

Riding the rails essay



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The Great Depression was a very difficult time in American history. The Great Depression was the longest and most severe depression that was experienced in the Western World. The movie *Riding the Rails* is a good example of times during this depression. The movie presents a story of ten men and women in their youth, who gave their accounts about leaving their homes in search of a better life. I think *Riding the Rails* gives a very clear and accurate view of how life was for young teenagers during these historical times.

During the 1930's at the time of desperation and hardship people were affected by economic conditions that were beyond their control. These conditions brought about hunger, loss of homes, and lack of jobs. At the height of The Great Depression there were more than 250, 000 teenagers living on the road in America (Uys. , Lovell. , 2005). *Riding the Rails* vividly shares the lives and the experiences of then youths who rode the rails or trains, as teenagers. Some left home to escape poverty or troubled families and others left because it seemed like it would be a great adventure.

Teenagers who were new to the rails had high hopes of where their journeys would take them. The movie describes these teenagers searching for a better life and their secrets for survival. The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word ' hobo' as " one who wanders from place to place without a permanent home or a means of livelihood. " (Houghton Mifflin Company). Historically, many people have been forced into becoming hobos or people who traveled around, because of jobs being scarce.

They had no choice but to travel from place to place in search of work to survive. Hobos are often associated with train hopping, because that's what many did during The Great Depression. Most hobos would hide among the tracks outside of the yard. Then they would run along the train, grab a hold and jump into the open boxcars. Once on the boxcar many teens headed to cities in search of work, and a new life. What they would find was freedom, companionship, misery and loneliness. On the outskirts of town, these teens encountered hobo's camps, or jungles.

This segment of the movie showing these hobo camps, describes them as threatening makeshift communities with just random rules. The hobo jungle was a place located near the railroad outside of the city. The jungle was close enough to get to and from the train, but far enough not to attract attention. The jungles shared a place where one could eat, sleep, read and wash before heading out once more. (McElivaine, 1993). The jungle could also be a place of danger and intimidation. Once inside the city jobs could be hard to find and many turned to missions for help.

Religious organizations such as churches, missions and the salvation army provided the only indoor locations where hobos could get hot meals, clothing and a good night's sleep. Many missions had the motto " feed and convert. "(McElivaine, 1993). If hobos accepted the mission's charity, they were then obligated to work for their food and sit through a sermon, no matter how long. Those who found work abandoned the trains, many others joined the CCC, or Civilian Conservation Camps. To revitalize the faith in the nation, President Roosevelt formed CCC.