and did not have a proper diet. They were uninformed about how to care for themselves and had to give birth in a dirty bed, perhaps with the help of a neighbor woman. Because of malnutrition, the mother often

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[71] Ibid., pp. 510-513.

[72] Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 540-542.

[73] Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

couldn't produce milk for the baby. Steinbeck described one woman's childbearing history as an example of the poor childbirth conditions.[75] The woman's explanations of why so many of her infants died are the only direct quotes in the entire series.

In The Grapes of Wrath Rose of Sharon, who is expecting a baby, competes with the sickly Winfield for a drink of milk.[76] She insists on picking cotton to help the family although she is very weak.[77] She gives birth prematurely lying on a mattress in a boxcar with the aid of Ma and Mrs. Wainright. The child is born dead.[78]

Chapter VI of the series covered the migrant scene that existed before the 1930's. It described the foreign-born migrant groups that were exploited before the Dust Bowl refugees arrived. Mention of the foreign workers occurs in an interchapter of The Grapes of Wrath. Chapter 19 of the novel comes just before the Joads arrive at the Hooverville, and it is a review of California's history until the arrival of the midwestern migrants.

> Now farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know it. They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the businessmen said. They don't need much. They wouldn't know what to do with good wages. Why, look how they live. Why, look what they eat. And if they get funny--deport them.[79]

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 453.

[77] Ibid., pp. 585-586.

[78] Ibid., pp. 596-603.

[79] Ibid., p. 316.

The seventh and concluding chapter of the series is also outside of the novel's realm. It tells Steinbeck's concepts of the solutions to the migrants' problems. His first suggestion was that permanent communities should be established with homes, schools and subsistence farms for migrant families so they could have permanent homes. The men of the family could travel to harvests while the women worked the gardens, cared for the family, and the children remained in school. The state, federal and local governments should bear the costs of establishing and maintaining such communities, he said.[80] This solution sounds like an extension of the government camp system described in Chapter IV of the series.

Second, Steinbeck suggested a state migratory labor board to make sure that laborers would be distributed around the state only in the numbers required at harvest time. This would end the rush of thousands of hopeful souls to farms where only a few hundred jobs were available. The labor board would negotiate with the migrants' labor unions, which should be permitted, Steinbeck said.[81]

Third, the state attorney general should investigate labor conditions and vigilante action against the migrants. Vigilante action, Steinbeck said, was an attempt to overthrow the government because it was an abuse of the law.[82] He named the treatment given to the migrants "fascistic."

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[80]Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 12, 1936, p. 8.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid.

> And 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, it is further submitted that California democracy is rapidly dwindling away. Fascistic methods are more numerous, more powerfully applied and more openly practiced in California than any other place in the United States.[83]

The series concludes with the hope that the migrants will be accepted into California society and treated fairly.

> It will require a militant and watchful organization of middle-class people, workers, teachers, craftsmen and liberals to fight this encroaching social philosophy, and to maintain this state in a democratic form of government.
>
> The new migrants to California from the dust bowl are here to stay. They are of the best American stock, intelligent, resourceful; and if given a chance, socially responsible.
>
> To attempt to force them into a peonage of starvation and intimidated despair will be unsuccessful. They can be citizens of the highest type, or they can be an army driven by suffering and hatred to take what they need. On their future treatment will depend which course they will take.[84]

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

# CHAPTER IV

## HIS TRUTH IS MARCHING ON: STEINBECK'S REPORTING STYLE

Tom Joad got out of the old McAllister Pen,
And there he got his parole,
After four long years on a man-killin' charge,
Tom Joad come a-walkin down the road, poor boy,
Tom Joad come a-walkin down the road.

Everybody might be just One Big Soul
It looks that-a-way to me,
Everywhere you look in the day or night,
That's where I'm a-gonna be, maw,
That's where I'm a-gonna be.

Whenever little children are hungry and cry,
Whenever people ain't free,
Whenever men are fighting for their rights,
That's where I'm a-gonna be, maw,
That's where I'm a-gonna be.[1]

The ballad "Tom Joad," by Woodie Guthrie incorporates a theme central to both John Steinbeck's seven-part newspaper series, "California's Harvest Gypsies," and his novel The Grapes of Wrath. In the series this theme takes the form of the discussions of dignity in Chapters II and IV. In the novel it is the theme of integration. The Joads are scattered at the end of the novel, but integrated into the human family. Tom sets out to be a leader in the struggle for human rights. This theme had its start with Steinbeck's own philosophy.

