CHAPTER 5

AMERICA AND AMERICANS
John Steinbeck in his non-Fiction- *Travels with Charley*, looks for the American dreams, virtues and the glory of the pioneers among the moderns. This travelogue reflects his concerns for the morals, the disease of “an ethics,” and a certain element of hate, in the lives of his country men. Although the travelogue deals with a journey he had undertaken in 1960, it actually marks the end of Steinbeck’s journey as a writer, a journey which began far back in 1929 with *Cup of Gold*.

Steinbeck says on the fly page of *The Winter of Our Discontent* that the novel is “about a large part of America to-day.” Similarly the subtitle of *Travels With Charley* tells us that the book is about a journey “in search of America.” Concern for his country influences both the books. In *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck writes:

I, an American writer, writing about America, was working from memory, and the memory is at best a faulty, warpy reservoir. I had not heard the speech of America, smelled the grass and trees and sewage, seen its hills and water, its color and quality of light... I had not felt the country for twenty-five years. In short, I was writing something I did not know about, and it seems to me that in a so called writer this is criminal.\(^1\)

Steinbeck turned away from his work on “a book about king Arthur and the Round Table, a legend that had fascinated him since childhood,”\(^2\) to write a novel about the contemporary American civilization. In order to understand his country and the people, he undertook the journey of rediscovery of America. 

*Travels With Charley*, like *Sea of Cortez* in the middle of his literary career, is Steinbeck’s introspective study of men and materials for his recent fiction. Typical of Steinbeck’s love of search, both the books are travels. *Sea of Cortez* was a voyage,
ostensibly to observe and collect marine specimens. But it turned out to be a speculative journey, sorting out ideas and stating the thesis of work be done in the future. Similarly *Travels With Charley* is a Statement of Steinbeck’s current literary interests. Beginning from New England, and passing through a great part of America, the journey ends in New England. What Steinbeck sees and hears could well be what he had all along suspected. For what he says in *Travels with Charley* regarding the average man’s attitude to life is not different from what he implies in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. This fact, taken with his letter to Adlai Stevenson, makes it apparent that the journey is actually a review, a thinking aloud. If *Sea of Cortez* expressed certain views which influenced his writings of the Thirties, *Travels With Charley* brings Seatinbeck’s views up to date. It also shows that Steinbeck has come a long way from the biological point of view which was mainly concerned with the problems of survival. It was not an accident that *Sea of Cortez* was an expedition to observe marine life. Steinbeck’s literary universe was the tide pool. But now in *Travels with Charley* the journey is a search for a thing lost. Steinbeck looks for the American dreams, the virtues and glories of the pioneers among the moderns, what he wants to find is sadly lacking. “My own journey started long before I left, and was over before I returned,” he says in *Travels With Charley*, is very true. For he must have seen what he had anticipated. He knows that “external reality has a way of being not so external after all,” and the mighty nation “turns out to be the macrocosm of microcosm me.” If *Sea of Cortez* reflected Steinbeck’s concern for the economic problems of the Depression, *Travels With Charley* reflects his concern for the morals.
the disease of “an-ethics,” and a certain element of hate, in the lives of his
countrymen.

Steinbeck is surprised to find the disease of “an-ethics” in his country,
especially, as America had entered upon an era of plenty at the end of the Second
World War. (1939-1945) The hunger and unemployment of the Depression were
hardly a memory. The things for which people strove in the past-plenty and
prosperity-turned out to be a curse. And now Steinbeck is as much concerned for the
man in times of plenty as he was for the man in the years of scarcity. It appears to
Steinbeck that America is suffering from “too many THINGS.” In his letter to Adlai
Stevenson he speaks of

a creeping, all-pervading, never-gas of immorality which starts in the nursery and
does not stop before it reaches the highest offices, both corporate and
governmental. Then there’s the violence, cruelty and a hypocrisy symptomatic of a
people, which has too much, ...” Steinbeck concludes the letter, “Someone has to
reinspect our system and that soon...On all levels it is rigged, Adlai.  

In his last book, America and Americans, Steinbeck expresses these and similar
anxieties about his country and the people. In America and Americans, he writes a
whole chapter deploiring the death of morals in the country. “It is hard to criticise the
people one loves” 7 he writes. Yet it is his love for his people which makes him
pitilessly expose the national malady of “an-ethics”:

It is a creeping, evil thing that is invading every cranny of our political, our
economic, our spiritual and our psychic life. I begin to think that the evil thing is one
thing, not many, that racial unrest, the emotional crazy guilt that drives our people
in panic to the couches of the psychoanalysts, the fallout, dropout, copout insurgency of our children and young people, the rush to stimulants, as well as hypnotic drugs, the rise of narrow, ugly, vengeful cults of all kinds, the distrust and revolt against all authority... and this in time of plenty such as has never been known.⁸

Steinbeck is surprised that plenty should bring out the worst in man. In times of inadequate food and security men observed codes of conduct and morals. Now the stock response is that a thing is all right if everybody does it. To start with, the hero of *The Winter of Our Discontent* is out of tune with the corrupt practices of New Baytown. But the creeping disease is so powerful that soon he succumbs to it. The all-pervading quality of the disease is best reflected in the attitude of Ethan’s boy, Allen, who is already steeped in the public philosophy of the fast buck. When Ethan pulls up the boy for not rendering even lip service to morals he replies, “shucks, everybody does it.”⁹ Allen is a contrast to Jody in *The Red Pony*. Both of them are about the same age. But whereas Jody learns the values of life from his mother, Allen has hardly anything to learn from his mother. Mary Hawley actually supports the son instead of attempting to educate him. It is so because Allen’s rottenness stems from his very roots. His mother is no Ma Joad

Steinbeck is not alone in his indictment of the contemporary lack of morals. When the editor of *The New Republic* invited four distinguished men to comment on Steinbeck’s views on “our rigged morality” all of them endorsed his opinion.¹⁰ Among them, Harry Golden, made a special comment that Steinbeck was the only writer of long standing who was really concerned about America and that
Hemingway (1898-1961) and Faulkner (1897-1962) did not write about America. Steinbeck has always been anxious for the happiness of large communities—the migrants and the social outcasts in the Thirties, and now the whole nation. Golden wanted to treat Steinbeck’s views not as clichés but as serious warnings.

Steinbeck warns that leisure, the gift of modern technology, is far from a blessing. People have more than they can eat; men and women retire early from work: the children grow without having a thing to do with their hands being unprepared for the leisure and comfort, the average American has become restless. Blind violence without anger behind it, a refusal to get involved instead of offering help are some of the consequences of this restlessness.

But Steinbeck has not given up hope that one day the very restlessness might lead the nation forward. As long as people are restless, even in a meaningless way, they are not dead: they will open to many larger experiences.

Racial hatred is another evil which makes Steinbeck unhappy. Only twice in all his stories has he made reference to this evil. Crooks, the Negro stable buck in *Of Mice and Men*, is a victim of segregation. The other Negro is the nameless one lynched by a white mob, in the story “The Vigilante.” In his youth Steinbeck did not see much of the Negroes, and it was never his method to write about a thing he did not know first hand. The only Negro family he knew in California was the Coopers of Salinas. In boyhood he never “heard or felt a breath” of colour prejudice. He was not prepared for the things he later heard about the Negroes— that they were an inferior race, they were dirty and mean. Steinbeck always remembered how the
Coopers were intelligent and how Mrs. Cooper’s kitchen was immaculate. In fact of his best nurses during the days of despair after he divorced his second wife was a Negro named Neale. Steinbeck described him as “a good man and will keep me fed and washed and clean..., and an excellent driver, cook, valet and damn good friend.” After his becoming a New Yorker, Steinbeck’s views about the Negroes are more clearly seen: “I guess when they are drafting peace-makers they’d better pass me by.” This does not mean that Steinbeck hates the Southern whites. With an insight that always helped him understand that the other side is also made of men like us, he traces the disease of racial hatred to the Emancipation.

