

HONORING JOHN STEINBECK AND CALIFORNIANS' COMMITMENT TO DISCUSSION, DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY THROUGH "THE GRAPES OF WRATH"

HON. SAM FARR

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Mr. FARR of California. Mr. Speaker, during this centennial anniversary of John Steinbeck's birth, I would like to honor the efforts of the Californians participating in the statewide reading and discussion of "The Grapes of Wrath." Steinbeck's powerful novel details the difficulties and blessings involved in diversity, migration, and the pursuit of the American Dream. By reading "The Grapes of Wrath," we are all able to see the continuing relevance of these issues and the necessity of encouraging dialog within our communities. One of my favorite passages, in Chapter 25, addresses the richness of the land and the bountiful produce that can be grown through the effort and determination of hard-working people. Here is a quote from that passage:

The spring is beautiful in California. Valleys in which the fruit blossoms are fragrant pink and white waters in a shallow sea. Then the first tendrils of the grapes, swelling from the old gnarled vines, cascade down to cover the trunks. The full green hills are round and soft as breasts. And on the level vegetable lands are the mile-long rows of pale green lettuce and the spindly little cauliflowerers, the gray-green unearthly artichoke plants.

And then the leaves break out on the trees, and the petals drop from the trees and carpet the earth with pink and white. The centers of the blossoms swell and grow in color: cherries and apples, peaches and pears, figs which close the flower in the fruit. All California quickens with produce, and the fruit grows heavy, and the limbs bend gradually under the fruit so that little crutches must be placed under them to support the weight. . . .

. . . And all the time the fruit swells and the flowers break out in long clusters on the vines. And in the growing year the warmth grows and the leaves turn dark green. The prunes lengthen like little green bird's eggs, and the limbs sag down against the crutches under the weight. And the hard little pears take shape, and the beginning of the fuzz comes out on the peaches. Grape blossoms shed their tiny petals and the hard little beads become green buttons, and the buttons grow heavy. The men who work in the fields, the owners of the little orchards, watch and calculate. The year is heavy with produce. And men are proud, for of their knowledge they can make the year heavy. They have transformed the world with their knowledge. The short, lean wheat has been made big and productive. Little sour apples have grown large and sweet, and that old grape that grew among, the trees and fed the birds its tiny fruit has mothered a thousand varieties, red and black, green and pale pink, purple and yellow; and each variety with its own flavor. The men who work in the experimental farms have made new fruits: nectarines, and forty kinds of plums, walnuts, with paper shells. And always they work, selecting, grafting, changing, driving themselves, driving the earth to produce.

I thank my California colleagues for rising with me in honor of this classic novel and the enduring spirit of Californians.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

HON. SUSAN DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise to celebrate the settling of California as part of the California Council for the Humanities literature project. It is a pleasure to join fellow Californians in reading a common work, John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath." It is a project rich not only as a piece of literature that explores the history of a specific group of immigrants to California but also the common immigrant experience.

So many of us are only a generation or two away from that immigrant experience. My grandparents came to this country from Lithuania—also migrating to a land of hoped-for prosperity.

I have selected some passages from Chapter 17 detailing that heart-breaking period of traveling to the unknown new land and also the wonderful experience of developing community that came from sharing that challenge.

The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to water. And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company, and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there.

In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and awe-struck through the night and filled a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. A family which the night before had been lost and fearful might search its goods to find a present for a new baby. In the evening, sitting about the fires, the twenty were one. They grew to be units of the camps, units of the evenings and the nights. A guitar unwrapped from a blanket and tuned—and the songs, which were all of the people, were sung in the nights. Men sang the words, and women hummed the tunes.

Every night a world created, complete with furniture—friends made and enemies established; a world complete with braggarts and with cowards, with quiet men, with humble men, with kindly men. Every night relationships that make a world, established; and every morning the world torn down like a circus.

At first the families were timid in the building and tumbling worlds, but gradually the technique of building worlds became their technique. Then leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes came into being. And as the worlds moved westward they were more complete and better furnished, for their builders were more experienced in building them.

The families learned what rights must be observed—the right of privacy in the tent; . . . the right to talk and to listen; the right to refuse help or to accept, to offer help or to decline it; the right of son to court and daughter to be courted; the right of the hungry to be fed; the rights of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights.

And the families learned, although no one told them, what rights are monstrous and must be destroyed. . . .

And as the worlds moved westward, rules became laws, although no one told the families. It is unlawful to foul near the camp; it is unlawful to eat good rich food near one who is hungry, unless he is asked to share.

And with the laws, the punishments. . . .

The families moved westward, and the technique of building the worlds improved so that the people could be safe in their worlds; and the form was so fixed that a family acting in the rules knew it was safe in the rules.

There grew up government in the worlds, with leaders, with elders. A man who was wise found that his wisdom was needed in every camp; a man who was a fool could not change his folly with his world. And a kind of insurance developed in these nights. A man with food fed a hungry man, and thus insured himself against hunger. And when a baby died a pile of silver coins grew at the door flap, for a baby must be well buried, since it has had nothing, else of life. An old man may be left in a potter's field, but not a baby.

HONORING JOHN STEINBECK ON THE CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTHDAY

HON. LOIS CAPPS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with my California colleagues to recognize the remarkable contributions that John Steinbeck made to literature on the occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of his birthday. Below is one of my favorite passages from "The Grapes of Wrath," which commemorates the beauty of California.

They drove through Tehachapi in the morning glow, and the sun came up behind them, and then—suddenly they saw the great valley below them. Al jammed on the brake and stopped in the middle of the road, and, "Jesus Christ! Look!" he said. The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses.

And Pa said, "God Almighty!" The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, and the morning sun, golden on the valley. A car honked behind them. Al pulled to the side of the road and parked.

"I want ta look at her." The grain fields golden in the morning, and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows.

Pa sighed, "I never knewed they was anything like her." The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns—rich barns. Al got out and stretched his legs.

He called, "Ma—come look. We're there!"

Ruthie and Winfield scrambled down from the car, and then they stood, silent and awe-struck, embarrassed before the great valley.