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[1]Alan Lomax, comp., Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People, notes by Woodie Guthrie, transcribed and ed. Pete Seeger (New York: Oak Publications, 1967), pp. 236-238.

His ideas were gleaned from scientific and evolutionary thought. He had always been a science student. In 1923 he took a summer course in general zoology at the Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove, California. There he learned about the organismal concepts of life of William Emerson Ritter.[2] In the 1930's Steinbeck was reading the works of the evolutionary philosophers Jan Smuts, Robert Briffault and John Elof Boodin. He and his friend, George Albee, a novelist, studied the works of biologist W. C. Alee together.[3]

Steinbeck took scientific and abstract philosophical thought and made it into an applied theory relevant to social and historical movements. Steinbeck called it his Phalanx or Group-man theory. The phalanx is a group of men in action as if all were welded into one organism. Each man who is a part of the group contributes to the mass movement. He rejected the idea that history is made by outstanding individuals who became great leaders. Mass movements occur because individuals join the phalanx and contribute to its function. Those who flaunt the phalanx will be destroyed and those who are isolated from the phalanx will wither. An individual could, however, perform a leadership function as part of the phalanx.[4]

This theory of the phalanx is evident in Chapter IV of the series where Steinbeck defined dignity in terms of the individual's

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[2]Richard Astro, John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973), pp. 44-45.

[3]Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[4]Ibid., pp. 32-37.

ability to share the responsibility of participation in society.[5] In the novel The Grapes of Wrath Tom Joad leaves his family to become one of the leaders of a phalanx. The movement he must join, or face destruction, is the organization of labor in its quest for economic and civil rights. Tom explains to Ma:

> Guess who I been thinkin' about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used to bother me. But now I been thinkin' what he said, an' I can remember--all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn't have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole.[6]

This is another example of how an element from the series was expanded upon in the novel. It also exemplifies the way in which Steinbeck's journalistic style differed from straight news reporting. Like his article for the Nation, Steinbeck's series for the San Francisco News was structured like an essay. The News series is a lengthy essay in which Steinbeck presented the problems of California agriculture, with his comments on them and then proposed solutions to the problems. Steinbeck's own attitudes toward various groups of people are evident in the series. The migrants are "resourceful, intelligent, responsible if given a chance."[7] The landowners and authorities are callous, greedy, willing to violate people's civil rights, and even employ

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[5]John Steinbeck, "California's Harvest Gypsies," San Francisco News, October 8, 1936, p. 16.

[6]John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), p. 570.

[7]John Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," October 12, 1936, p. 8.

terrorism by hiring vigilantes.[8] Steinbeck not only allowed his biases to show, he stated them clearly so that the reader would know his position. Clearly, he was a journalist-advocate rather than simply a reporter of the news.

Another characteristic of Steinbeck's style was his heavy reliance of general description. Rather than relying on the specific, the individual, to give his report evidence of authenticity, Steinbeck generalized as much as possible. He used no individual migrant's name in the entire series. There is only one direct quote in the whole series, a woman's comments on her childbearing history in Chapter V.[9] Steinbeck might have done this out of a sense of delicacy, a feeling that he didn't want to expose the pain of a few individuals. Another reason for his generalizing might have been to give his descriptions greater impact. Through generalization he implied that the sufferings described in the series were shared in common among many people.

When Steinbeck described problems such as makeshift housing or poor diet he gave a few typical examples which might have even been composites of several different people or families. For example, in Chapter II of the series Steinbeck described the upper, middle and lower class living conditions of the migrant camps. In the case of each family the dwelling place, health and morale of the people were in keeping with one another.[10] These might have been typical families

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[8] Ibid.

[9] John Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," October 9, 1936, p. 14.

[10] John Steinbeck, "Harvest Gypsies," October 6, 1936, p. 3.

or they could have been composites of many families Steinbeck had seen.

Another striking aspect of the series is that Steinbeck never mentioned the flood conditions he had been sent to observe. Steinbeck mentioned in an article written many years later that his friend, George West, of the San Francisco News, asked him to visit a group of 3,000 migrants who had been caught in heavy rains in King's County, California, and were living on high ground in the flooded fields.[11] Perhaps Mr. West considered the flood conditions a good news peg. Steinbeck ignored the flood, perhaps to strengthen the impact of his more timeless social message.

