



The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to The Grapes of Wrath

John Steinbeck , Charles Wollenberg (Introduction)

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With the inquisitiveness of an investigative reporter and the emotional power of a novelist in his prime, Steinbeck toured the squatters' camps and Hoovervilles of California. Here he found once strong, independent farmers so reduced in dignity, sick, sullen, and defeated that they had been cast down to a kind of subhumanity. He contrasts their misery with the hope offered by government resettlement camps, where self-help communities were restoring dignity and indeed saving lives. The Harvest Gypsies gives us an eyewitness account of the horrendous Dust Bowl migration and provides the factual foundation for Steinbeck's masterpiece, The Grapes of Wrath. Included are twenty-two photographs by Dorothea Lange and others, many of which accompanied Steinbeck's original articles.

The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to The Grapes of Wrath Details

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Mosco says

Non è un romanzo, bisogna tenerlo a mente, e nemmeno racconti: sono articoli scritti durante la grande depressione.

Sconfortanti le tante, troppe, analogie con la condizione degli attuali migranti. Stesse miseria, sfruttamento, paghe da fame, razzismo, fatiche, disprezzo, violenza gratuita.

Solo che a loro mancavano i gommoni e le morti in mare; e i campi (pochi) organizzati dal governo erano decenti.

Vedere "Bilal. Il mio viaggio da infiltrato nel mercato dei nuovi schiavi" di Fabrizio Gatti per un confronto chocante:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1...>

Jodi says

A series of investigative newspaper articles Steinbeck had published in 1936 describing the conditions faced by those displaced by the Dust Bowl and living California. The last article in the series is Steinbeck's view on what should be done to ameliorate the conditions of those living under the tyranny of large farms and communities unwilling to recognize them as humans. I respect and greatly admire Steinbeck in that he not only describes the problems faced by those living as migrants in California but he also offers a solution. Grapes of Wrath furthered Americans' awareness of the problem. Steinbeck's work in bringing awareness to the situation with insightful, concise and incredible writing makes him a true American hero.

Buck says

The Harvest Gypsies is a series of seven newspaper articles published in 1936 chronicling the plight of migrant farm workers in California. These are more than just news articles, they are advocacy pieces. The seeds of Steinbeck's later work The Grapes of Wrath are clear.

My edition included an informative introduction by Charles Wollenberg and photographs by Dorothea Lange and others, dated mostly from the years immediately after the articles were published

Kim says

In 1936 the *San Francisco News* commissioned John Steinbeck, who was just starting to achieve recognition as a novelist, to write a series of articles about conditions for migrant farm workers in the Salinas Valley. The seven articles were originally published between October 5 and October 12, 1936. In 1938 Steinbeck

allowed the Simon J. Lubin Society to re-publish the articles with an additional eighth chapter in a pamphlet entitled *Their Blood is Strong*.

The articles are of inherent interest, because Steinbeck was an excellent journalist. But they're particularly important because they led Steinbeck to write *The Grapes of Wrath*. If you're familiar with the novel, you'll immediately recognise the source of its inspiration in these articles. For the committed Steinbeck fan, they're a must-read: powerful, moving, accessible, like all of Steinbeck's prose.

dianne says

A collection of beautifully written essays Steinbeck wrote as a journalist in 1936 about the plight of farmworkers in California during the awful years of the Dustbowl migration. He writes from what seems now to be a naive sort of moral outrage - using words that have since been stolen by The Power that Be. He refers to the violence and cruelty perpetrated by Big Farms appropriately as "terrorism". He refers to them as fascists.

In 2016 brutal Big Farms would be called "job creators" and the starved, attempting to organize workers would be labelled "terrorists", methinks.

There is a review of the various outlanders who are brought in as peon labor - Chinese, then Japanese, then Mexicans, then Filipinos - but separates them, in their living standards, what should be afforded them, and certainly their futures - from white "Americans". He seems to think that all people of color will be returning to their places of familial origin and that only the whites will remain. And so he believes that future migrant workers will be white. "To attempt to force them into a peonage of starvation and intimidated despair will be unsuccessful."

He believed that the terror brought down on every group that attempted to organize, by the fascist vigilantes would be the end of agriculture in California - because the workers will be white (i.e. "American") and won't stand for it. "The old methods of repression, of starvation wages, of jailing, beating and intimidation are not going to work; these are American people". As opposed to the groups of color that preceded the Dustbowl migrants. Now, as we have 80 years of hindsight - he is sort of right. Except the migrant workers aren't white, or allowed to become "American", and so have been living in various degrees of pain, hunger and despair under the "old methods" that continued.

The simple asks - decent places to live, clean water, breaks in the work day, reasonable pay, access to safe and clean toilets, ability to organize, education for children, protection from abuse - that Steinbeck wanted for his Okies - were the same simple demands I learned about 40 years ago from a tiny, powerful Mexican who was speaking to us - a group of 20 or 30 people in Fullerton, interested in what Cesar Chavez had to say. Finally - 40 years after *The Grapes of Wrath* - the novel that grew from these essays - a leader emerged that could successfully organize the United Farm Workers into a union with bite, and initiate the grape boycott that changed California.

Steinbeck's descriptions of the hopelessness of the migrants' lives, the death of children, the inevitable fall into misery and depression, accompanied by photographs by Dorothea Lange create an important bit of history, with lots of lessons yet to be learned.

