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Steinbeck's myth of the Okies

by [Keith Windschuttle](#)

John Steinbeck performed a rare feat for a writer of fiction. He created a literary portrait that defined an era. His account of the “Okie Exodus” in *The Grapes of Wrath* became the principal story through which America defined the experience of the Great Depression. Even today, one of the enduring images for anyone with even a passing familiarity with the 1930s is that of Steinbeck’s fictional characters the Joads, an American farming family uprooted from its home by the twin disasters of dust storms and financial crisis to become refugees in a hostile world. Not since Dickens’s portrayal of the slums of Victorian England has a novelist produced such an enduring definition of his age.

According to Penguin Books, which produced a very handsome series of paperbacks to mark the centenary of his birth this February, Steinbeck’s novels still generate a combined sale of around two million b ...

Keith Windschuttle is an author and publisher who is a frequent contributor to *The New Criterion* and *Quadrant*. He is author of *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past*, which is now in its fourth edition from Encounter Books, and five other books on contemporary social issues. His book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847*, will be published by Macleay Press, Sydney, in November. He is publisher of Macleay Press, Sydney. He is a graduate in history from the University of Sydney and in politics from Macquarie University. He is a former academic who taught history, social policy and media studies the University of New South Wales and other Australian universities. His principal research interests are in historiography, especially of Australian and American history, and in the theories of history produced in the last two hundred years.

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