Millions of slaves, blinking and helpless, emerged into the blinding light of freedom, and they were no more fitted or prepared for it than a man would be who after a life-time spent in prison was forced into the complication, the uncertainty, and the responsibility of the outside world...and the white Southerner found himself surrounded by a vengeful, savage and untrained enemy.

Many Southerners were tired of owning slaves even before the Civil War. But when they were called evil and brutal men by the Northerners, they began to defend slavery by way of defending themselves. The Northerners entertained the image of a Negro as an innocent and saintly hero suffering untold miseries. The Southerners built up a retaliatory image of the Negro. That was how the racial war was perpetuated. After the Emancipation the Negroes were free to go to the North, and they were forced by the South to do so. But when they actually went there the Northerners, who had fought for the emancipation of slaves, were not prepared to accept them as equals. They were free but, only to live in segregation.
In *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck describes the horror he felt at the sight of Negro-baiting. The cheer-leaders of Texas boo and call unprintable names at a little Negro girl and a white man taking his son to the school.\textsuperscript{14} He also meets some sober men who can look at the thing as a whole. He meets an old man, who has two Negroes to take care of him. The old man wonders how the Negro would react to a change, when it takes place. The Negroes hate the whites just as the whites hate them. The old man agrees with Steinbeck that a time might come when the white will be outnumbered, or more likely both will disappear into a new race. Like the old man Steinbeck is bothered with what happens in the meantime. The young Negro student he speaks to, strongly feels that something should be done now. One day, may be, the Negroes will attain perfect equality. But Martin Luther King’s passive resistance is, in his opinion, too slow to benefit the Negroes. When Steinbeck reminds him of Gandhi’s nonviolent fight against violence, the young student replies, that what is urgent is action. “I might be an old man before I am a man at all. I might be dead before.”\textsuperscript{15} Even in his vehemence the boy feels that he has been selfish. The younger generation of the Negroes dreams of complete equality in their own life time. And Steinbeck has sympathy for the impatience of youth. Some of the older Negroes, like the one Steinbeck picks up on the highway, have withdrawn into a protective shell and refuse to be drawn into a dispute. Steinbeck shares with them their anxieties and hopes.

In analyzing the Negro problem Steinbeck brings to bear the same impartially he achieved in *In Dubious Battle*. To Steinbeck the U.S.A. is infected by the curse of
racial hatred. He hopes for a better day for all when the curse is removed; but in the mean time he is much worried regarding the means before ends are achieved. If he were to have written a book on Negro equality, "around which much of our thinking and our present-day attitudes turn,"16 he would, in all likelihood, have displeased both sides, just as in In Dubious Battle he displeased both the Communists and the Capitalists.

In the midst of racial hatred, in an atmosphere of "an-ethics," in the general gold-rush, and in the restlessness Steinbeck is able to see a oneness in his countrymen. His journey in search of America reveals to him that

we are a nation, a new breed. America are much more Americans than they are Northerners, Southerners, Westerners, or Easterners....It is a fact that Americans from all sections and of all racial extractions are more alike than the Welsh are like the English....The American identity is an exact and provable thing.17

In his foreword to America and Americans, Steinbeck observes "that out of the whole body of our past, out of our differences, our quarrels...something has emerged that is itself unique in the world: America...."18 The unity of the nation, Steinbeck claims, can be seen even in the physical features of Americans who resemble one another, whether they are of Japanese blood or of Caucasian origin.

Steinbeck seems to have discovered, in his old age, that he was in love with his country. Though not an expatriate like some writers of his youth, Steinbeck did not completely identify himself with the country during the Thirties. Perhaps his love of the region of his birth compensated for everything. Perhaps the unity of the states as one nation was still in the making. The Second World War (1939-1945) brought
all the people together as never before. The very restlessness of the people, their
costant movement from place to place, large scale production of consumer goods
cut through the borders to make a closer unit of the states. In his travels Steinbeck
notices that “regional speech is in the process of disappearing”19 and thanks to the
radio and television.

The oneness is not an unmixed blessing. The uniform cooking, clean but the
tasteless food, comic books and broadcasting are not things that make a sensitive man
happy. As a storekeeper in Minnesota tells Steinbeck, the pent up feelings of the
nation burst into some excitement over a murder or the World series of baseball
games. The best outlet for the American seems to be the Russian but the anti-Russian
feelings are only symptoms of the disease of smugness. People are afraid to have
opinions of their own. A friend and a political reporter had asked Steinbeck, before
he commenced his travels, to look for a man with guts. He had bitterly remarked, “I
haven’t seen anything but cowardice and expediency. This used to be a nation of
giants. Where have they gone? You can not defend a nation with a board of
director.”20 All that Steinbeck found in his travels was a fight or two over the ancient
subject-a woman.

It is his love for his people that gives Steinbeck the privilege of making fun of
their ways. In the chapter entitled “Paradox and Dream” in America and Americans,
he makes endless fun of the so-called “American way of life” of which the
Americans speak “as though it involved the ground rules for the governance of
heaven.”21 Steinbeck lists a series of paradoxes in the American belief in myths. The
average American believes that he is a born mechanic, a pioneer and a great hunter, but he is incapable of looking into the gas tank when the car fails, does not know how to kill and cook an animal, and shoots the whole neighborhood, except the target, when out on a hunting spree. He dreams of ideal home, but is found constantly changing places and often living in mobile homes. Steinbeck has sympathy for the dreams of Americans in spite of the many paradoxes involved in them.

These dreams describe our vague yearning toward what we wish were and hope we may be: wise, just, compassionate, and noble. The fact that we have this dream at all is perhaps an indication of its possibility. 22

Steinbeck “has no sacred cows.” 23 He exposes the drawbacks in the American way of life, with all its evils such as racial hatred, “an-ethics,” lack of growth of the mind. They are all laid bare with the frankness with which Steinbeck is always credited. 24 As he says in his foreword to America and Americans, his essay is “inspired by curiosity, impatience, some anger, and a passionate love for America and Americans.” 25 He wants other countrymen to know “what our country is like to us, what we feel about it: our wonder at its size and diversity, and above all our passionate devotion to it—all of it, the land, the idea-and the mystique.” 26

Love for his country and the people makes Steinbeck angry at their drawbacks. The wrath of Steinbeck of the Thirties arose out of a love for the migrant workers. The unhappy lot of the victims of the Depression (1929-1933), the social outcasts and those by nature handicapped to live a normal life moved him to write compassionately about their suffering. Man as an individual and as a member of the group in his struggle for survival is an object of pity for him. Using biological and
biblical metaphors, and the myths of Adam and king Arthur, Steinbeck expresses his compassion for man. Steinbeck’s image of man after *East of Eden* is that he “is individual, responsible, guilty, redeemable”,\(^{27}\) and as such his compassion for man is based on the fall of man, his remorse and the promise of a better life. Steinbeck’s love for his country and the people is more than ever strongly expressed in his later writings. And because America is the most powerful nation among the democratic countries, he thinks it is the last great hope for mankind. Seen in this light Steinbeck’s concern for Americans becomes a concern for humanity itself:

At the heart of all Steinbeck’s writings is man. Steinbeck is unhappy and angry at man’s inhumanity to man. But he does not despair. He knows that it is a lack of understanding that others are also men like us that leads to violence and hatred. And he believes that the evil of violence and hatred can be cured by love and understanding. Steinbeck’s “work drive has always been aimed at making people understand each other.”\(^{28}\) Now that man is equipped with a God-like power to destroy, Steinbeck is all the more concerned for man’s well-being. “Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope.”\(^{29}\) It is the duty of a writer, says Steinbeck, to discourage the hazardous tendency and to create hope by celebrating “man’s proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat—for courage, compassion and love.”\(^{30}\) Compassion and love—these are the key words to the understanding of Steinbeck’s works. Instant acceptance of any kind of person, sympathy for the under-dog, understanding of the inarticulate and a love for all that lives—these are the main features of his fiction. Above all Steinbeck possesses what
Arnold Bennett calls the “essential characteristic of the really great novelist” a Christ-like, all-embracing compassion.\textsuperscript{31}

The Nobel Prize citation acclaimed John Steinbeck as an independent expounder of the truth with an unbiased instinct for what is genuinely American, be it good or wicked...He likes to contrast the simple joy of life with the brutal and cynical craving for money. But in him we find the American temperament also expressed in his great feeling for nature, for the tilled soil, the wasteland and the mountains and the ocean coasts.\textsuperscript{32}

In \textit{America and Americans}, Steinbeck himself isolates this genuinely native element.

