



American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California

By James N. Gregory

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Fifty years ago, John Steinbeck's now classic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, captured the epic story of an Oklahoma farm family driven west to California by dust storms, drought, and economic hardship. It was a story that generations of Americans have also come to know through Dorothea Lange's unforgettable photos of migrant families struggling to make a living in Depression-torn California. Now in James N. Gregory's pathbreaking *American Exodus*, there is at last an historical study that moves beyond the fiction and the photographs to uncover the full meaning of these events.

American Exodus takes us back to the Dust Bowl migration of the 1930s and the war boom influx of the 1940s to explore the experiences of the more than one million Oklahomans, Arkansans, Texans, and Missourians who sought opportunities in California. Gregory reaches into the migrants' lives to reveal not only their economic trials but also their impact on California's culture and society. He traces the development of an "Okie subculture" that over the years has grown into an essential element in California's cultural landscape. The consequences, however, reach far beyond California. The Dust Bowl migration was part of a larger heartland diaspora that has sent millions of Southerners and rural Midwesterners to the nation's northern and western industrial perimeter. *American Exodus* is the first book to examine the cultural implications of that massive 20th-century population shift. In this rich account of the experiences and impact of these migrant heartlanders, Gregory fills an important gap in recent American social history.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

A thorough study of the migration of Oklahomans, Arkansans, Texans, and Missourians to California in the years of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. Gregory dispels the popular Okie image built from *The Grapes of Wrath*, placing this unique exodus in economic perspective. He is particularly successful in tracing Okie impact on the San Joaquin Valley, where the Okie twang and culture have taken root to become the Californian. Gregory's prose is conversational, although his narrative lacks the compelling anecdotes that enrich history for the lay reader. This is, nevertheless, an important and necessary work on this period.

Recommended.

- Timothy L. Zindel, *Hastings Coll. of the Law, San Francisco*

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Review

"An important and readable book about one of the significant episodes of the Great Depression. The story is told from multiple points of view and illustrated with a number of striking pictures--some of them not often seen. This book would be useful in a number of different kinds of courses."--William H. Goetzmann, The Univ. of Texas

"...a profoundly impressive book....American Exodus is a major contribution to our understanding of regional, cultural, and political history in the United States. It deserves the widest possible readership."--Bill C. Malone, *The Journal of Southern History* _

"[A] stunning book....The impressive range of source material, from government documents to graffiti to country music to cliometrics is fashioned and reshaped to form a vivid yet subtle portrait of generation of Americans on the move....A masterpiece of reflection, imagination and research, a book that advances our historical understanding, with a narrative skillfully and vividly told. In sum, a testimony to what the historical profession and history are presumed to be about."--OAH Ray Allen Billington Prize Committee

"We have had many other essays and books on the Okie migrants who entered California in the 1930s, but no one has done so comprehensive and masterful a job of telling their history as James Gregory. He has uncovered a vast literature on these people, including their own newspapers and poetry, and he has derived from it a convincing portrait of both their strengths and weaknesses. Best of all, he succeeds in giving them their due. They are, as he reveals, a major 20th-century American subculture, with roots in the Old Southwest and a life that has endured beyond the thirties down to our own time. The Okies must be reckoned with, and this book must be read to understand [them]."--Donald E. Worster, University of Kansas

"American Exodus takes us beyond the Dorothea Lange photographs and the Hollywood stereotypes to the heart of that complex story of a plain folk culture transplanted across a continent in the midst of the great depression. In John Steinbeck, the Okie's found their novelist; in Jim Gregory they have found their historian."--Dan T. Carter, Emory University

"Clearly the best book that has been written about the Okies."--Roger Daniels, University of Cincinnati

"[A] remarkable book....Gregory has a fine ear for music and a fine eye for quotation, and combines these with vigorous social analysis. American Exodus is a fine achievement."--Otis L. Graham, Jr., University of

North Carolina, Chapel Hill

"It will fit in well with my 20th-century California class."--Kathy Olmsted, University of California, Davis

About the Author

James N. Gregory is Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sheryl Hicks:

Book is to be different for every single grade. Book for children until finally adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important usually. The book American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California has been making you to know about other information and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The e-book American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California is not only giving you a lot more new information but also being your friend when you feel bored. You can spend your current spend time to read your reserve. Try to make relationship together with the book American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California. You never sense lose out for everything if you read some books.

Dennis Taylor:

The particular book American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California will bring you to definitely the new experience of reading the book. The author style to elucidate the idea is very unique. Should you try to find new book to read, this book very suited to you. The book American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California is much recommended to you to see. You can also get the e-book from your official web site, so you can easier to read the book.

Fran Short:

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Phillip Elliott:

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