

Hardships of 19th century

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The early 1900's and the era of the Great Depression were times of great changes and hardships. There were wars, the relocation of many people just to find work, and huge gaps and problems between social groups such as African Americans and Caucasians and the poor and rich. In John Steinbeck's novel, *Of Mice and Men*, an abundance of problems the characters face reflects real life situations. The story follows two men, Lennie and George, as they deal with the hardships presented to them. The many problems that they endure and see is what mostly occurred during the early 1900's. For example, Crooks, an African American stable hand, is being discriminated against because of his race; Candy is constantly worried about losing his job since he knows he would not find another job because he is handicapped and old. Thus the problems that the characters confront, like discrimination and unemployment, are greatly influenced by the real-life situations of migrant workers and the different ways certain social groups were treated during the Great Depression. The Great Depression was a major event that caused a significant amount of distress on countless of people. The stock market crashed leaving many people unemployed, famished, and homeless. There was practically no money around but people still managed to gain debts they could not pay off at the time. It was a time in which "business was weak and many people were out of work" (Pillai). People struggled to keep themselves, their families, and their hopes alive. The setting of *Of Mice and Men* is the 1930's in the Salinas Valley of California. It mostly takes place on a ranch filled with men that are there for almost the same reason; to find a job and to find a way to support themselves. Numerous of people had the same goal as many of the ranch workers. In the 1930's African American men had

already gained the right to vote but were still not treated as equals to whites. They were cruelly and unfairly mistreated. Crooks, an African American stable buck, is judged based on his skin color. He lives in a little shack apart from the other men in the bunkhouse. People living on the ranch rarely enters his room. When Lennie approaches Crooks' room, Crooks responds " You got no right to come in my room. This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me" (Steinbeck 68). Crooks is resentful that he must live away from the others, yet he is confrontational to the men on the ranch when they invade his space. Crooks is excluded from mostly everything because of his race, just like every African American in the 1900s. African Americans were not allowed to interact casually with Caucasians. Since Crooks is the only African American on the ranch, he is not allowed to play cards or communicate casually with the other ranch members unless they initiate the interaction. In addition to African Americans being viewed in a negative manner, women were also viewed in a negative manner. Society had established the ideology that women, like Curley's wife, were only seen as possessions of their husbands and not as a possession of their own self. " These women were truly on the margins, practically invisible" (Ware). Women did not have as much significance as men, they were treated like objects not humans. People did not focus on them or care about what they have to say. An example from the novel is Curley's wife, she is not given an identity. She is only referred to as " Curley's wife" making it seem like she is only Curley's property. Most of the time in the novel, Curley is searching for his wife demanding the men on the ranch if they have seen her (Steinbeck 53). Curley does not mention her name, he just asks if anyone has seen his

wife or a girl (Steinbeck 37). Not providing Curley's wife with a name, lessens her significance as a woman and a human being and results in making Curley's wife seem like an object belonging to Curley. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck mirrors the circumstances of a laborer in the early 1900s by describing the frustrations of migrant workers' lives and their attempts to locate a place of their own. Due to the stock market crash of 1929, in which prices of farm crops decreased because of a great decline, farmers were forced to produce more goods in order to make money (Fanslow). Farmers had to increase their mechanization and the cultivation of more land, but this forced the farmers to spend more money and gain a debt they could not pay off (Fanslow). Finding employment "prompted a migration of small farmers and laborers from Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas, to California" (Chavez). Going on the road caused these farm workers to carry their belongings and leave their homes filled with hope to find work along the way. George and Lennie, as well as other characters such as Candy and Crooks, in Steinbeck's novel attempt to work hard enough to earn their way into living off the land and have everything they want without having to struggle to find work again (Steinbeck 14). Lennie's and George's goal is big since everyone during that time was struggling, even the rich; it will be extremely tough for them to achieve their goal. Life during the 1900's was very tough. Discrimination and unemployment were very common everywhere and it affected everyone. Particular social groups like African Americans and women were still viewed in a negative way because of their race, gender roles, and rights. John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* reflects the hardships many people faced at the time. The problems that the characters confront, like discrimination and

unemployment, are greatly influenced by the real-life situations of migrant workers and the different ways certain social groups were treated during the Great Depression.