For I believe that out of the whole body of our past, out of our differences, our quarrels, our many interests and directions, something has emerged that is itself unique in the world; America-complicated, paradoxical, bullheaded, shy, cruel, boisterous, unspeakable dear, and very beautiful.\textsuperscript{33}

The essential Americanness of Steinbeck is basic to an understanding of his art. It is also important in isolating his image of man. Through his novels, he delineates the American man, who is variously described as optimistic, pragmatic, outgoing, gregarious, energetic and moral. His portraits have relevance for the rest of the world also because man everywhere has certain common drives and aspirations. Unlike the repatriate writers, Steinbeck rooted himself in American soil and heritage, and imaged man. And this image has its share of universal validity. What Camus claimed about Silone is true in the case of Steinbeck.

\textit{As to Silone, who speaks to the whole of Europe, the reason why I feel myself so close to him is that he is at the same time so incredibly rooted in his national and even provincial tradition.}\textsuperscript{34}
In an eastern Pennsylvania town, there has been for some years an exhibit for the passing public called "Roadside America". It is an extensive scale model of a typical rural countryside, the United States of legend, nostalgia, and not infrequently, reality. There is a splendid redundancy that is striking in the concept, there, of people stopping along the road to enter a building to glimpse, in effect, the road they have just left. It is, I think, much like the way in which the fiction of John Steinbeck illustrates this same "Roadside America" in a process of historical change. And because the study of Steinbeck's novels involves the evolving attitudes of the man himself, something of the same sort of doubling of attention to America in-motion takes place within Steinbeck's criticism as takes place within the tourist attraction I have mentioned.

The brief critical history of *The Wayward Bus* (1947) has been a record of reasonable assumptions insufficiently pursued-and occasionally of sweeping presuppositions vainly applied. Peter Lisa, referring to the book's first reviews, goes on to describe Steinbeck's "pitiless examination" of a materialistic American culture, noting certain thematic devices such as the scars worn by several characters and the sexual longings apparent beneath their surface responses. Lisca considers the bus's journey both from its evident allegorical aspect and also in terms of the "purely visual perception" by which Steinbeck renders scenes as Camera-eye Compositions.35

Bus is a combination of that institutional motion and that frenetic activity which characterize Roadside America, qualities clearly presents even its seldom-seen
film version of a decade later (already an exercise is nostalgia). “There was a hush on
the land and great activity,” Steinbeck says, and that paradox of stillness and
motion embodied in the land pervades the “plot” and its characters, underlying and
justifying their continuing interaction. Ceaseless activity in search of a peaceful state
is the human norm, and dreams are the only immediate means of realizing that
objective—though often these dreams are disbelieved in even as they are dreamed. All
the people in The Wayward Bus are dreams, and therefore most are also deceivers—of
themselves or others, and sometimes both.

Steinbeck’s perspectives in Bus involve greater interest in individuals than had
been the case in such earlier works as The Grapes of Wrath, and thus there is
emphasis on how individuals’ conceptions enactments of their responsibilities to one
another account for the state of the overall social fabric. Bus therefore presents a
cross-section of persons in varied modes of existence, instead of a species in an
ongoing common experience. Rebel Corners, which Steinbeck quickly places in
customary historical context so that its larger meanings might begin to appear at once,
is a sort of Eden in the “semi desert” with roots in the wellspring of life, across roads
(as for its writer and its protagonist) where rebellion (with sexual overtones, like
Eden’s in the usual lay interpretation) leads its characters outward on the road of their
dreams, but with little knowledge of good and evil, or Truth. Thus: a “wayward bus”. And if rebellion in Eden, paralleling that upheaval in American history, that conflict
of our adolescence, for which the Corners is named, sends men and women out of the
garden, whither shall they go? Hollywood beckons, a place where “eventually, all
the adolescents in the world will be congregated." It pulls Pimples and Norma most directly.

From the time when his consciousness was sharpened by first hand observation of political crisis in California's agricultural valleys, Steinbeck developed in his writing a series of remedies for the social evils he saw, these remedies reflect his belief in man's ability to pursue meaningful social goals. The thematic substructures of his greatest social novels (In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath) are laced through with the novelist's teleological belief in the value of human values in the human progress. Steinbeck celebrates man's ability to emerge ahead of his accomplishments and grow beyond his concepts, when those concepts are framed by a recognition of the unity of all life in a regulated, ordered cosmos. The battle in In Dubious Battle is dubious in that Steinbeck shows how neither blind partisan action nor detached observation can solve the pressing problem faced by the dispossessed and the downtrodden. And The Grapes of Wrath ends in triumph as Steinbeck creates in the character of Jim Casy a man of messianic vision who converts an understanding of the unity of life into a gospel of social action.

How strange, then that Steinbeck followed The Grapes of Wrath (1939) with The Log from the Sea of Cortez (1949) which is the narrative record of the Steinbeck-Ricketts marine Collecting expedition to the gulf of California in the spring of 1940. In this unusual work of travel literature, Steinbeck ostensibly abandons his commitment to concepts of social progress and emerges into a perfect scientific vacuum. The novelist seems to question that that factor of civilization we call
progress, he celebrates the unadorned life-styles of the simple Indians of the Gulf who may someday remain "to sun themselves, to eat and starve and sleep and reproduce" while "a great and godlike race" of North Americans "flew away in four-motored bombers to the accompaniment of exploding bombs, the voice of God calling them home." 

At the beginning of *The Log*, Steinbeck and Ricketts state that their curiosity was not limited:

> We wanted to see everything our eyes would accommodate, to think what we could, and, out of our seeing and thinking, to build some kind of structure in modeled imitation of the observed reality. 

They realized, of course, that what they would construct would necessarily be warped by "the collective pressure and stream of our time and race" and by the "thrust of our individual personalities," but knowing this, they affirm that they might be able to maintain a balance between "our warp and the separate thing, the external reality. The oneness of these two might take its contribution from both." Accordingly, they define the structure they build as "a new thing composed of it and us."

In this "new thing" life is a coordinate whole in which all things, even property and suffering, are necessary. Viewing marine life in the tranquil Gulf, Steinbeck and Ricketts emerge as holistic semi-scientists who impose order on chaos by seeking the meaning of the whole from an inspection of the parts. They develop a feeling of fullness "of warm wholeness, wherein every sight and object and odor and experience seems to key into a gigantic whole." And they approach the borderline of
the metaphysical as they celebrate their holistic worldview in tones more religious than scientific:

"...a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin and an Einstein. Each of them in his own tempo and with his own voice discovered and reaffirmed with astonishment the knowledge that all things are one thing and that one thing is all things." 43

This perception of the fundamental unity of life represents the quintessence of understanding and is what Steinbeck and Ricketts gleaned from their experience in the *Sea of Cortez*. And believing that there is no way of conceiving of a holistic universe if the human spirit is not inseparably identified with it all, Steinbeck and Ricketts note how they "slipped into a new frame and grew to be a part of it, related in some subtle way to the reefs and beaches, related to the little animals, to the stirring waters and the warm, brackish lagoons." 44 They state that their trip had "dimension and tone" in that the "brown Indians and the gardens of the sea... they were all one thing and we were that one thing too." 45

Early in *A Russian Journal*, Steinbeck writes that "the hardest thing in the world for a man is the simple observation of what is." 46 But whereas in *The Log*, Steinbeck was able to observe what is and still fuse thought and thing into an integrated nucleus with dimension and tone, in *A Russian Journal* Steinbeck and Capa simply report what they saw as they saw it. The volume is a minor work which tells us what the Russian people wear, what they serve at dinner, how they dance and sing and play. But it really does little to help us achieve a fuller understanding of either the sense described or the minds of the describers.
In real sense, Steinbeck’s most important work of travel literature is *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962) which is the published result of the novelist’s journey in a camper across the United States with his French poodle, Charley. For one thing, the book is set in this country and it provides Steinbeck with a direct opportunity to recollect on many of his central beliefs about America. Moreover, *Travels with Charley* is the only one of Steinbeck’s travel volumes which is not a collaboration. And so by definition, the reader is not faced with the problem of determining how much of the book is Steinbeck’s and how much is someone else’s. In 1951, Steinbeck told his editor Pascal Covici, that “there are no good collaboration “since” in utter loneliness a writer tries to explain the inexplicable”.

