

Of Mice and Men Disaster

General George Patton once said, "Accept the challenges so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory". Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks could definitely benefit from this quote, considering their situations. In the novella, *Of Mice and Men*, written by John Steinbeck, Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks all experience discrimination in different ways. Through these characters Steinbeck illustrates how people with disabilities, different genders, and unfavorable circumstances in harsh, abusive manners were discriminated against. To further express the theme of discrimination, Steinbeck puts these characters in conflicts that emphasize their disabilities or situations. In the experiences of Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks, Steinbeck shows readers how displeased he was with how people treated one another and the need for change.

Steinbeck uses the character Lennie, to show discrimination against mental disabilities. An example of Lennie being discriminated against can be seen when George states, "Course, Lennie's a nuisance most of the time"(Steinbeck 41). Here George expresses his frustration with Lennie's mental disabilities and his obligation to care for him to Candy. Even though Lennie cannot help his illness, George calls him names and does not hide his feelings of frustration. This is discrimination against Lennie because George puts him down about his disabilities. It is not Lennie's fault he has these disabilities and he cannot control the way his brain works. This is discrimination because Lennie has a mental incapacity and George makes fun of him and doesn't understand that Lennie is his only friend and shouldn't put him down. However there are other examples that prove that Steinbeck uses Lennie to

show the theme of discrimination. For instance, "O.K.-O.K. I'll tell ya' again. I ain't got nothing to do. Might jus' as well spen' all my time tellin' you things and then you forget em', and I tell you again" (Steinbeck 4). Again, George expresses his anger towards Lennie. Lennie has issues with short term memory and George gets frustrated with having to remind Lennie all the time of what

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just happened. Lennie tries his best to avoid situations where his disabilities will be obvious, but he can not help it or control it all of the time. The fact that George, his best friend, ends up calling him names because of a disability he cannot control, this is mean and offensive to Lennie. This is obviously discrimination. Lennie is symbolic of the theme of discrimination against mental disabilities.

Curley's wife is a great example of gender inequality in this novella. It can be shown when George states, "Jesus, what a tramp, he said"(Steinbeck 32). This passage shows how disrespectful the men are to Curley's wife. They do not even know her well, and yet they are already judging her. They call her a "tramp" because she is a married woman who tries to speak to men, other than her husband. This is discrimination because they do not treat her like they would treat the other men, they don't realize she is just lonely. However, there is more evidence which proves that Curley's wife is discriminated against. After seeing Lennie stare at Curley's wife, George says, "Don't you even take a look at that bitch. I don't care what she says and what she does. I seen em' poison before, but I ain't never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her. You leave her be" (Steinbeck32). In this quote, George expresses his anger to Lennie about Curley's wife. George does not want Lennie to get involved in any way with Curley's wife. He thinks badly of her just because she is a married woman who talks to other men. George bases his first impression of Curley's wife on his past experiences with other women, proving he

thinks all women are the same. I think George is just judging a book by its cover, there is more behind Curley's wife than he sees. George discriminates Curley's wife because she's a woman, and that's probably how he sees all women. She should have more social restrictions put on her just because she is a woman and married, which is not fair. Through the character, Curley's Wife, Steinbeck shows how difficult it must have been to be a woman during these times.

Steinbeck uses the character Crooks, to show discrimination against race. Racism against Crooks can be seen when Curley's wife states, "Well, you keep your place then, nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny"(Steinbeck 81). Curley's wife reminds Crooks what she is

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capable of doing to him if he is disrespectful of her social position. She knows she has an advantage because she is white and he is black and so even if she lies, everyone will believe her. She also reminds him that black people who do not cooperate with a white person, will get lynched. Although this is not the only example, Crooks is discriminated for his race many more times. For instance, "Jesus, how that nigger can pitch shoes"(Steinbeck 44). Carlson calls Crooks a racial slur, which refers to his race in a disrespectful way. Carlson sees Crooks as a lower class person so that is why he calls him a "nigger". This is discrimination because color shouldn't matter and they continue to treat Crooks so badly. Crooks is a good example of racial discrimination.

To make it easier to understand the theme of discrimination, Steinbeck includes Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks as characters who find themselves in situations that express their disabilities or social inequalities. Overall, Lennie, Curley's wife and Crooks all experience discrimination in different ways, such as racism, gender inequality and mental disabilities. Each character is uniquely put together and

have disabilities that express to the readers the discrimination that the characters had to go through and not to judge a person, actually get to know them. All people can benefit from reading *Of Mice and Men* because it teaches people to treat everyone equally and not to judge a book by its cover.

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Work Cited

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. Penguin Books, New York: 1993.