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Summary: The Harvest Gypsies

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The Harvest Gypsies

John Steinbeck captures the true essence of the American struggle in his book *The Harvest Gypsies*. ~~The author~~, Steinbeck uses specific situations during the lives of individuals to convey a generalized perspective of ^{the life} live of migratory families. Through the ^{use} usage of case specific conditions he is able to illustrate the horrid conditions in which the people lived in what were known as “squatter camps” or “hooverilles”. Steinbeck depicts the living conditions of those who migrated to California from states like Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Nebraska and all the other states that were affected by the drought during the early 1930’s, as conditions that caused men and their families to lose their dignity. John Steinbeck continues to describe life as an American immigrant; he compares these new immigrants to those of the past. He gives a recollection of the different people that were used as cheap laborers; he goes on to talk about the Chinese immigrants that were used by farmers after the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Steinbeck then denotes that as a result of fear of an uprising and organization by Chinese immigrants, farmers choose to expel the immigrants using force and deportations. This treatment would also be the case for the ensuing Japanese, Mexican and Pilipino migrants.

Using text from the book we are able to ascertain how the American society viewed immigrants of other nationalities, but most importantly we are able to gain insight on how these “new” immigrants were seen by the American public. “It would be understood that with this new race the old methods of repression, of starvation wages, of jailing, beating and intimidation are not going to work; these are American people” (Steinbeck 22, 23), Steinbeck uses an outsiders perspective with no real interest, other than the wellbeing of the people, to illustrate the living conditions of the people that lived and died in the squatter communities. In the context of the book we find the continuous usage of a very powerful and descriptive word, sullen. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, one of the definitions for sullen is that of a gloomily, resentfully silent or repressed individual. With this in mind Steinbeck does a great job of capturing the audience’s attention. Steinbeck then goes on to describe federally funded labor camps, which began as an experiment, like the one in Arvin California. He uses these camps as examples to demonstrate how with a little guidance and understanding these migrants could reestablish themselves and become functioning citizen within the community. Steinbeck supports the notion that with federal assistance these ex-farmers could become self-sustaining, by reminding the audience that these now squatter immigrants once took pride in farming their own land.

Using descriptive terminology, John Steinbeck is able to form an illustration, with the assistance of heart wrenching photography. Steinbeck is able to describe the living condition of the families that were forced to relocate after the devastating drought that ravaged the Midwest. As a result of his informative descriptions, one can begin to appreciate the spirit of those that were displaced following devastating drought that resonated in the aftermath of one of the greatest natural catastrophes to take place in the United States.