And while it is unlikely that Steinbeck looked back with disfavor on his work with Ricketts in Mexico or with Capa in Russia, *Travels with Charley* finds Steinbeck in “utter loneliness” with only Charley for companionship, commenting on his land, and as it turns out, on his own life.

The shattering effect of Steinbeck’s circumambulatory journey through America seems to have been the inevitable result of his vision of man as animal finally converging with his vision of man as compassionate idealist and Christian. The consequent meeting eventuated in fission, not fusion; and that the lack of synthesis had an enduring detrimental effect on the author-Noble Prize winner or not—is only too evident in the work of his last fifteen or eighteen years. If Steinbeck made us aware of American social ailments in *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, both written during the 1930s so did he also have faith then that the
American people would strive to correct the wrong he had exposed. In a sense, American activity during the Second World War confirmed his faith and justified his pride in his country: In *The Grapes of Wrath* he had written:

> For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic, in the universe, grows beyond his work....Having stepped forward he may slip back but only half a step, never the full step...This you may know when the bombs plummet out of the back planes on the market place, when prisoners are stuck like pigs, when the crushed bodies drain filthy in the dust....If the steps were not being taken, if the stumbling-forward ache were not alive, the bombs would not fall, the throats would not be cut, Fear the time when the bombs stop falling while he bombers live—for every bomb is proof that the spirit has not died. And...fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.46

Two years after the appearance of this declaration of faith in man, the United States entered World War II and put it to the test.

The sudden death of Franklin D. Roosevelt in April, 1945, only a few months after the beginning of his fourth term in office, left Harry Truman in the White House; and the lackadaisical 1948 campaign of governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York, based on his foolish and unwarranted optimism, assured the Democrats of the Presidency for at least another four years. During the Republican Convention of 1952, memories of the war were revivified, and the American people were reminded that not all old soldiers, as it were, “fade away”; despite his lack of political experience, General Dwight Eisenhower was selected on the first ballot to turn as candidate for President on the Republican ticket. His public image as a victorious
military commander—indeed, a war hero—was an attribute not to be dismissed in favor of a more accomplished politician’s program; and Eisenhower charged into the campaign with a winning smile, the catch phrase “It’s time for a change,” and a platform split by party dissension.

Among the many millions of voters attracted to the old soldier’s image was John Steinbeck, a former war correspondent of the European and African campaigns, who recalled that “President Harding stirred me toward the Democratic party and President Hoover cemented me there.”50 Steinbeck’s attraction to Eisenhower, however, like that of most American voters, is not difficult to comprehend when one realizes that few people had heard of his opponent before the Democratic Convention in July. Adlai E. Stevenson was highly regarded in Illinois, whereas Governor, he had done much to clean up syndicated gambling and political graft; but outside his own state he was simply unknown. “A year and a half ago, I had never heard of Mr. Stevenson,” Steinbeck wrote late in 1952. “A year ago I knew his name and only remembered it because of the usual first name. Until the convention I had never heard nor read a Stevensonian world. And now we hurry through dinner to hear him on radio or to see him on television.”51 Steinbeck’s shift from Eisenhower—whom he had been “solidly behind”—was quick and dramatic. He indicated the reason for his rapid change in the foreword to a collection of Stevenson’s campaign speeches published during the autumn of 1952. “I have switched entirely because of the speeches,” he explained, and continued:
A man cannot think muddled and write clear. Day by day it has seemed to me that Eisenhower’s speeches have become more formless and mixed up and uncertain...Eisenhower seems to have lost the ability to take any kind of stand on any subject...Stevenson, on the other hand, has touched no political, economic, or moral subject on which he has not taken a clear and open stand even to the point of bearding selfish groups to their faces.

....With equal pressures we have seen in a pitiful few months the Eisenhower mind crumble into uncertainty, retire into generalities, fumble with friendships and juggle alliances. At the same time Stevenson has moved serenely on, clarifying his position, holding to his line and never being drawn nor driven from his nongeneralized ideals,

....As a writer I love the clear, clean writing of Stevenson. As a man I like his intelligent, humorous, logical, civilized mind.52

For Steinbeck, Adlai Stevenson was the ideal political leader, a man with the integrity and ability to guide the American people in a way that might help them restrain their perpetual restlessness from dissipating their energy and canceling out one action by another in a continuum of profitless paradoxes. “We are a restless, a dissatisfied, a searching people,” Steinbeck wrote in America and Americans:

We bridle and buck under failure, and we go mad with dissatisfaction in the face of success....We work too hard, and many die under the strain; and then to make up for that we play with a violence as suicidal.

The result is that we seem to be in a state of turmoil all the time, both physically and mentally...

The paradoxes are everywhere: We shout that we are nation of laws, not men—and then proceed to break every law we can if we can get away with it. We proudly
insist that we have our political positions on the issues—and we will vote against a man because of his religion, his name, or the shape of his nose.  

Steinbeck believed that this restless urge for action was deeply infused in the American character; in “The Leader of the people,” Jody’s grandfather still dreams nostalgically of his Western passage, and long after it was done he gazed at length out over the Pacific as though he were ready to set sail and continue pushing forward.

Stevenson himself shared this spirit. Like Steinbeck, he thrived well in the outdoors; indeed, Steinbeck’s daemon seems to have been guiding Stevenson’s pen as he wrote to a friend during his campaign for Governor of Illinois in 1948:

I’ve seen Illinois in a capsule—the beauty of the south, the fruit belt, the coal fields, the oil fields, the great industrial area around East St. Louis—and every where the rich, black, fecund earth stretching away and away. It gives you a great feeling of pride and power. Shut your eyes for a moment and let the fetid, hot places, the scorched islands, the arid, the cold, the small—all the places of the world where men struggle to live and love and breed—dance through your head. Then open your eyes and look at Illinois, and murmur “thrice blessed land.”  

“I own farm land in Illinois,” Stevenson reminded his listeners at the National Plowing Contest in Kasson, Minnesota [9/6/52], “and I come from a family that has lived in the heart of the farm belt for over a hundred years.”  

A favorite photograph of himself was snapped while he sat at the wheel of a tractor, which he could manipulate well; to be sure, he was adept at all the takes of a farmer and could handle the tools accordingly. Again like Steinbeck, he enjoyed camping and hunting; Mrs. Edith Dick, an old Family friend, recalled that “Adlai loved to ride and on snowy Sundays he would hitch up one of the horses and take his family sleighriding….He
showed little boys how to trap and fish along the river bank. They hunted arrowheads in the meadow, and he enlivened canoe trips with tall tales about the Indians.” Mrs. Dicks’ description suggests glimpses of a reincarnated Thoreau, whose affection for youngsters was often exhibited in a similar manner. Another delightful photograph displays Stevenson with his three sons, each bearing a shotgun and a hunter’s smile of satisfaction over the ring-necked pheasants they had brought down shortly before.

