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Humanities- ½

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**True Faces of the Past**

Alice Walker once said, “No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.” This quote is important because it relates to the character of Lennie in *Of Mice and Men. Of Mice and Men,* by John Steinbeck, is a novella about how two men, George and Lennie, want to achieve the American dream of working hard and earning enough money to buy their own land. They work on a ranch to earn the money, but soon realize that the dream is hard to attain because people are often discriminated against because of mental disabilities, like Lennie, or by discrimination of race and gender like Crooks and Curley’s wife. To illustrate the theme of discrimination, Steinbeck includes the characters of Curley’s wife, Crooks and Lennie in his novella. Through these three characters, Steinbeck shows his displeasure with the way people treat each other.

Because she is seen as property, Curley’s wife is representative of gender inequality. An example of the theme can be seen when George says, “Jesus, what a tramp,” he said, “So that’s what Curley picks for a wife” (Steinbeck 32). When Curley’s wife is called a “tramp” it means that that the men believe she is too flirtatious because she is married. Through this judgment, Steinbeck shows that women had few rights during this time and little to no respect. Nevertheless, there are other examples of gender inequality that Steinbeck makes clear through Curley’s wife. For instance Crooks says, “Maybe you better go along to your own house now. We don’t want no trouble” (Steinbeck 77). When Crooks implies that Curley’s wife is “trouble” it means she will get everyone in trouble if she is caught talking with the boys by Curley. Steinbeck shows that when men think of women as property, other men simply talking to her can cause conflict. Curley’s wife is symbolic of gender inequality because she is seen as property.

Because of his color, the people on the ranch see Crooks as a minority and they discriminate against him because of his race. An example of racism is obvious when Curley’s wife says, “Listen Nigger, she said. You know what I can do to you if you open your trap” (Steinbeck 80). In this passage, it is obvious that Crooks is not respected and is treated poorly. Steinbeck shows his readers that even though slavery has ended, African Americans are still not equal to white people. Curley’s wife is saying that she can get Crooks fired or killed and no one on the ranch would care since Curley is African American. However, there are still more examples of racism. For example, “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” (Steinbeck 20). This quote proves that Crooks is not only used for manual labor, but he is also used as entertainment for the other men on the ranch. Through Crooks, Steinbeck proves that discrimination still exists and African Americans were not treated fairly. Steinbeck proves that Crooks experiences racism because he is isolated from the other men because of his race and he is also treated unfairly by his race.

 Lennie is a perfect example of the theme of discrimination against mental disabilities. An example of this theme is proven by George when he says, “Blubbern’ like a baby! Jesus Christ! A big guy like you” (Steinbeck 9). In this passage, Lennie is seen as a baby by George, because he is crying over his dead mouse. Through Lennie, Steinbeck proves that people with mental disabilities were subjected to bullying. This is obvious discrimination. Furthermore, Steinbeck supports this topic with more examples of Lennie’s disability. For instance, George says, “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). In this quote, George is forced to constantly remind Lennie of what has happened because Lennie has problems with his memory. Steinbeck proves that people with mental disabilities are sometimes punished verbally and physically by others, like George, who lose patience and get frustrated because of his forgetfulness. Because he cannot help having a disability, Lennie is a perfect example of this theme.

Steinbeck’s displeasure with discrimination against gender, race and mental disabilities is illustrated through the theme of discrimination by illustrating it through the characters of Curley’s wife, Crooks and Lennie in his novella. Steinbeck uses the three characters to make his readers think about the themes of gender inequality, racial discrimination, and mental disabilities. People today would benefit from reading Steinbeck’s novella because he explains how cruel and unforgiving people in the United States were during this time. People today try to hide the flaws of the past, but through these characters, they can learn about discrimination so it will never again be a problem society has to hide.

**Work Cited**

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