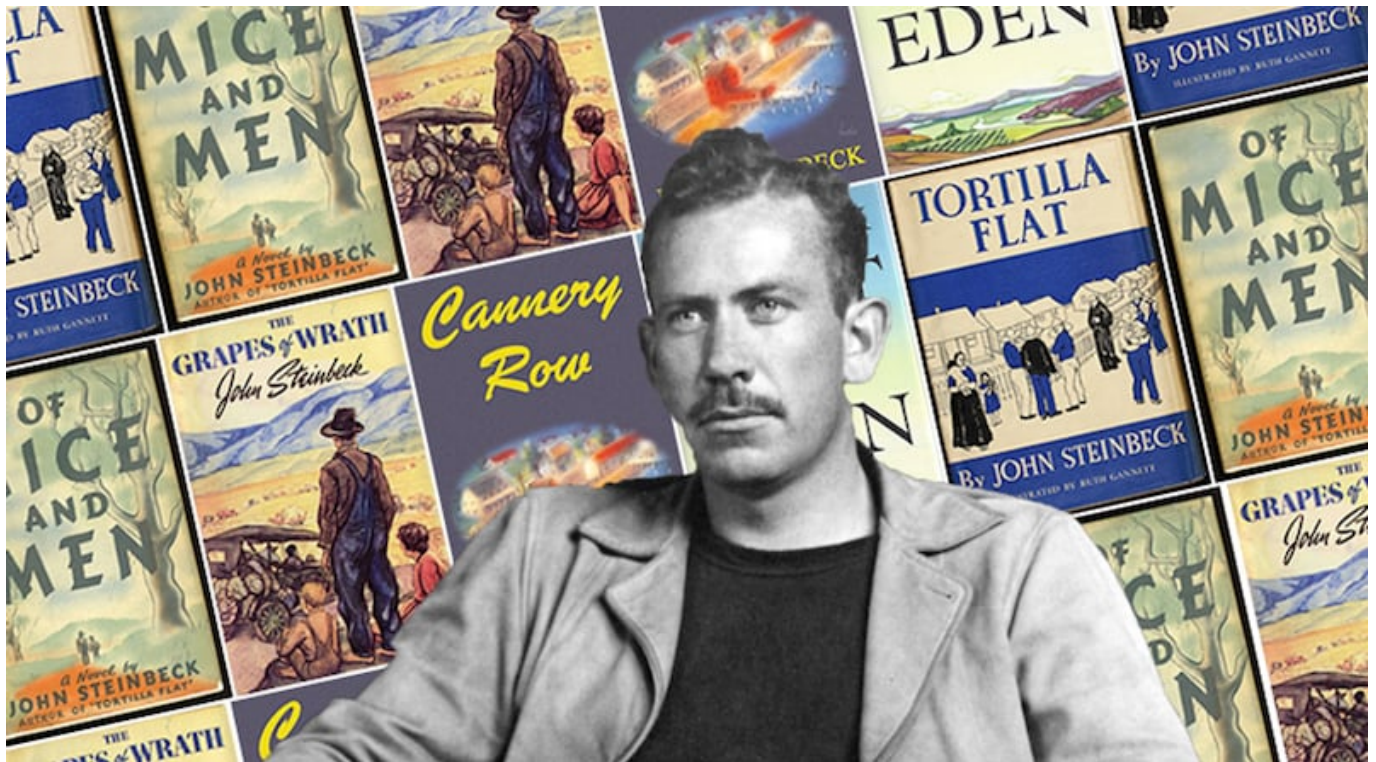


John Steinbeck and the Fall and Rise of Israel's 'Mount Hope'



Daniel Greenfield writes in [FrontPage](#):

In 1966, a year before the war that would fundamentally change the country and the region, John Steinbeck arrived.

"I want to see everything in Israel," he told the press.

Outraged novels of class warfare like 'Grapes of Wrath' had once made the author a favorite of the leftist establishment, but Steinbeck had turned to other topics. He considered his life's work to be 'East of Eden', a retelling of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel in California, which touched on his own dark family history that he had followed all the way back to Israel.

Steinbeck's support for the Vietnam War had infuriated the

literary establishment and even though he had won the Nobel Prize and his acceptance speech became one of the most famous of its kind, he continued to be dismissed as an outdated fossil. And the author, prone to an old school literary machismo, who never much liked parties and crowds, dismissed them.