Obviously, however, it was not for his prowess with a canoe paddle or a shotgun that led Steinbeck to regard the Democratic candidate as a political savior of America. Perhaps leaning a little too heavily on exaggeration for effect, Steinbeck charged that until Stevenson emerged to the presidential candidacy, “politics—the word, the practice—had become disreputable to the point where politics and crime were confused in many minds. The career of a politician was for the greedy, the unscrupulous,” he continued, in language more than a little like that of Lincoln Steffens, whose muck-raking articles for McClure’s at the beginning of the century shocked citizens into disbelief over the enormity of big-city political graft. “Men of ideals and conscience avoided politics as an arena where wolves tore at the body of the nation and snapped and snarled at each other,” Steinbeck wrote to Stevenson, not long after Adlai’s defeat in 1952. “Then in a few short months, you... changed that picture. You made it seem possible for politics to be as it once had been, an honorable, virtuous and creative business.”
In the light of his resounding defeat by Eisenhower, it seems doubtful that Stevenson could have done anything whatever during the campaigns that would have altered the results significantly enough to put him in the White House; nevertheless, it is possible that his outspoken honesty in 1952 lost him more votes than it gained. “Let’s talk sense to the American people,” he reiterated in one speech after another; and drawing upon a Kantian ethic, he stated unequivocally to his audience in Richmond: “We must do right for right’s sake alone.” 59 In Baltimore he told his listeners that if he is elected there is going to be “no park-barreling while our economy is in its present condition. If your principal interest in life is getting a new federally financed boon-doggle for your state you had better vote for somebody else.” 60 And to the automobile workers in Detroit: “...labor unions must confirm to standards of fair conduct and equal protection in the exercise of their stewardship. A few unions...abuse (their) trust by excluding from membership some who want to work, denying them a vote, denying their seniority rights because of the color of their skin or because of restrictive notions about employment security. That not right.” And a few moments later: “We can not...tolerate shutdowns which threaten our national safety, even that of the whole free world. The right to bargain collectively does not include a right to stop the national economy.” 61

What becomes increasingly apparent to a reader of Stevenson’s campaign speeches as he moves page by page with the speaker across the nation, is that Stevenson—morally correct, of course, but politically suicidal—spoke to the American people as if they constituted a thoroughly enlightened electorate having
more concern with far-reaching legitimate issues than with public image and self-interest. As an honest man, however, Stevenson had no choice. "To trade integrity for a quick promotion or to sacrifice self-respect and conviction for the boss's favor is a price I would not pay," he wrote. "Better to be fired for the right cause than to sell your talents for the wrong one. You won't have an opportunity to try out your ideas and ideals, unless you resist the temptation to sell them out. Conscience is a fragile thing." 62 Using the vigorous aphoristic style of Emerson, Stevenson brought the virtues of nineteenth-century transcendentalism into twentieth-century politics. He was the embodiment of Jefferson's "natural aristocrat," blessed as he was with virtue and talents; Lowell would have considered him a true "gentleman," and Whitman would have declared him a poet—perhaps the poet, the seer, for whom America was waiting.

If Stevenson was disillusioned with the American people after the elections, he seldom revealed it in public. Like Jefferson, he recognized the essential value of an enlightened electorate in a free democracy, and even after his defeat in 1952 he continued to promote his view that a "genuinely free and an honestly informed people will ultimately triumph over intolerance, injustice and evil from without or within. But a lazy people, an apathetic people, an uninformed people or a people too proud for politics, is not free. And," he added, "it may quickly be a mob."63 In an address delivered at Harvard the previous year, his American idealism fairly glowed: "... poverty, oppression and ignorance have always been our concern, and those who see virtue only in self-interest and self-preservation mistake, I think, our
character and misread our history... A propitious political accident... has made our inborn compassion co-ordinate with the national interest.”

Stevenson refused to be satisfied with the apparent American tendency—indeed, world tendency—to strive mightily for, and to a large extent achieve, mastery over natural forces while moral concerns remained ignored and buried beneath increasing piles of atomic waste. ‘After all,’ he wrote in 1955, ‘the great issues of the day are not technical, they are moral,’” Steinbeck agreed, emphasizing the pernicious fear generated by the atomic revolution: “And just as surely as we are poisoning the air with our test bombs,” he observed in his Introduction to *Once There Was a War* (1958), “so are we poisoned in our souls by fear, faceless, stupid sarcomic terror,” Stevenson, in contrast, found the new atomic technology awesome but not necessarily fearful, for atomic power is of nature, and nature is neutral. “In any case,” he said, “let us not cower with fear before this new instrument of power... there is no evil in the atom; only in men’s souls... the way to deal with evil men has never varied; stand up for the right, and if needs must be, fight for the right.”

Reasserting the high value of American democracy in a world at once menaced and blessed with man’s new control over atomic power, Stevenson proclaimed that the United States must never disregard “the moral sentiments of human liberty and human welfare embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.” Over and over, Stevenson extolled the intrinsic virtues of a “thriving, full-bodied democracy,” which he defined as “honest disagreement... liberty coupled with responsibility,” a means of self-government in
which “all the people reason together, reason aloud, reason their way to clarity of judgment and unity of purpose.”

Stevenson’s constant appeal to the moral intelligence of the common citizen made a strong impact on Steinbeck, who regarded himself as one of the “so-called ‘people’” all his life. “We always underrate the intelligence of the ‘people,’” he observed in 1952, and later, in *Travels with Charley*, he confessed: “I admire all nations and hate all governments.” But if one can judge from the rest of his traveler’s tale, Steinbeck’s affection for the people was projected with more lip-service than soul. It was difficult for him to maintain faith in a nation of withdrawn materialists, each hunting his own Great Carbuncle composed of plastic and smelling of cash. In a published letter to Stevenson, written upon his return from England and less than a year before he commenced his peregrination in “Rocinante,” Steinbeck itemized his two “first impressions” of America after an extended stay abroad:

> First, a creeping, all pervading, nerve-gas of immorality which starts in the nursery and does not stop before it reaches the highest offices, both corporate and governmental. Two, a nervous restlessness, a hunger, a thirst, a yearning for something unknown—perhaps morality. Then there’s the violence, cruelty and a hypocrisy symptomatic of a people which has too much, and last, the temper surely, ill temper which only shows up in humans when they are frightened.

Throughout the letter he excoriated the pervasive immorality and materialistic values that had observed in his native land, and he concluded that “Someone has to reinspect our system.... We can’t expect to raise our children to be good and honorable men when the city, the state, the government, the corporations all offer
higher rewards for chicanery and deceit than for probity and truth. On all levels it is rigged, Adlai. Maybe nothing can be done about it, but I am stupid enough and naively hopeful enough to want to try.”76 The weak ray of hope expressed in his concluding line probably points directly to the underplaying purpose of his nomadic journey. Stung by Stevenson’s two defeats and despondent over the malignancies he had perceived in America society—“On all levels it is rigged,” he had written—Steinbeck needed to go back among the people and discover whether the fault lay with the nation or the government.

The issue of a “rigged” morality was nothing new to Stevenson. If he was ‘resolutely idealistic on issues,” as Stephen A. Mitchell has suggested, so was he also “realistic about politics and politicians.”77 In America and Americans, Steinbeck, recalled an incident that had occurred between Stevenson and Sam Rayburn: Stevenson had insisted upon an open convention to elect the vice-presidential candidate, and Rayburn countered that he had to be appointed. When Rayburn finally relented after hours of debate, he said sadly but kindly to Adlai: “Look, son—look Governor—I’m an old man and I’ve been through this for many years, and I tell you I don’t mind an open convention—as long as it’s rigged!”78 Who can distinguish with certainty the truth from the humor in Rayburn’s statement? Could Stevenson? Having spent now little time in state politics before being drafted as the presidential candidate in 1952, Stevenson, like most Americans, he said, had become “accustomed to political bad manners and billingsgate. After a century and a half we have developed some immunity to vilification, abuse and misrepresentation in our
domestic public dialogue. If not an ornament to the American tradition it is at least a part of it, and we have learned somehow to give it a rough evolution and get along surprisingly well in spite of deceit, demagoguery and verbal violence." 79

Stevenson’s eclectic reading and dry wit usually enabled him to treat demagoguery with irony and thereby counter attack with barbed sarcasm. He “was the undefeated champion of the deflating retort, the complete squelch and the droll epigram, 80 Newton N. Minow has recalled; and Steinbeck, too, like many of Stevenson’s associates and acquaintances, appreciated his brand of controlled humor. After pointing out that political jests are usually contrived, irrelevant, and flat enough to avoid injury by implication, Steinbeck noted that Stevenson had changed the technique by “draw(ing) his humor from his subject. His jokes, far from obscuring his message, enlighten it.” 81 If Stevenson was not aware of Mark Twain’s dictum (expressed in The Mysterious Stranger) that the “one really effective weapon” of mankind is laughter, he learned the lesson elsewhere and employed it throughout his political and diplomatic career.

