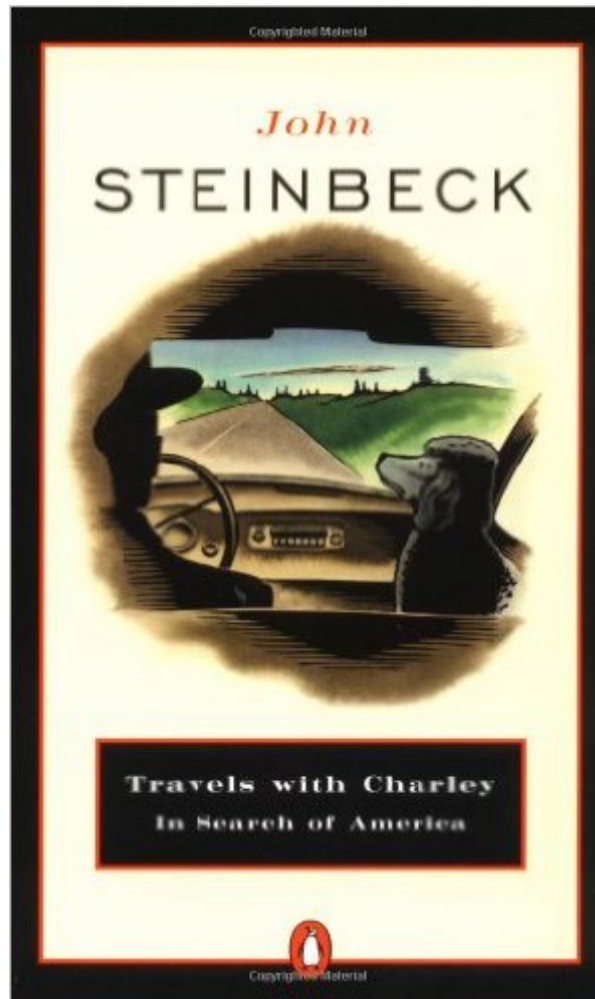


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# Travels With Charley In Search Of America



## Synopsis

An intimate journey across America, as told by one of its most beloved writers— To hear the speech of the real America, to smell the grass and the trees, to see the colors and the light— these were John Steinbeck's goals as he set out, at the age of fifty-eight, to rediscover the country he had been writing about for so many years. With Charley, his French poodle, Steinbeck drives the interstates and the country roads, dines with truckers, encounters bears at Yellowstone and old friends in San Francisco. Along the way he reflects on the American character, racial hostility, the particular form of American loneliness he finds almost everywhere, and — the unexpected kindness of strangers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have read somewhere that what makes a novel a "classic" is that it must contain some fundamental truths that can withstand changing fads, cultures and eras. I know that "Travels with Charley" is not a novel but a memoir. However, this memoir contains so much truth that it deserves--and has achieved--almost instant "classic" status. It is about John Steinbeck's trip across America. He begins in New York, drives up through Maine, across the midwest, through Montana to Washington, down the Pacific Coast, through Texas and finally through the American southeast. He was 58 when he took this trip, and his only companions were his loyal dog Charley and trailer Rocinante. I appreciated the way that Steinbeck respected Charley, gave him human characteristics, and looked for Charley's observations on mankind as well as his own. I have heard this memoir described as an "angry" book, but I think this only describes a small portion of Steinbeck's experiences on the road. Steinbeck was certainly troubled by certain things--chief

among them the horrifying "witches sabbath" that occurred in New Orleans. He also looked with sadness upon the "progress" that has diminished our cultural identities and ravaged our beautiful land. However, he was wise enough to know that older people often cling to the past simply because it is familiar, but not because it was superior or even good. He recognized that trait in himself and challenged it. Some individual passages in this book were so wise I read them several times to try to appreciate the full extent of his wisdom. For example, the passage where Steinbeck remarks that too many older people turn in their exciting lives for healthy and safe ones.

In 1960 John Steinbeck decided to reacquaint himself with America after being away because, in his own words, "I've lost the flavor and taste and sound of it. I'm going to learn about my own country." So he set out on a 3+ month journey with his dog to do just that. Along the way, he met people and made conversation, observed the state of the country, and let his mind wander as he made his journey. Then he returned to his mobile cabin at night and recorded the day's events. These journal entries became "Travels with Charley." Overall, Steinbeck seems to paint a pretty picture. While driving through New England in the fall, he is taken with the brilliant foliage on display. He is much impressed with Wisconsin, and says about Montana, "I am in love. For other states I have admiration, respect, recognition, even some affection, but with Montana it is love." Later, Steinbeck also speaks glowingly of the California Redwoods. Steinbeck also has nice things to say about the American people - sometimes. He notes that midwesterners are openly friendly, and again praises Montana, for its inhabitants "had time...to undertake the passing art of neighborliness." However, interspersed throughout his journey, Steinbeck encounters many things which are not so delightful. In fact, some were quite upsetting. He talks of waste - "American cities are like badger holes, ringed with trash" - and of miserable people - "(some people) can drain off energy and joy, can suck pleasure dry and get no sustenance from it. (They) spread a grayness in the air about them." (This was his opinion of a waitress Steinbeck had just met in Maine.) And the waitress wasn't the only one. Along his journey, he met many close-minded, opinionated, bigoted and racist Americans, and it made for depressing reading.

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