Austin Wright says

THIS BOOK NEEDS TO BE ANNEXED INTO MODERN EDITIONS OF "GRAPES OF WRATH"!!!!
These are basically the scientific notes by Steinbeck which allowed him to write Wrath in the detail he did.

Did you know that California orchards can sustain themselves in the off-season with just 20 employees, but when the window for picking and canning comes, the orchard needs 2,000 employees?!?! This creates an absolute we-need-migrants/we-hate-migrants mentality.

FIVE-STAR! RECOMMEND THIS BOOK TO EVERYONE!

Kerry says

Fascinating, powerful and horrifying, written in an objective style yet still allowing Steinbeck's disgust and shame at the way his native California was treating migrant workers to come through. The photographs say almost as much as the text (which only runs to some 44 pages). Well worth a read.

Pamela says

The Seven articles written by Steinbeck published in the San Francisco News in the 30s read like radio or documentary narration.. as we pan over a scene of utter hopelessness. They *are* news articles though, so while Steinbeck does seem to tell it like it is in horrible detail, there's not much one can do but wonder how we got through this decade. The book is yet another reminder that even in California, things aren't always as 'golden' and perfect as its reputation is believed the world over (falsely or not.) One of the things I'm coming to terms with personally as I learn new things about my adopted state is that in a throw away world, California is a leader in creating throw away people.. using, used and useless.. In hindsight it is temporarily warming to know things get better for everyone eventually, for a time.. but these things *do* keep happening because we're not willing to learn from our predecessors and make life better for each other while we're harvesting all that money in fields or financial districts.

Maria says

Steinbeck escribe de fábula, está claro. En este caso es un tipo reportaje-ensayo sobre las condiciones de los aparceros, jornaleros, etc. y sus familias en los años 30.

La verdad es que leyendo este libro ves el asco que da la humanidad.

Recomendable, se lee en un rato y Steinbeck cuenta todo muy clarito.

Gary the Bookworm says

The *Harvest Gypsies*, a thin volume of advocacy journalism, combines the prose of John Steinbeck, the newspaper man, with the haunting realism of Dorothea Lange's photojournalism. Their shared subject is the wave of migrant workers who flooded California during the mid-1930's from the Dust Bowl states. Steinbeck went on to write *The Grapes of Wrath*, citing these articles as his inspiration; Dorothea Lange's famous photo, *Migrant Mother*, became the defining image of dignity under duress during the Great Depression.

Steinbeck's style of writing in these articles lacks the poetry he achieves in his fiction, but his message of condemnation for the status quo is unequivocal. He depicts and deplores the exploitation of farm workers practiced throughout California - providing historical and socioeconomic context - and argues for federal intervention to protect the workers and preserve democratic principles. It is a wonderful companion piece to both *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Mary Coin*, a fictionalized version of Lange's life and work.

John says

The series of newspaper articles Steinbeck wrote depicting the hardships of the "okies" who traveled to California to work as migrant laborers after the dust bowl. Served as inspiration and background research for *The Grapes of Wrath*. Depressing--in comparison *The Grapes of Wrath* is upbeat.

Chris Blocker says

In 1936, John Steinbeck toured the migrant camps and government camps of California. He wrote seven articles about the plight of the migrant workers that were published in *The San Francisco News*. *The Harvest Gypsies* is the compilation of those articles.

Having read *The Grapes of Wrath* there's not much to say about *The Harvest Gypsies*. It's clear Steinbeck was greatly moved by his experience in 1936, and it was this series of encounters that was the catalyst for his 1938 Pulitzer-winning novel. Elements of many of the stories Steinbeck tells in *The Grapes of Wrath* are first seen here. Told in a concise, largely journalistic voice, *The Harvest Gypsies* doesn't leave too much room for the Steinbeck we love, but he does make brief appearances.

The Harvest Gypsies is a very thin book primarily for Steinbeck fans. It also serves as a great companion to *The Grapes of Wrath*. It's not one I'd recommend to readers who have not read and loved *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Jorge Cienfuegos says

El complemento perfecto para la lectura de "Las uvas de la ira". Un libro de no ficción (ojalá lo que cuenta fuera ficción) que remueve.

Wei Cho says

Powerful portrayal of California during the Great Depression, especially in the Central Valley where agricultural conditions were deplorable. Steinbeck focused more on the "okies" or the people who migrated to California from the Midwest because of the Dust bowl and mentions imported hands from Asia and Latin America. This book will make your blood boil because of so much injustice and you would end up thinking if those huge agribusiness tycoons are human beings at all!

It is such a sad story and so many things that they went through. Many times we don't think of the people who help bring food to our table, the growers, and not the people who own the land but the people who actually work on it. California is not a land for small farmers but huge mega corporations.

Duffy Pratt says

I read *The Grapes of Wrath* about 40 years ago, and I remember the John Ford movie much better than I remember the book. The sketches in these seven articles are harrowing, more so than anything I remember from the book. Basically, this small series of articles carries all the political weight of the novel in about 1/20th the space, and even as short as they are, these articles are still redundant. But they are powerfully written. I was especially impressed at his sketch of three families in three different levels of despair, from determined, to cursed, to hopeless.

The other thing I found striking here is the number of times Steinbeck made reference to women who were unable to feed their newborns, because they did not have the nutrition to make milk. This didn't square well with my recollection of the ending of the book, with Rose o'Sharon (no idea how to spell that). And, to some extent at least, it confirms my suspicion that the novel was not quite as brutal as the picture painted by these articles. I liked these articles, but I had hoped they might inspire me to re-read the book. But I'm just not feeling it.