After facing the establishment's fury over the Vietnam War, Steinbeck was not worried about the leftist reaction to his visit to Israel. And he looked at Israel through the lens of a writer who had chronicled pioneers and messianists, but also a man who had come to see the world caught in a struggle between good and evil, the forces of democracy against those of Communism.

"The Israelis are the toughest and most vital people I have seen in a long time," Steinbeck wrote to the LBJ administration with which he had developed a close relationship. "Their army is superb. They say that Israel's secret weapon is 'No Alternative'. They have no place to go and anyone who will invade them will have to kill them all, men, women and children, and they all go down fighting. Only they won't go down. Right now with the weapons they have and they command, they could lick the whole Arab League single handed."

Steinbeck was a little over a year away from being proven right when the Six Day War would see Israel, outnumbered and outgunned, defeat Egypt, Syria and Jordan, not to mention forces sent by Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. But if the American author's enthusiasm was especially passionate, it might have been because unlike a lot of visitors, his family had left blood here.

"I've started for there several times and never made it," Steinbeck wrote. "I wonder if I have an unconscious reluctance because of what my great-grandfather tried to do there in the 1840s."

One of his stops in Israel was to 'Mount Hope' and the 'Steinbeck farm' that his grandfather had left behind after his brother was murdered by the local Arab Muslims. The Grossteinbeck family (the name was later shortened) had joined a Christian mission in the 1850s that was the first to try and build outside Jaffa. But the idealistic farmstead had not taken into account the fanatical Muslim hatred for Christians and Jews who, under Islamic law, had no rights at all.

The Grossteinbecks and other settlers had faced Arab Muslim harassment but what happened in 1858 had international repercussions and brought American military power to bear in Israel.

90 years before Israel, as a Jewish country, had even been reborn.

In January 1858, five Arab Muslim men came to the farmstead under the pretext of looking for a lost cow, convinced Frederick Grossteinbeck, the brother of John's grandfather, to parley and then fatally wounded him.

Frederick retreated to the farmhouse where he prayed, "Oh ! Father forgive all my sins and help me to bear this dreadful pain" while his wife Mary tried to stop the bleeding from his stomach.

Mary Steinbeck, John's great-aunt, then only 24 years old, was dragged away and raped by each of the Arab Muslim invaders in turn. "He violated me. Before I had time to rise, another one came ; he violated me and bit my cheek. Then a third one violated me. They then went into the house, and I got up and followed them. I went to Frederick ; I could not feel his pulse," she testified.

The Muslim colonists also sexually assaulted Frederick's mother-in-law and robbed the farm.

While the United States had no military presence in Israel

(then ruled by the Ottoman Islamic caliphate) and was unused to projecting much force abroad, its leaders were much less feckless than ours when it came to the honor of Americans.

In an account [that was included](#) in a report submitted by President James Buchanan to the Senate, the Consul to Egypt, stated that he met the Islamic leadership intending, "to make them feel our power, and the influence of our consuls, it is very evident that every effort must be made in the present case, so to act as that such a case shall never occur again," he wrote.

American flags were raised to make a diplomatic point despite the protests of the Ottomans.

The assaults on the Steinbeck family alerted many Americans for the first time to the mistreatment of foreign and domestic Christians in Israel. Bringing justice to the perpetrators came to be seen as a test of American power and the survival of Christians in the region. The Senate report included a description of the massacre of Christians in 1856 in Nablus.

"We had to threaten them with the presence of a squadron to bombard Jaffa," Consul Edwin DeLeon, a Jewish American diplomat who later worked as the Confederacy's representative to Europe, wrote. "The expediency and propriety of detailing a war steamer to that coast, as a visible emblem of our power, to reassure the terrified Christians, to averawe [sic] the fanatic savages, who, like wild beasts, now lie in wait for them, and, finally, to insure the effectual punishment of those five bloodhounds of Jaffa we have in bonds, whose brethren else may rescue or bloodily avenge them on the unprotected heads of the Christians and Jews of Palestine."

Describing his meeting with Ottoman officials, DeLeon rejected all social formalities. "When further asked by the governor whether our countries were not at peace, I promptly responded ' No ; we regard murder of men and the violation of women,

when permitted and screened by governors, as a declaration of war. You have commenced it, not we.'”

