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Humanities - 3/4

8 April 2014

**Discrimination**

Desmond Tutu once said, "Racism, xenophobia and unfair discrimination have spawned slavery, when human beings have bought and sold and owned and branded fellow human beings as if they were so many beasts of burden." This quote directly relates to the themes in *Of Mice and Men* shown through the characters of Curley’s wife, Crooks and Lennie. These three characters are thought of as outsiders because of their differences from the other young, white men on the ranch. In the novella *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, two friends by the names of George and Lennie stumble upon a farm where they meet many interesting people, including Curley’s wife and Crooks, and ultimately get into trouble that puts their friendship to the test. To convey the theme of discrimination, Steinbeck includes the characters of Curley’s wife, Crooks and Lennie to show his frustration with society in the way they discriminate against one another.

Curley’s wife represents gender discrimination because of the unfair treatment that she receives. An example of the discrimination against women is clear when Carlson says, "Why'n't you tell her to stay the hell home where she belongs?" (Steinbeck 62). Women are seen as objects to the men. They expect women to remain at home and do household chores all day. Steinbeck includes Curley's wife to show readers that women's rights were not respected at the time. However, this is not the only example of how Curley's wife is used to show gender discrimination. For instance, George says, "’You give me a good whore house every time,’ he said. ‘A guy can go in an' get drunk and get everything outta his system all at once, an' no messes. And he knows how much it's gunna set him back. These here jail baits is just set on the trigger of the hoosegrow’"(Steinbeck 56). The men on the ranch have no interest in marrying a woman because they see wives as a "responsibility". Instead, the men on the ranch begin to visit whore houses to get the physical attention they want, without having to deal with any emotional attachment. Meanwhile, women are expected to stay at home and dwell in isolation. This clearly represents the portrayal of women as possessions or objects. Curley's wife is representative of gender discrimination through all the unfair treatment she receives and because the men treat her as an object as opposed to a person. However, Curley’s wife is not the only person who is discriminated against on the ranch.

Despite all of the hard work Crooks does on the ranch, he is devalued and discriminated against because of his skin color. An example of racism in the novella is when Candy says, “They let the nigger come in that night. Little skinner name of Smitty took after the nigger. Done pretty good, too. The guys wouldn’t let him use his feet, so the nigger got him. If he coulda used his feet, Smitty says he woulda killed the nigger” (Steinbeck 20). In this passage, it is clear that the men only invite Crooks to join them so that they can use him for their own entertainment. This passage illustrates that the white men on the ranch believe that they are superior to people of any other race, and that they have the right to treat people of other races poorly. Their unjust mindsets lead them to continuously take advantage of Crooks, especially in this situation. Steinbeck includes Crooks to show readers the severity of racism at the time, but this is not the only example of how Crooks is used to show racism. For instance, Crooks says, "Well, I got a right to have a light. You go on get outta my room. I ain't wanted in the bunk house and you ain't wanted in my room" (Steinbeck 68). In this quote, Crooks is telling Lennie to leave his room even though he is desperate for companionship because Crooks is black, the men do not allow him in their sleeping quarters and rarely speak to him. Crooks represents racism because the men treat him like he is a lesser human being who is not as good as them. But there is one more form of discrimination that is prominent on the ranch.

Even though Lennie is kind and selfless, he is treated poorly by society and is therefore representative of discrimination against people with mental illnesses. It is clear that Lennie represents discrimination against people with mental illnesses when Curley's wife says, "'You're nuts,' she said. 'But you're a kinda nice fella. Jus' like a big baby" (Steinbeck 90). In this passage, Curley's wife is comparing Lennie to a child because people did not recognize mental illnesses as medical conditions and instead discriminated against people with mental illnesses as stupid. Steinbeck includes Lennie in the novella to represent discrimination against people with mental illnesses. However, this is not the only example of how Lennie represents the discrimination against people with mental disabilities. For instance, Crooks says, "'Jus' nuts,' said Crooks. 'I don't blame the guy you travel with for keepin' you outa sight" (Steinbeck 69). In this quote, Crooks is indirectly telling Lennie that he is dumb and a constant obstacle to George. Lennie does not receive the respect he deserves because people dismiss his mental illness as stupidity and therefore deem it acceptable to treat him poorly, regardless of his consistent kindness and selflessness. Lennie represents discrimination against people with mental illnesses because he is labeled “stupid” and disrespected because of it.

To show his frustration with society and the way people discriminate against one another, Steinbeck includes the characters of Curley’s wife, Crooks and Lennie. It is evident the three characters represent different types of discrimination because of the unfair treatment they receive. Curley’s wife represents gender discrimination because she is thought of as an object. Crooks represents racism because the men on the ranch treat him as a lesser man. Lennie represents discrimination against people with mental disabilities because he is called names and the men treat him like a child. All people can benefit from reading *Of Mice and Men* to learn about the different types of discrimination so that they can learn to identify discrimination and help put an end to it.

**Work Cited**

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