Although the floods weren't mentioned in the series, they did play a part in the novel. The rains begin at the end of Chapter 28 of The Grapes of Wrath. During the storm the men struggle to protect their boxcar dwellings from the flood waters. Their efforts to build a dam are to no avail and the waters flood out the boxcars and ruin all their belongings and their cars.[12]

Steinbeck's newspaper series was at the time considered effective propaganda on behalf of migrant workers. A group dedicated to improving the migrants' lot published the series as a pamphlet. Simon J. Lubin Society, named after California's first Commissioner of Immigration and Housing, who served in the 1920's, published the

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[11]John Steinbeck, "A Primer on the Thirties," Esquire, June, 1960, p. 90.

[12]John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 588-613.

pamphlet under the title, "Their Blood is Strong." Lubin was one of the first people to be concerned about the welfare of migrant workers. The members of the society included the Governor of California, Culbert L. Olson; a columnist for the San Francisco News, John D. Barry; and Carey McWilliams, an attorney and author. McWilliams served on the state's Commission of Immigration and Housing for a short time and he was the author of Factories in the Field, a history of migrant labor in California which was published about the same time as The Grapes of Wrath. Other Lubin Society members included government officials, professional people and people in the farming industry.

The thirty-three-page pamphlet containing the series and an epilogue was published in April, 1938. It went through several printings and demand for it was heavy. The 5-1/2 by 8-1/2 inch pamphlet had an illustrated cover, and the text was accompanied by photographs by Dorothea Lange, the only Farm Security Administration photographer working on the West Coast, whose classic photograph "Migrant Mother" had illustrated a chapter of Steinbeck's series in the San Francisco News.

The introduction was written by John D. Barry of the News, who hailed Steinbeck as a champion of the underprivileged.

> His articles had extensive reading. They helped people to realize the deplorable conditions that existed nearby, in many instances right under their eyes. It was inevitable that they should be published together.
>
> Steinbeck is a unique figure. He has come forward at a time when revolutionary changes are going on in the world. He will be a factor in those changes and a significant factor too. His sympathies are, not with the special people, but

> with those at a disadvantage, sorely in need of a gifted and valiant literary champion.[13]

Steinbeck's epilogue, dated Spring, 1938, was a cry of outrage against the continuance of conditions he had first reported on more than a year and a half before. He cited the efforts of relief authorities and public health nurses to help the migrants, but said their aid made little impact upon their problems. In the epilogue Steinbeck recapitulated the description of migrant life he had given in more detail in the series. He said that he had just returned from a field trip to migrant camps the week before he wrote the epilogue, and he had more stories to tell of starving people, dying children and stunned disbelief at the conditions people were facing. The epilogue ends with an emotional and vigorous cry for action on behalf of the migrants. It took the same tone as his ending for the series and the conclusion of his article "Dubious Battle in California."

> Next year the hunger will come again and the year after that and so on until we come out of this coma and realize that our agriculture for all of its great produce is a failure. If you buy a farm horse and only feed him when you work him, the horse will die. No one complains at the necessity of feeding the horse when he is not working. But we complain about feeding the men and women who work our lands. Is it possible that this state is so stupid so vicious and so greedy that it cannot feed and clothe the men and women who help to make it the richest area in the world? Must the hunger become anger and the anger fury before anything will be done?[14]

It was very unusual for a California newspaper of the 1930's to publish material that was obviously favorable to the migrant

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[13]John Steinbeck, Their Blood is Strong (San Francisco: Simon J. Lubin Society of California, Inc., 1938), n.p.

[14]Ibid., p. 33.

workers. Dorothea Lange, the Resettlement Administration photographer who was working in California, deserves the credit for getting such material into the San Francisco News. About seven months before Steinbeck's series appeared in the News, Miss Lange was returning from a month-long field trip. As she passed a flooded pea pickers' camp in Nipomo she noticed a mother and her children. She considered going on to San Francisco, but she turned around and went back to take the picture. The mother and her children were the subjects of "Migrant Mother," the photograph which illustrates the first chapter of Steinbeck's series.[15]

Miss Lange developed her photographs and rushed them straight to the offices of the San Francisco News. The editor of the News notified the United Press about the camp in Nipomo, and the United Press contacted relief authorities. A United Press report in the News March 10, 1936 issue described the pea pickers' joy at hearing shipments of food would be arriving from Los Angeles.[16] The story was illustrated with two of Miss Lange's photographs of the mother and her children. The News gave Miss Lange credit for alerting the public and the authorities about the migrants' desperate condition.

