

Undiscovered Writing: Steinbeck's forgotten currency
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John Steinbeck is known as great American writer. He wrote detailed, heartfelt accounts of American life, often from working class perspectives – farmers, paisanos, and migrant workers being some of his favorite subjects.

Instead of sharing stories that matched his own personal plights, or glorifying notions of the American dream, Steinbeck put his sweat into constructing and amplifying the true narratives of hard-working Americans. This month, we are kicking off our Undiscovered Writing Series with one of Steinbeck's lesser known works.

Before *The Grapes of Wrath* came Steinbeck's *The Harvest Gypsies*, a series of articles he wrote about migrant workers and families affected by [the Dust Bowl](#). Commissioned by the [San Francisco News](#), it was a seven-part series, detailing the true experiences of people affected by the Dust Bowl, based on Steinbeck's own observations and interviews.

One of the most moving pieces of the series is [Article II](#), in which Steinbeck shares the lives of three families living in a settlement camp. He begins with the first family, living a quite difficult life, but the conditions deteriorate further, then further, as he addresses each family's situation. By the end, we are crushed – mere witnesses to complete destitution. Steinbeck leaves readers here, with one final thought: "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."

In a world as divisive as ours right now, where many thousands are living in camps none-too-different from these, understanding and knowledge are the forgotten currency. Steinbeck

emphasized that we need to recognize the humanity of those struggling, and meet them with human understanding. That's a message the world needs now perhaps more than ever. (297 words)