In The Winter of our Discontent, Steinbeck had dramatically portrayed, through the first person point of-view, Ethan Allen Hawley’s struggles against the temptations of an emerging new morality which stressed materialistic success at any cost. From the first offer of a five percent kickback by a salesman to his own son’s rationalization for plagiarism in an essay which won the “I Love America” contest, Hawley repeatedly heard the argument, “Everybody does it” 82 Eventually he, too, agreed that his inherited morality of honesty and Puritan ethics was as outdated and
impractical as his ancestral talisman in the contemporary society of New Baytown with its mores of dishonesty, laziness, opportunism, and cynicism toward all vestiges of the older morality.  

The older morality of Puritan America had been perverted and inverted in New Baytown to the extent that the Churches symbolically had been replaced by the banks and business, with shrew bankers and corrupt satesmen as the new ministers. For some of its citizens, the earlier religious ceremonies and rituals gradually had been replaced by shrewd business maneuvers, special deals, and kickbacks. Financial success, no matter how obtained, had become more important that the Biblical teachings; and getting caught, the new definition of sin. Ethan Allen Hawley struggled heroically, but he finally died to his Puritan morality during the Easter weekend and was resurrected a disciple of the new morality of New Baytown.

Though Ethan Allen Hawley decided to forsake the new morality before it destroyed his own family, this “moral wasteland of contemporary American existence,” as represented in New Baytown and its representative citizens like Ethan Allen Hawley, tremendously disturbed Steinbeck in 1960. For this reason he felt compelled to re-examine this new America which seem to have emerged since Steinbeck had left the Salinas Valley in California and had gone to the large city in the east.

Although he repeatedly states in *Travels With Charley* that he made his tour through nearly forty states to observe the land and its people objectively and casually, it soon becomes obvious in this panoramic travelogue that Steinbeck’s motivation
was basically romantic and his account of the tour, highly subjective. He was searching for people and places quite different from that which he had found in his fictitious New Baytown, as a brief examination of his account of the tour will indicate.

Steinbeck's romantic emphasis on a compensating good for every evil observed along the journey ended abruptly, however, after his two days of philosophic meditation in nature's cathedral beneath the giant Sequoia redwoods boarding Oregan and California. Hereafter his perceptions of the people and conditions became increasingly realistic as he himself gradually changed from a romantic person like Don Quixtoe to an enlightened American like Monsieur Ci Git whom he later met near New Orleans.

During the months and years following the publication of *Travels With Charley* (1962), Steinbeck not only could not forget this new found image but also became increasingly perturbed by the "sausage-like propaganda" which was being ground out about America by non-American writers. He himself had lived all his life in America and in 1960 had revisited this land and its people—his land and his people, not merely a fictive construct. And so he felt compelled, and qualified, to write *America and Americans* (1966). 85

In 1960 at Femont' Peak near Monterey, as he had written in *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck had reflectingly thought to himself:

It would be pleasant to be able to say of my *Travels with Charley*. 
"I went out to find the truth about my country and found it." And then it would be such a simple matter to set down my findings and lean back comfortably with a fine sense of having discovered truths and taught them to my readers.”

Half a decade later, as he writes in the Foreword to America and Americans, he has discovered some new truths about this “complicated paradoxical, bullheaded, shy, cruel, boisterous, unspeakably dear, and very beautiful” (America). And so he accepts his role as America’s prophet to interpret these new truths and to warn people of any impending doom, although it sometimes is very painful for him to do.

Writing in the first person, as he had in Travels with Charley, Steinbeck in America and Americans shifts from a descriptive, panoramic travelogue structure to a topical, journalistic editorial structure to present his candid appraisal and judgment of his newfound age of America and the Americans. He admits in the Foreword to the book that he can not pretend to be objective in his analysis but insists that his opinions are “informed by America and inspired by curiosity, impatience, some anger, and a passionate love of America and the Americans.” It is from this vantage point that he examines several of the more unique characteristics and truths about our nation and its people in the mid—1960’s.

America and its people have a right, says Steinbeck, to be proud of the achievement which is appropriately expressed in the motto, “E Pluribus Unum.” America did not exist; it was created by our work, bloodshed and tears:

We built America and the process made us Americans—a new breed, rooted in all races, stained and tinted with all colors, a seeming ethnic anarchy. Then in a little,
little time, we became more alike than we were different—a new society; not great,
but fitted by our very faults for greatness, E Pluribus Unum.99

"E Pluribus Unum" recounts the early settlement of America and it reiterates
the book’s central idea of the paradoxical unity of the American people. Steinbeck’s
brief personal interpretation of the first settlers stresses the development of a country
by people who wanted to exclude other religious groups. He tells the story of a
minority that became a majority through restlessness, hard work, and ferocity, yet
that feared and struggled against the inclusion of the “strangeness, weakness, and
poverty” of other minority groups. The eventual emergence of the American out of
the selfishness, bigotry, and bullying that marked the settlement of America came
about, according to Steinbeck, through the natural and inevitable process of change
and adaptability:

What happened is one of the strange quirks of human nature—but perhaps it is
perfectly natural direction that was taken, since no child can long endure his
parents. It seemed to happen by instinct. In spite of all the pressure the old people
could bring to bear, the children of each ethnic group denied their background and
their ancestral language.90

From diverse ethnic and national background, we have merged and blended into a
new American identity except in the cases of American Indians and the imported
Negroes.91 Together as a united people we have pursued a unique goal known as The
American Dream. At the same time, however—and this is Steinbeck’s great concern
in the work, we have repeatedly proved to be “a restless, a dissatisfied, a searching
people” who “seem to live and breathe and function by paradox.”92
“Paradox and Dream” extends the idea of paradox in the American experience to include what Steinbeck feels is the most paradoxical pattern of all: “Our passionate belief in our own myths.”93 Self-reliant but strangely dependent on mechanical gadgets, publicly puritanical but sometimes privately prolligate, the American continually exhibits the gap between illusion and reality evident in a comparison of the American dream and the American way of life. The dream, itself, derives the American as if he is caught by a collective unconscious which stirs him to see his home as a symbol of personal safety and comfort and allows him to accept weapons and violence as an essential part of life. At the same time however the dream embodies all hopes for peace. Steinbeck interprets our folk tales, though rooted in violence, as essentially moral: “I wonder whether this folk wisdom is the story of our capability. Are these stories permanent because we know within ourselves that only the threat of violence makes it possible for us to live together in peace?”94

The next chapters “Government of the People” and “Created Equal” offer a paradox within themselves and between each other. Steinbeck, on the one hand, points to the fear and hatred Americans, have for any form of religious, political, or bureaucratic power. He notes, however, that regardless of the tendency of mediocre and corrupt individuals to control politics, the excellent architecture of our government has insured individual rights and political stability. The individuals who have sought their rights as American and endured the worst that Americans have done to other Americans are the Blacks. Steinbeck’s history of the Black in America focuses on the issue of slavery and after slavery, the tactics whereby constitutional
rights are denied by local Customs, law, and law—enforcement officers. The paradox he sees lies in the practice of Americans, who hate power and oppression, preventing a minority group of Americans from assuming rights guaranteed by the finest governmental structure in the history of man.