> Ragged, ill, emaciated by hunger, 2,500 men, women and children are rescued after weeks of suffering by the chance visit of a Government photographer.[17]

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[15]Dorothea Lange, "The Assignment I'll Never Forget," American West, May, 1970, pp. 46-47.

[16]Paul S. Taylor, "Migrant Mother: 1936," American West, May, 1970, pp. 42-43.

[17]Ibid., p. 42.

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March, 1935 was not the first time Miss Lange had had contact with the San Francisco News, according to her husband, Paul S. Taylor, who worked for the Resettlement Administration in the 1930's, and is now a professor emeritus of economics of the University of California. He recalls:

> The San Francisco News was well familiar with Dorothea Lange's photographs. In the summer of 1935 we showed our project book proposing a program of camp construction, and very soon a lead editorial appeared in the News in support, written doubtless by the Associate Editor, George P. West, to whom we had shown it. From time to time the News carried Dorothea Lange's photographs, as did newspapers all over the country.[18]

Miss Lange and John Steinbeck did not meet in the mid-1930's although both had a common interest in the migrants' problems and both were doing field work at about the same time. They did meet after The Grapes of Wrath was published in April, 1939 and prior to the publication of Lange and Taylor's book, An American Exodus.[19]

The San Francisco News may have had editors who were sympathetic to the migrants and their problems, but another San Francisco newspaper did not. William Randolph Hearst and his San Francisco Examiner spoke out against any clamor for reform in agriculture. If Hearst had read The Grapes of Wrath he might have noticed the mildly disguised description of himself which Steinbeck put into the mouth of a migrant. He tells Casy and the Joads about a man who could have been Hearst as an example of the extreme greed of the California landowners.

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[18] Letter, Paul S. Taylor to Frances Miller, August 11, 1974.

[19] Ibid.

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Time,"

> They's a fella, newspaper fella near the coast, got a million acres--"
>
> Casy looked up quickly, "Million acres? What in the worl' can he do with a million acres?"
>
> "I dunno. He jus' got it. Runs a few cattle. Got guards ever'place to keep folks out. Rides aroun' in a bullet-proof car. I seen pitchers of him. Fat, sof' fella with little mean eyes an' a mouth like a ass-hole. Scairt he's gonna die. Got a million acres an' scairt of dyin'."
>
> Casy demanded, "What in hell can he do with a million acres? What's he want a million acres for?"
>
> . . . "I dunno," he said. "Guess he's crazy. Mus' be crazy. Seen a pitcher of him. He looks crazy. Crazy an' mean."
>
> . . . The preacher smiled, and he looked puzzled. He splashed a floating water bug away with his hand. "If he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an' maybe he's disappointed that nothin' he can do'll make him feel rich--not rich like Mis' Wilson was when she give her tent when Grampa died.[20]

The San Francisco Examiner denounced The Grapes of Wrath and Carey McWilliams' Factories in the Field with a story whose headline read, "Reds Blamed for Books on Migrant Labor."[21] Since Factories in the Field contained information which substantiated The Grapes of Wrath, groups like the Associated Farmers assumed that Steinbeck and McWilliams were united in a Communist conspiracy. McWilliams said:

> I think I have cited enough evidence--there is much more--to confirm the discovery by the Associated Farmers of a conspiracy by two authors to subvert California agriculture. But there is, I regret to report, one thing wrong with the conspiracy theory: namely, I never met John Steinbeck.[22]

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[20] John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 281-282.

[21] Carey McWilliams, "John Steinbeck: A Man, a Place and a Time," American West, May, 1970, p. 39.

[22] Ibid.

The reactions to both the news series and The Grapes of Wrath were so vehement because the two works were authentic portrayals of California agriculture. John Steinbeck's journalistic style was not orthodox. He wrote the impassioned essays of an advocate, not the dispassionate reports of an objective reporter. One of the reasons he attempted reporting was his great desire to see his subjects' suffering alleviated.

His journalism was clearly a precursor of his novel The Grapes of Wrath. Facts, settings, themes and even phrases from the news reports appear in the novel. This indicates that the novel is based heavily on his work as a reporter. He made many field trips besides the one for the San Francisco News and got to know his subject well by living with it. He also tried to understand the larger trends behind the scenes he observed by going to the Resettlement Administration for background information.

The Grapes of Wrath is indeed a work of literature, but it could not have been written solely from the imagination. It is a work of literature which documents a period of American history. This was probably part of Steinbeck's purpose in writing the book, to inform people and to move them to action.

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