

# Minorities in society essay sample



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John Adams, the second president of the United States once said, “ That the desires of the majority of the people are often for injustice and inhumanity against the minority, is demonstrated by every page of the history of the whole world” (Adams <http://thinkexist.com>). This quote was true back in the eighteenth century when Adams said it, and it remains true now. A minority is a group differing, especially in race, religion, or ethnic background, from the majority of a population. Discrimination against minorities has been a problem in our society for centuries and has only gotten worse with time. Minorities are mistreated and looked down upon in society, as evidenced in Ken Kesey’s book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Discrimination towards different minority races is a huge predicament in our world today. Although it has somewhat improved in the last century, it still remains a problem. One of the minority races that Kesey focused on in the novel was Native Americans. During the scene where Chief explains his childhood, he states, But I remembered one thing: it wasn’t me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all...And even as far back as grade school I can remember people saying that they didn’t think I was listening, so they quit listening to the things I was saying (Kesey 210). The Chief is saying that people never even gave him a chance. They just assumed that since he was different, meaning Native American, that he was dumb. A big dilemma that Americans have is they are quick to judge and make assumptions about people before they even know the first thing about them. Since as early as the 1800’s, Native Americans have been victimized by being forced out of their homes to move west.

Nobody would listen to them and their opinions were always brushed aside. For centuries now, Native Americans have been ignored in our society and have been treated like nobodies, which is why Kesey included them in his novel: to show society that they do exist and to show that they can be a somebody if they are given the chance. Another example of discrimination towards a racial minority exemplified in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* would be in the scene that Nurse Ratched explains how she chose her orderlies. She experimented with many different African American males to fill the role until she found the right ones with an enormous amount of hatred towards white males; her reasoning being to ensure that they would not betray her and side with the patients. The first orderly she chose was from Georgia, where he watched his father suffer and bleed as a slave.

This tormenting sight changed his view and attitude towards whites forever: His eyelids hang loose and thin from his brow...he lifts them up just a bit whenever a new white man comes on the ward, peeks out from under them and studies the man up and down and nods just once like he's oh yes made positive certain of something he was already sure of. He wanted to carry a sock of birdshot when he first came on the job, to work the patients into shape... (Kesey 30). The orderly feels this way towards whites because he realized that the way they treated African Americans was unjust and wrong. Even though this is minor scene in the novel, it helps exemplify Kesey's theme of the mistreatment of minorities by explicating the cruel treatment towards African Americans.

Kesey also portrays women as a minority in his novel, especially with Nurse Ratched. When Chief first describes Nurse Ratched, he talks about all her

unisex facial features in a positive way, but as soon as he describes her features that make her a woman, his attitude changes to negative: Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like fresh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink nostrils—everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it (Kesey 6). These lines explicate how the nurse realizes that men have more power than woman which is why she tries to cover up her womanly features, such as her breasts. In the 1900s, women began to gain more rights and equality; however, they are still treated as inferior to men and still considered a minority in society.

The last minority that Kesey includes in his novel is people with a mental disability. Most of the book takes place inside the mental institution and many of the patients have not been in the “real world” for years. When McMurphy takes the men out for a fishing trip, they stop to fill up with gas along the way and the service-station man is shocked when they pull up. The service-station man came bouncing out, grinning and wiping his hands on the oil rag. Then he stopped grinning and went past the doctor to see just what was in these cars. He backed off wiping his hands on the oil rag, frowning...’ Those uniforms, they’re from the hospital back up the road, aren’t they? You guys are from that asylum’ (Kesey 235) As soon as the service-station man realized that the cars were full of patients from the mental institution, he did not want to service them anymore.

He talks about them as if they are bad people who have done something wrong. The patients on the ward are mentally disabled; they do not have a disease and most of them have done nothing wrong. Mentally disabled people are a minority in society and are seen as different from everyone, where in reality, they are just the same as everybody else. I believe that Kesey includes this theme in his book to bring to our attention to the mistreatment of minorities. Kesey wants us to read his novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and think about how this applies to our life and society today. He didn't want us to just look at the unjust treatment of the specific minorities he mentioned in the novel; he wanted us to look at minorities as a whole in society. Kesey hoped that his readers would change their treatment towards minorities after reading this novel so that everyone would be seen as equals. I think that this is a great theme for a novel. Not only was the mistreatment of minorities a problem in the 1960s, when the novel was written, but it remains one today.

Since the very beginning, there have always been minorities in our society and there will always be a minority or someone who fits outside the margins. There is no way to avoid minorities, so the only thing we can do is accept them in our life and treat them with fairness. Because we have been brought up in a world where mistreating minorities happens every day, some people might not realize when they are actually doing it and the harm they are causing. I think Kesey made an excellent choice for a theme in his novel because it brings to our attention that minorities do exist and that we should try to treat them the same as anybody else. If I were a sociological critique, I

would look at the political and economic issues in society in the 1950s and how they affected Kesey.

During this time, The African American Civil Rights Movement was beginning, which could be why Kesey included on the treatment of the minority race. Kesey may have chosen the orderlies in the novel to be African American males for a few reasons. First, the orderlies' roles in the book are minor characters, but at the same time, they also have some control over the patients in the ward. This is similar to what Donald Barthelme says in "Margins" when Edward says to Carl, "' You could be the first man of your race to be Vice-President'" (Barthelme 146). This is degrading because it is saying that no matter how hard you try, you can never be on top since you are African American-the minority. A sociological critique would also look into why Kesey chose a woman to play the character with the most control in the book. During the early to mid-1900s, women were beginning to earn more rights and freedom. If I were a sociological critique, I would say that Kesey dislikes the fact that women are gaining more rights in society; therefore, he created Nurse Ratched's character to be a negative and evil character that doesn't know how to maintain order and control; therefore, should not be in charge.

The relevance of this theme in both the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and in the world today is very significant. Kesey portrays this theme in multiple ways throughout his novel. Not only does Kesey represent different minority racial and gender groups such as African Americans, Indians and women, but he also shows how minorities can be anyone who fits outside the margins, such as those with mental disabilities. I think this theme is relevant

in society today because everyone is quick to judge others in our society and stereotypes are a growing problem today. It is human nature to judge and analyze others; however, the problem with that is that most of the time people's assumptions are negative and untrue. Just because someone is of a different race or gender doesn't mean they should be treated differently. Those who are mentally disabled or appear to be the least bit different are always stereotyped as "weird" or "unusual." Everyone is different and there are not any rules as to what makes someone "normal." Nobody is "normal" because everyone has unique characteristics that make us all different from each other. America is referred to as a melting pot because of its great diversity. People migrated here from all over for freedom. Just because someone belongs to a minority group does not mean that they should be treated unfairly; everyone is equal.

Minorities are inevitable in life. They will always exist; however, they do not have to be treated unfairly. Discrimination towards minorities is cruel and should be punished. Ken Kesey exemplifies how different minorities were discriminated against in society throughout his novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Those that read his novel might now have a different outlook on minorities and will hopefully try to treat everyone, minorities and all, with equality.

#### Works Cited

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