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Humanities-3/4

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**Ain’t I Got a Right?**

“‘Wha’s the matter with me?’ she cried. ‘Ain’t I got a right to talk to nobody? Whatta they think I am anyways?’” (Steinbeck 87). In this quote from Curley’s wife, she is questioning why people discriminate against her because of her gender. In John Steinbeck’s novella, Of Mice and Men, he describes life on a ranch in California during the Great Depression, and he shows the different ways people are discriminated against, whether it be age, race, or intellect. In order to show discrimination as the theme, Steinbeck includes the characters of Candy, Crooks and Lennie in the novella. With these characters, Steinbeck demonstrates pervasive discrimination during the 1930s.

Candy is representative of discrimination against age because no one respects his wants and needs. A quote that proves this is, “At last Carlson said, ‘If you want me to, I’ll put the old devil out of his misery right now and get it over with. Ain’t nothing left for him. Can’t eat, can’t see, can’t even walk without hurtin’” (Steinbeck 47). Carlson says this when the men are all talking about potentially euthanizing Candy’s dog. Even though Candy keeps protesting Carlson’s offer to kill the dog, the men do not listen to him because they consider his opinion as an elder worthless. It shows how he is discriminated against because of his age. The men discriminate against Candy in other ways as well. Another example can be seen in the quote, “Slim turned to Candy. ‘You stay here with her then, Candy. The rest of us better get goin’” (Steinbeck 98). This quote shows that they do not think Candy is good enough to help in the search for Lennie. They view him as worthless, and they think he will just hold them back. Instead of bringing him on their manhunt, they leave him with the dead body of another

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character who is also disrespected, undervalued and discriminated against. Clearly Candy is representative of Steinbeck’s focus on discrimination against the elderly. Candy is not the only person who is discriminated against, though.

Crooks is discriminated against because of his race.  A quote that supports this idea is, “‘You go on get outta my room.  I ain’t wanted in the bunkhouse, and you ain’t wanted in my room.’  ‘Why ain’t you wanted?’ Lennie asked.  ‘Cause I’m black’” (Steinbeck 68).  This passage shows that Crooks is not allowed to have the same basic privileges that the other ranchers have like being able to go in the bunkhouse.  He does not want others venturing into his own room because he is tired of being discriminated against and he wants to be treated equally. Having his own space where he can ensure his privacy is the one strand of pride he can hold onto. The ranchers discriminate against Crooks in other ways as well.  Another example can be seen in the quote, “This is just a nigger talkin’, an’ a busted-black nigger.  So it don’t mean nothing, see?” (Steinbeck 71). In this quote Crooks is telling Lennie that the other ranchers don’t listen to Crooks because of his race.  This quote proves that nobody listens to Crooks simply because he is black. Racial discrimination renders him unimportant. Because of this prejudice what he says is viewed that way too.  Since none of the ranchers see Crooks as important for being black, he is discriminated against for his race. However, there is yet another character who is discriminated against as well.

 Lennie is discriminated against for his mental disabilities. A quote that supports this is, “You never had none, you crazy bastard. I got both of ‘em here. Think I’d let you carry your own work card?” (Steinbeck 5). This quote shows that George does not think Lennie is smart enough to take responsibility for his own things. George thinks Lennie is incapable of even the

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smallest tasks because of Lennie’s disabilities. However, this is not the only time that Lennie gets discriminated against. Discrimination is seen in the quote, “If he finds out what a crazy bastard you are, we won’t get no job, but if he sees ya work before he hears ya talk, we’re set” (Steinbeck 6). George does not want Lennie to talk to the boss because he fears they will not get the job. He knows that the boss will think Lennie is too incompetent to be hired, even though he has no control over his mental disabilities and has a kind loyal heart. This represents discrimination because the boss would overlook the good things about Lennie and just focus on his stupidity. Lennie is greatly discriminated against because of his mental disabilities.

Steinbeck shows the discrimination that went on during The Great Depression through Candy, Crooks and Lennie. Whether he is portraying Lennie being put down because of his disabilities, Candy not being respected for his age, or Crooks being discriminated against for his race, they are all undeniably victims of other peoples harmful acts of prejudice. People can learn a great lesson about how to treat others from the events that occur within this novella. They can realize that everyone can be different in some way and still be equal!

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**Work Cited**

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