We ardently defend “the American Way of life”, but we just as readily seek support from our neighbors and friends to “Go and Fight City Hall”95 We are convinced that “politics is a dirty, tricky, and dishonest pursuit and that all politicians are crooks”—from the candidate for school board to the one for the presidency—but them expect the winners of the elections to rule and operate by divine guidance and without error.96 Over the years we repeatedly have stated all are created equal but then have continued to deny the Negroes this divine inheritance.97 Neither the emancipation of the slaves a hundred years ago nor the recently-passed civil rights laws have prevented white Americans from enslaving black Americans with “the servitudes of debt, of need, of ignorance, and the constant reminders of inferiority”98 White Americans seemingly do not realize, Steinbeck points out, that black Americans want nothing more or less than white Americans want—“peace, comfort, security and love”. But it will take more than laws to remove the deep-seated suspicion and hurt in the Negroes and the fear and the suspicion in the whites: both races must change their attitudes towards one another. Only when we have reached the stage that we no longer can remember “whether the man we just spoke to in the street was Negro or white” will we have over come the trauma left on society by slavery.99
In “Genius Americans” and “The Pursuit of Happiness” Steinbeck focuses on other ominous paradoxes of American life. He observes the obsession with wealth and position which exists in a society that in name is classless, and the fascination that Americans, living in a democratic society, have for rituals, little, and secret organizations. He also points out that the worst manifestation of this cultism in America are the “screwell” groups which interfere with the rights of others: the “Haywire Mother” who keeps certain books from her children, the super patriots who want to preserve the country by using techniques which will destroy it, and the secret organizations which thrive on the fear and hatred of minority groups. Even more ominous for Steinbeck is the complete failure of many Americans to find fulfillment in a society of abundance. The crisis between children and parents, the fear of growing old, the male fascination with women’s breasts, are all symptomatic of the sickness of a society which combines mass production with the obsession that each generation must be better, know more, and have more than the previous one. The end result is the question of a leisure which leads many into destructive trouble, and leaves others with the persistence of a vague desire to “go back to the country and try with puzzled failure to re-create a self-sufficient island against the creeping, groping, assembly-line conformity which troubles and fascinates them at the same time.”

The final chapters in America and Americans examine Americans and the land, the world, and the future. Steinbeck’s discussion of the land contains a wearing to Americans to cease the abuses committed against what once seemed a limitless continent. His view of Americans and the world stresses the importance of American
literature in establishing the image of America, and the struggle of American writers to create literature totally independent of outside influences: "They learned from our people and wrote like themselves, and they created a new thing and a grand thing in the world—an American literature about Americans."\textsuperscript{101}

The myth of equality, once perverted, divides America and disturbs its natural unity. Steinbeck, however, feels that the perversion and potential loss of the myth of self-reliance is even more destructive to the American character. Any danger to the American’s belief in self-reliance threatens the vital spirit of the people. Spiritual maladies, such as what Steinbeck call paedosis, the desire of parents to see their frustrated dreams fulfilled in the life lives of their children, corrupt the American character and insure a lifeless future dominated by feelings of fear and guilt. Advertising groups, calculating the situation exploit the parents’ fears, using the children as a market for food, clothes, and various cosmetics, and further insure a future of alienation and spiritual emptiness. The new leader of the people is the corporation man. He represents all the negative characteristics which define the age in which he lives. His whole being, his work, his family, and his future, is shaped by his fear and admiration of the corporation. His life style, revered by so many factors of American life, is a tribute to the corporate status. The single driving force in his life is to conform to those patterns and ideas which will insure success for the corporation, and to convince others to conform by their simple allegiance to the corporation’s products. The values of freedom and self-reliance are shunned and replaced by one definite goal—to make money for the corporate god.
Steinbeck feels that mechanization in American life is so severe that only pockets of resistance remain. Too often, however, the individual who senses the monotony and spiritual barrenness of an "assembly-line conformity" has only a vague, groaning desire to go back to the land. This feeling has the greatest potential for assuming mythic value, but the first Americans' love for the beauty and abundance of the land, once critical to the American character, has long since been perverted into lust and madness: "it is little wonder that they went land-mad, because there was so much of it. They cut and burned the forests to make room for crops; they abandoned their knowledge of kindness to the land in order to maintain its usefulness. When they had cropped out a piece, they moved on, raping the country like invaders...There has always been more than enough desert in America; the new settlers, like over indulged children, created even more."\textsuperscript{102}

By the time Americans began to realize that the land had its limit, the use and effectiveness of the machines had already set in motion, a destructive rape beyond the capability of the early settlers' wildest rage. At the present moment, a new awareness of the vital need to preserve our remaining resources exists, but whether this sense of the necessity to conserve the land can overcome the greed and destructiveness which still continues is a matter frightfully open to question. Steinbeck feels that Americans are an exuberant people, but they act as careless and harmfully as active children. The only time they seem to have consciously sensed that they have moved beyond moral boundaries was after America dropped the atomic bomb on two Japanese cities. In Steinbeck’s personal reaction to the
aftershock of that terrible and tragic act lies his own feeling of the moral and spiritual
cities in America: “I did not know about the bomb, and certainly I had nothing to do
with its use, but I am horrified and ashamed; and nearly every one I know feels the
same thing. And those who loudly and angrily justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki—
why, they must be the most ashamed of all.”103

In his critical appraisal of other areas of cultural paradoxes, Steinbeck at times
becomes nearly as aphoristic as Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard. Steinbeck points
out, for example, that “in name we are a classless society while in practice the class
structure is subtle, ever-changing.”104 From our forefathers we “learned to distrust
inherited position, property, and money, but we quickly proceeded to admire the
same thing if self-acquired.”105 Moreover, we historically detested the titles, rituals
and orders of the aristocratic society but now emulate these hated symbols in our
lodges and secret societies.106 We continue to insist that our children grow up and
become responsible adults but “when they are approaching adulthood, we insist that
they be children—with the result that there is a warping effect on the whole
American personality.”107

Steinbeck, however, consciously delays his analysis and judgment of
America’s most serious problem until his last chapter in the book, because he knows
that it will be difficult for him to criticize the people he loves. But just as the
traveling Steinbeck earlier could not avoid the harsh realities of the Deep South, just
so the editorializing Steinbeck cannot conclude his important journalistic analysis of
America without discussing the “creeping, evil thing that is invading every cranny of
our political, our economic, our spiritual, and our psychic life." Steinbeck cannot ignore this thing because his personal observations during his tour in 1960 and his study of history have convinced him that this evil, or "subtle and deadly illness," is the single cause for many of our social ills in the mid-1960's:

...racial unrest, the emotional crazy quilt that drives our people in panic to the couches of the psychoanalysts, the fallout, dropout, copout insurgency of our children and young people, the rush to stimulant as well as hypnotic drugs, the rise of narrow, ugly, and vengeful cults of all kinds, the distrust and revolt against all authority, political religious, or military, the awful and universal sense of apprehension and even terror, and this in a time of plenty such as has never been known—I think all these are manifestations of one single cause.109

Looking at America and this evil thing as objectively as possible, Steinbeck begins with his usual admiration of us Americans for our many achievements, especially the gaudy achievement of surviving many complex paradoxes. But then he wonders why we seemingly cannot resolve a paradox so simple as our fear of being alone and our even greater fear of being together. He wonders what has happened to us in recent years what our parents had that now is lost, or at least being lost110

One rather obvious answer, which Steinbeck is convinced of by this time, is the loss of rules—"rules concerning life, limb, and property, rules governing deportment, manners, conduct, and rules defining dishonesty, dishonor, misconduct, and crime." Our forefathers did not always obey all the rules, but they at least believed in the rules and severely punished all violators. Today, America has lost theses "pragmatic brakes" and instead, seems to believe that "it's all right because everybody does it"111
Gallantry and responsibility formerly were our hallmarks, but they have been replaced with self-pity, gold-bricking, bribery, cheating, espionage, violence, murder, and non-involvement—even if some one nearby is being attacked or murdered.\textsuperscript{112} Moreover, we have become so obsessed with our fears and anxieties that we seek relief from psychiatrists, the church, sleeping pills, and pep pills, instead of strength from within ourselves. Consequently, our America is on the verge of both a moral and a nervous collapse.\textsuperscript{113}

