

Social barriers in of mice and men



In society, social barriers place limits on people and greatly influence them, especially on those who are affected by various kinds of discrimination, such as racism and sexism. *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, explores the social barriers of the 1930s placed upon the people of the time. In chapter four of *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck exemplifies how social barriers prevent the characters from achieving authentic relationships. When these barriers are eliminated, friendships and dreams can be realized; however, fear and misunderstanding prevent this from happening.

Steinbeck demonstrates how social barriers impact communication between people who are very different. Lennie, a large, mentally challenged man, wishes to check on his puppy, which is in the cabin of Crooks, a racially challenged African American: “‘ You got no right to come into my room. This here’s my room. Nobody’s got any right in here but me. ’ ... ‘ Why ain’t you wanted? ’ Lennie asked. ‘ Cause I’m black. They play cards in there, but I can’t play because I’m black’” (68). Crooks responds to Lennie approaching his cabin with a belligerent remark and expresses his wish to remain the sole one in his cabin.

As Crooks and Lennie converse, Crooks sees that Lennie is different from the others on the ranch – that he is retarded – but also the fact that he does not judge people. Crooks expresses how he feels about Lennie: “ Crooks scowled, but Lennie’s disarming smile defeated him. ‘ Come on in and set a while,’ Crooks said. ‘ Long as you won’t get out and leave me alone, you might as well set down. ’ His tone was a little more friendly” (69). After realizing that Lennie was a person of sincerity and candor, Crooks decided to

allow Lennie in, the first time he had let anyone in since the boss and Slim had been in Crooks' cabin.

Crooks also felt like he had someone to talk to, the first time in a long while that he had been able to do so. Lennie made Crooks feel like he was more included with the group of people on the ranch, and he temporarily broke Crooks' racism barrier, just as Crooks broke Lennie's disability barrier. At first, social barriers between Lennie and Crooks disheartened and prevented them from ever becoming friends, but as these barriers were broken, the two began to talk more to each other.

During the middle of chapter four in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck exemplifies the fact that when social barriers are eliminated, friendships and dreams can be realized. As Crooks and Lennie are talking, Candy, the only other person on the ranch at the time, chimes in and compliments on Crooks' cabin: "' You got a nice little cozy place in here,' he said to Crooks. ' Must be nice to have all this room to yourself this way'" (75). Candy, an old man with only one hand, is also tackling a social barrier, but his of age. Candy is not rude to Crooks, and even makes a nice comment on his residence.

This pretty much eliminated all of the social barriers between Candy and Crooks. While Lennie, Crooks, and Candy are talking, they reach the topic of Lennie and George's " ranch plan" with rabbits and alfalfa. Crooks volunteers to join: "' If you...guys want a hand to work for nothing - just his keep, why I'd come and lend a hand. I ain't so crippled I can't work like a son-of-a-bitch if I wanted to'" (76). As Crooks was listening to Candy and Lennie have a

cheerful conversation about their future “ farm”, he was comfortable enough with them to ask if he could help, even without pay.

Just in one day, each one of these three characters’ social barriers were eliminated and they together felt a feeling of hopefulness and good spirit. When social barriers are broken, communication between each other is greatly improved and much more can be accomplished. Towards the end of chapter four in *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck also demonstrates how fear and misunderstanding prevents social barriers from being broken. While Crooks, Candy, and Lennie are having a fine time talking together, Curley’s wife bursts into the room and asks if anyone had seen Curley.

None of the men inside the cabin wanted to engage in too much conversation with her, because they knew that since she was the boss’s daughter-in-law, anything they said could be used against them later on. Soon Crooks had enough of Curley’s wife, and requested that she leave in a rather crude manner. She retorted, “‘ Listen, nigger,’ she said. ‘ You know what I can do if you open your trap? ’” (80). These few words of bellicose completely dampened the great spirit in the cabin at the time. Curley’s wife was very threatening, and all Crooks could do was say yes to anything she demanded or risk serious consequences.

Her hostile words pushed everyone in the cabin back under their social barriers and scared them so bad they didn’t dare to speak until Curley’s wife left and went elsewhere to look for her husband. Not long after she left, George, Carlson, and Slim returned from Soledad, where Curley was receiving treatment for his injuries. George look all around for Lennie until he

found him in Crooks' cabin. George asked disappointedly, "' What you doing in Crooks' room. You hadn't oughtta be in here. ' Crooks nodded. ' I told them, but they come in anyways. ' ' Well, why'n't you kick them out?'

' I di'n't care much,' said Crooks" (82). George was unhappy to find Lennie at a place where he was not supposed to be at, worried that Lennie would get himself into more trouble. George did not know what had transpired in the cabin just moments before he arrived back at the ranch, and wanted Lennie to get out as quickly as possible. After Lennie and Candy had left, Crooks was left alone in his cabin. All of the characters were completely pushed back under their social barriers and had never felt such a low, hopeless point in their lives ever before.

Through discouragement and fear, social barriers can be easily put back into place. Chapter four in *Of Mice and Men* explores Steinbeck's main message in the book. In one chapter, Steinbeck demonstrates what life is like with and without social barriers, and what it feels like when someone puts social barriers back in place. His message about social barriers still has a significant impact on people around the world today as many still hide behind the covers just because they are afraid of the pressure society puts on them.