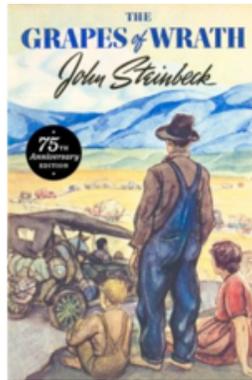


John Steinbeck's 'The Grapes of Wrath' wasn't so beloved by one California county

John Steinbeck's novel was banned by Kern County in 1939, a prohibition that would stay in place for a year and a half. Various residents called John Steinbeck's 'Wrath' a 'libel and lie' as well as 'obscene in the extreme.'

By Molly Driscoll, Staff Writer **FEBRUARY 27, 2014**



'The Grapes of Wrath' is by John Steinbeck.

Today, one of John Steinbeck's most famous novels, "The Grapes of Wrath" (released in 1939 and celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary this year), is celebrated as one of the best American works of all time, with the book securing Steinbeck the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

A 1940 film version, released the year after the novel, was nominated for several Oscars, including Best Picture, and won director John Ford the Best Director prize and actress Jane Darwell, who portrayed Ma Joad, the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

However, not everyone adored "Wrath" when the novel was first released.

According to NPR, some of the residents of Kern County, Calif. objected to the

book. Kern County is where the Joad family ends up at the end of the novel, and the board of supervisors in the county believed the book downplayed the aid Kern County was trying to give migrant workers. One member of the board called the novel a “libel and lie,” according to NPR. One farmer named W.B. Camp said it was “obscene in the extreme.”

So the book was banned from libraries and schools by the board of supervisors in the county in August of that year, with those for the ban triumphing four to one. Camp is one of the people featured in a photo of three men burning “Wrath” over a trash can.

Rick Wartzman, who is the author of the book “Obscene in the Extreme: The Banning and Burning of John Steinbeck’s ‘The Grapes of Wrath,’” noted that a librarian named Gretchen Knief tried to fight the ban.

“There are some incredibly brave and sensible letters she wrote to the Board of Supervisors about the dangers of censorship,” he told the Bakersfield Californian. “Those were her bosses. She served at their pleasure.”

The ban ended up lasting for a year and a half.

“It’s such a vicious and dangerous thing to begin,” Knief wrote of banning books in her letter to the board of supervisors. “Besides, banning books is so utterly hopeless and futile. Ideas don’t die because a book is forbidden reading.”

