

Student's Name

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Course

Date

The California Countryside

The theme of class plays a crucial role in the plot development of both "*Under the Feet of Jesus*" and "*The Grapes of Wrath*." The two novels explore the conventional aspects of California and processes that led to the state's critical economic changes and the then ensuing social fabric. As depicted in the books, many poor people, especially the immigrants, did not only suffer in California because of their economic statuses, but largely became afflicted due to the oppression they faced from high-class families. Low-class families' struggles are majorly expressed in "*The Grapes of Wrath*" through the concept of "I-to-we." For instance, the Joad family and many other migrants strive to meet two seemingly contrasting goals: to care for both their families and other poor families as themselves, and to fit in the larger group (society) and ensure their survival. "*Under the Feet of Jesus*" examines the level of oppression that a mixed-status family faces working in an industry. Despite the establishment largely depending on their labor, it treats the individual laborers as expendables. The high-class families' main goal is to maintain their status quo by oppressing the low-class migrants while these poor families' main dream is to fend for themselves and be part of the larger society by attaining an equitable state.

The "California dream" in "*Under the Feet of Jesus*" is explored through intricate ideologies and circumstances. The poor families in the novel, as mainly expressed through Estrella, dream to overcome the extreme estrangement from the society they live. They experience a strong sense of discrimination from the middle-class and high-class Californians,

who are predominantly White (Viramontes 35). The novel clearly tackles how White immigrants do not face oppression as the Latino families such as Estrella's. Their experience contrasts that of Mexican immigrants. Although the White migrants share the same conditions, they escape other forms of oppression.

The threat of deportation and racism compounds the social and economic marginalization that the Mexican-American migrants face, which make them contend with their situation without protestation. Undoubtedly, they dream to overcome their situation and be part of society and live without fear. They dream to live in a neighborhood that is free from toxic pesticides that the White farmers usually spray, and that threatens their present and future lives, pervading both their collective memory and hope. The working-class people live in poor conditions and on lands that White farmers constantly pollute with toxic sprays (Viramontes 41). Characters such as Estrella are worried about the impact of the toxins on their future children. The fact that she is only thirteen years old and concerned about her future family communicates that she has lived with environmental racism whole her life.

"The Grapes of Wrath," similarly, explores the struggles of a family to achieve the forsaken "California dream." The Joad's family begins their journey to California from Oklahoma, where the family originally resides (Steinbeck 12). The journey was in a rickety used truck was long and arduous. They had heard that the farming in California offers well-paying jobs of picking (gathering) fruits. This presented a job opportunity that attracted many workers from Oklahoma, including the entire Joad's family. They intend to chase the California dream that promised to solve all their problems (Steinbeck 17). The novel critiques the dream with numerous adversities. For instance, Granpa Joad both died on the journey – before reaching the "promised land." Granma Joad dies as soon as the family arrives in California from the hostilities

and inhumane conditions of the land. The family began breaking as soon as the dream started becoming unclear.

Ominous rumors disclosed disturbing news of a depleted job market in California. A migrant had disclosed to Pa Joad that about 20,000 people were arriving for every 800 jobs, and that his children had starved to death (Steinbeck 61). The Joads meet much hostility in California. However, they escape other oppression because of their Whiteness compared with the Mexican migrants. The camps are overcrowded and the situation becomes worse because work is almost impossible to find despite the meager pay the farms offer. Agriculture is the main source of income for the White farmers and they rely entirely on the labor derived from the Oklahomans and the Mexican migrants. The life in a government camp that Joad and his family lives is hostile and people die from hunger, disease, and inhabitable conditions, a struggle that imitates what the Estrella and other Mexican families faced in "*Under the Feet of Jesus*." The situation contradicts their hopes in the land of California. Both the Oklahomans and the Mexicans arriving in California in 1930 and 1990 respectively faced hostilities from the landowners and the government officials, who perceived them as non-equals. Both migrants worked in farms where the owners depended largely on their labor but treated them as expendable and desperate individuals.

Tom Joad and Jim Casy are some of the renowned working-class individuals who noticed the escalating oppression from the government officials and the landowners. They did not only watch the actions of the antagonists, but proactively reproached the events (Gale 53). Jim Casy had hit a police officer when they engaged in a verbal altercation about the workers need for a union. He was jailed and upon release, he began mobilizing men to revolt. His actions compelled the police officers and the landowners to arrange for his death. Tom Joad realized the police

intention to destroy their government camp and mobilized men who stopped the cause. Besides, when the police shot dead Jim Casy, Tom Joad retaliated by killing a policeman and running into exile (Gale 51). They had realized that even the workers had their own class with rights.

Although their actions were considered wrong before the law, the protagonists executed moral justice. Rose of Sharon Joad, whose baby was stillborn, exhibited loyalty to the people of her class by breastfeeding a sickly man who was also starving. The image powerfully dramatizes the migrant workers' desperate plight.

In “*Under the Jesus Feet*,” Estrella, who is only thirteen years of age, breaks the era’s familial pattern of female inaction. She constantly protests over the toxic chemicals that the White farmers constantly sprayed on their habitat. At the end of the book, she takes Alejo to the hospital after he was sprayed with an insecticide while picking apples to sell. She even gets the money for gasoline to aid their journey to the hospital. She is tender and nurturing to the members of her social and economic class, but turns suspicious to outsiders. She is aware of her social class and although her social status is disadvantaged and impoverished, she still strives to care for--and protect--her loved ones.

The two novels exhibit similarities on topics regarding racism and oppression between different classes. History reports that the people of different classes normally reside within a common location. Lower-class families normally live in neighborhoods with poor conditions (Eagleton 107). Educational and health facilities in such areas are in poor states, being underserved by the government. On the contrary, high-class and middle-class families enjoy lucrative recreational, health, transport, and educational infrastructure that the government sufficiently maintains (Eagleton 107). In the early 90s, Americans utilized fellow Americans from disadvantaged regions to work on their farms as explored in “*The Grape of Wrath*.” The

situation had changed in the late 90s when California farmers sought labor from foreigners such as the Mexican migrants as depicted in "*Under the Jesus Feet*."

The foreign (Mexican) migrants had no rights and faced exploitation, racism, and all manner of oppression without protests or complaints to the government and landowners. The Oklahoma migrants, however, faced similar work and residential conditions, but could fight for their rights in the society and even kill oppressive police officers. The two novels explore oppression between different classes that involve both local (Oklahoman) migrants and foreign (Mexican) migrants.

Works Cited

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