



# Obscene in the Extreme: The Burning and Banning of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

*Rick Wartzman*

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Few books have caused as big a stir as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, when it was published in April 1939. By May, it was the nation's No. 1 bestseller, flying off store shelves at a rate of 10,000 copies a week. But in Kern County, California—the Joads' newfound home—the book was burned publicly and banned from library shelves. *Obscene in the Extreme* tells the remarkable story behind that fit of censorship, a moment when several lives collided as part of a larger class struggle roiling the nation. It is a superb historical narrative that serves as an engaging window into an extraordinary time of upheaval in America, when as Steinbeck put it, "A revolution is going on."

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