

Steinbeck's Use of Nonfiction Sources

Student Name _____ Date _____

OKIE TRAUMA I And Its Cure

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many new arrivals to FSA migrant camps in California suffered from what has been dubbed "Okie trauma." The migrants were proud people, rugged individuals accustomed to taking care of their own. Dislocation from their longtime homes, grinding poverty, unsanitary conditions in squatter camps, unemployment, discrimination, and hunger often left them completely demoralized.

CUTTINGS FROM THE COLLINS REPORT

From Tom Collins's report of August 8, 1936, p. 4

During the past week we have had three families arrive in destitute circumstances. One group used the last drop of gasoline just as it arrived at the office. In such cases the destitute groups were referred to the Good Neighbors in the districts where they were assigned. The neighbors collected food and supplies from their own stocks to carry the groups over to the morrow. The groups were then given "guarantees" to the amount of \$5.00 on a grocer and oil station. In the meantime, the men made inquiries ...to locate jobs for the new comers. In all cases the new arrivals were working within three days after arrival, and all sums advanced ...were repaid.

We also witness the arrival of expectant mothers in the new groups. Word seemed to have passed along the ditch banks and the farmer camps, that we give much attention to expectant mothers and to children.

From Tom Collins's report of October 24, 1936

The head hanging, exploited, intimidated and seemingly ignorant migratory farm laborer, who wallowed around on the ditch bank, or pitched his tent on the open prairie, his only neighbors the millions of flies which swarmed around his hovel, his only mental, educational and recreational activities restricted to hunting new gopher holes... that type of migratory worker is gone from this section of the county.

Rugged individualists all their lives, it has taken courage and patience to build up a cooperative community for themselves. This has been accomplished through a program of education and tolerance.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THESE CUTTINGS

1. Find one or two brief passages in *The Grapes of Wrath* that match at least one or two of these events:
 - a. Families arriving destitute;
 - b. Good Neighbors helping out new arrivals;
 - c. Money (or credit) advanced to new arrivals;
 - d. Word passed of good treatment at the camp;

- e. Word passed that the camp is especially good for children and expectant mothers;
 - f. Residents finding work for new arrivals.
2. In what ways is each passage from *The Grapes of Wrath* similar to and/or different from its matching passage in the Collins report?
 3. What label describing how Steinbeck is using each Collins cutting would you apply to each matching passage from *The Grapes of Wrath*?
 4. If his portrayal of “Okie Trauma” in your cuttings is typical, would you say Steinbeck accurately portrays the psychological condition of some new arrivals to the FSA camps?