When John Steinbeck visited the ‘Steinbeck farm’, he was conversant with the bloody scenes that had taken place in the rooms and they informed his view of the region. And with his literary imagination, he may have been able to see them as he walked around the quarters.

During his World War II special correspondent dispatches, Steinbeck had described the American soldiers as having “no love lost for the Arabs. They are the dirtiest people in the world and among the smelliest. The whole countryside smells of urine, four thousand years of urine.” He mentioned that the soldiers stayed out of cities because of all the “many little religious rules and prejudices that an unsuspecting dogface can run afoul of.”

But what must have really struck Steinbeck is that the precarious outpost outside Jaffa that his ancestors had labored and bled for was now a neighborhood. The ‘Mount Hope’ settlement has since become known as the ‘HaTikvah’ or the ‘Hope’ quarter of Tel Aviv.

During Israel’s War of Independence, Hassan Salamah, a leader of the Army of the Holy Jihad, had attacked the ‘Hope’ community now populated by Jews. The Muslim attackers were so confident of victory that they brought sacks to carry away the loot and torches to burn the rest.

While the mob fell to looting and burning, 16-year-old Ezra Tzapadiya, a Jewish refugee from Beirut who had smuggled himself into the country at only 15, managed to pick off the attackers by copying their battle cry. (Ezra lost an eye in the battle but went on to have a successful [musical career](#).) The Muslim attackers failed to realize that by burning the Jewish homes they had highlighted themselves against the flames and were wiped out by the Israeli defenders.

Disgraced among his fellow Muslim Jihadis, Salamah had to turn to ex-Nazi volunteers to carry out attacks on the Jews. His son, Ali Hassan Salameh, became the architect of the Munich Massacre, and received CIA protection that allowed him to escape Israeli assassins for 7 years until his entire convoy was taken out in Beirut.

20th century Israelis, like 19th century Americans, meant business, and would not allow the murders of their families to go unpunished.

That is no longer the case. 'Mount Hope' or the 'HaTikvah Quarter' became a working class Jewish neighborhood, but has since been overrun by African migrants. Some of these migrants made headlines when [they recently rioted](#) in a dispute over Eritrean politics back home. Even long before the rioters, residents of the 'HaTikvah Quarter' have asked the government to stop the plague of crime, drugs and gang violence that has overtaken their community.

The new conservative Israeli government and its battles over judicial reform arose in part from the difficulty of deporting the [tens of thousands of illegal Africans](#) who have taken over parts of Tel Aviv. The leftist Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly blocked lifesaving measures like amendments to the Infiltration Prevention Law allowing the country to deport the invaders.

Mount Hope, once worthy of its name, has once again become a source of despair, but it is also a reminder of the resilience of history. Steinbeck's grandfather had left behind Jaffa for America. His father raised the family in Salinas, California: a new promised land. Israeli and American settlers had cultivated fields and changed the world around them for the better.

When Herman Melville, the author of *'Moby Dick'*, had visited the Christian settlement, he had dismissed the idea that there

was any possibility of a Jewish return to Israel.

“The idea of making farmers of the Jews is in vain. In the first place Judea is a desert with few exceptions. In the second place, the Jews hate farming. All who cultivate the soil in Palestine are Arabs. The Jews dare not live outside walled towns or villages for fear of the malicious persecution of Arabs and Turks. Besides, the number of Jews in Palestine is comparatively small. And how are the hosts of them scattered in other lands to be brought here? Only by a miracle,” he wrote.

The Jews proved to be excellent farmers and the Jewish villages became settlements, towns and cities guarded by their young men. And Jews came there from around the world.

“You can search the world over and you’ll not find Israel’s equal for a stinking past of heroic proportions. The present is even worse if that is possible- surrounded by enemies dedicated to her destruction, hemmed in between the sea and illiterate compromises of an absent, but quite an innocent, academy of the nations. And the people, the Israelis, the remnants of the trampled, tormented and rejected Jews from 87 nations,” John Steinbeck wrote a year before the war that might have ended Israel, instead helped secure its future and reclaim its territory.

Israel, he summed up, “bears up what I have always felt- that only those people who have nothing to do and no place to go are tired.”

‘Mount Hope’ is not just in Israel, it is where we are too. It is a reminder that no matter how dark the past, we can strive to reclaim the future. Nothing is so hopelessly lost that hope cannot rise from it again as long as we do not despair. Only those who do nothing are truly tired.

There is hope in that truth.