In spite of these disheartening facts, however, Steinbeck still has hope and has confidence in America and his fellow Americans:

\begin{quote}
We have not lost our way at all. The roads of the past have come to an end and we have not yet discovered a path to the future. I think we will find one, but its direction may be unthinkable to us now. When it does appear, however, and we move on, the path must have direction, it must have purpose and the journey must be filled with a joy of anticipation, for the boy today, hating the world, creates a hateful world and then tries to destroy it and sometimes himself. We have succeeded in what our fathers prayed for and it is our success that is destroying us.\textsuperscript{114}

In other words, we can find a new way and so can stop our steady movement toward collapse and death, if we will learn from our past and so develop goals and values more durable than those subtle destroyers of nations known as comfort, plenty, and security.\textsuperscript{115}

Steinbeck likewise is convinced that the restless energy which always has been and still is present in Americans is the catalytic force which will enable our
country to alter its present course toward self-destruction. Though this energy often
has found expression in negative, violent forms, it can be diverted into constructive
channels. To what extent we Americans will be successful in this channelling of our
restless energy or how we will react to the new circumstances or the future for which
we will need to make new rules, it is impossible to predict, Steinbeck admits. We
Americans will make many mistakes just as we have in the past, but we also have
been endowed, by history and experience, with all we need to be able to succeed. 116
As he states in the afterword:

We have failed sometimes, taken wrong paths, paused for renewal, filled our bellies
and licked our wounds; but we have never slipped back—never. 117

Thus, Steinbeck concludes this book of editorial essays with a reaffirmation of his
perennial confidence that our America and we Americans will continue to persist
and perserve, even in the mid-1960’s.

Steinbeck’s tremendous concern for, as well as optimistic confidence in,
America and in his fellow Americans is not peculiar to The Winter of Our Discontent
(1961), Travels with Charley (1962) America and Americans (1966)—it is implicit in
each of his works of fiction and nonfiction. What is unique in these three works is the
fact that Steinbeck’s new image of his country and its people is a prophetic one.
Moreover, Steinbeck himself becomes increasingly involved in his prophetic vision
and judgment of America and the Americans during the perplexing, changing 1960’s.

The initial phase of Steinbeck’s prophetic vision, as dramatized in The Winter
of Our Discontent, had shocked its prophet-author enough that he had decided to
immediately tour America in order to find out whether or not Americans really were being corrupted by the new morality of material success at any cost. The second phase of his vision, as described in *Travels with Charley*, not only graphically revealed that America was a complicated, paradoxical, and “troubled place...(with) a people caught in a jam,”118 but also began to involve Steinbeck personally in some of the complex problems facing Americans in the early 1960’s. Unable to detach himself from his country and its rampant social ills in the mid-1960’s, Steinbeck in the third and last phase of his vision, presented in *America and Americans*, fully assumes his prophetic role by boldly judging his fellow Americans for having forsaken their former commitments, values, and rules. As a result they have become a “restless...dissatisfied...searching” people who “seem to live and breathe and function by paradox.”119 But, he also declares, Americans still possess certain intrinsic qualities and perpetual energy which can and, hopefully, will enable them and the country to persevere and prevail.

Steinbeck’s increasing personal involvement in his prophetic vision also is evident in the form, structure, and point-of-view of these last three works. The first is a novel; the second, panoramic travelogue; and the third, a series of editorial essays—but all are written in the first person. Shifting from a fictive narrative to generally non-teleological observations during a tour to teleological analysis, Steinbeck becomes increasingly involved in the central issues and his eventual appraisal and judgment of them. Nevertheless, though shocked and concerned, he always retains and expands his basic hope and confidence in his fellow Americans: in
The Winter of Our Discontent, in Ethan Allen Hawley; in Travels with Charley, in people like the Good Samaritan service station attendant in Oregon and the enlightened Monsieur Ci Git in New Orleans; in America and Americans, in all Americans who will be willing to attempt to channel their restless energy toward a new path and a new set of rules. And it is on his positive note that Steinbeck concludes his prophetic vision of his America and the Americans in the turbulent 1960's.
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4- Ibid., p.185.

5- Steinbeck’s letter to Adlai Stevenson, *Coronet*, 47, March 1960, p.147, under the title “Our rigged morality.”


7- Ibid.

8- Ibid., p. 137.


10- “Have We Gone Soft?”, a symposium, the participants being,


12- *Travels With Charley in Search of America*, p 240
13- *America and Americans*, p.60

14- *In Texas*, at least 20 times, says the author, his dog was “mistaken” for a Negro.


16- *America and Americans* p.66.

17- *Travels With Charley in Search of America*, pp.185-186.

18- *America and Americans*, p.7.


20- Ibid., p.151.

21- *America and Americans*, p.29.

22- Ibid., p.34.


25- *America and Americans*, p.7.

26- Ibid., p.8.


28- E.W. Tedlock, JR and C.V. Wicker, *Steinbeck and His*


30-Ibid.


33-Forward to America and Americans, p.7.


36-New York: Bantam, (Because Viking Press has failed to keep The Wayward Bus in print) 1957; p.93.


39-Ibid., p.2.

40-Ibid.

41-Ibid.

42-Ibid., p.121.

43-Ibid., p.271.

44-Ibid., p.270.

45-Ibid.


48-Peter Lisca, “Steinbeck’s Image of Man and his Decline as writer,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, XI (Spring 1965), 3-10.


50-*Travels With Charley*, p.177.

52- Ibid., pp. 7-8.

53- *America and Americans*, pp. 29-30.


55- *Speeches*, p. 64.


57- Both photographs have been reproduced in *As We Knew Adlai*, pp. 271, 273.


59- *Speeches*, p. 90.

60- Ibid., p. 124.

61- Ibid., pp. 54-55.
62.“If I were Twenty—one,” in Fabulous Yesterday: Cornet’s 25th Anniversary Album, ed. Lewis W. Gellenson (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) P.166; hereafter cited as “If I were Twenty—one.” (originally published December, 1955).

63-Ibid., p.165.


65-“If I Were Twenty—one,” p.165.


67-Speeches, p.97.

68-Call to Greatness, p.108.

69-“If I were Twenty—one,” p.165.

70-Stevenson’s definition of democracy is not quoted but paraphrased by Barry Bingham, “With Adlai in Asia,” in As We Knew Adlai, p.194.

71-“If I were Twenty—one,” p.165.

72-Foreword to Speeches, p.6.

73-Ibid., p.5.
74- *Travels With Charley*, p.76.

75-Adlai Stevenson and John Steinbeck, "Our 'rigged' Morality," in Fabulous Yesterday, p.198. (Originally published March, 1960)

76-Ibid.

77-"Adlai's Amateurs" in *As We Knew Adlai*, p.66.

78-*America and Americans*, p.45.

79-*Call to Greatness*, p.33.

80-"Marching to the Beat of Mankind," in *As We Knew Adlai*, p.183.

81-Foreword to *Speeches* p.6.

82-*The Winter of Our Discontent*, pp.27,182,294.


86-*Travels With Charley*, p.,207.

87-Foreword to *America and Americans*, p.9.

88-Ibid., p.8.


108-Ibid., p.168.

109-Ibid.

110-Ibid., pp.168-169.


112- *America and Americans*, pp.170-172.

113-Ibid., pp.172-175.

114-Ibid., p.177.

115-Ibid.

116-Ibid., pp.177-178.

117-Afterword to *America and Americans*, p.221.

118- *Travels With Charley in Search of America*, p.271.

119- *America and Americans*, pp.32-33.