

## **Economic Crisis In The Novel Of Mice And Men By John Steinbeck**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

John Steinbeck is an American Novelist found during the Great Depression Era. Most of Steinbeck's work is set in southern and central California, particularly in the Salinas Valley and the California Coast Ranges region. His works frequently explored the themes of fate and injustice, especially as applied to downtrodden or everyman protagonists.

The Great Depression was the worst economic slump that had ever existed in the United States history. In these novels, the social and economic environment in which the workers evolving show cases the difficulty to sustain and maintain adequate existence. There are many factors which played a role in bringing about the economic depression; however the main causes of the Great Depression were the overproduction in industry and agriculture, the high tariffs and war debts, the stock market speculation and financial panic.

During the Great Depression era socio and economic crisis was the major flaw. In *Of Mice and Men* depicts the aimless existence of the migrant laborers who worked hard yet perpetually lack the money to purchase farms of their own in their dream of the promising land to start a new life of good hope. People started migrating, because that was the last yardstick in hand to achieve the normal existence of life. This sort of character transformation in these novels was clearly observed in each character from the commencement to the concluding part. Most of the characters and the protagonists of the novel understood the difficulties and hurdles in leading a mere life.

Though there was a great downfall and chaos, people were stubborn in their own way of leading life and also financially upgrading themselves.

*Of Mice and Men* revolves round the relationship of two migrant farm workers in California garnered immediate as a play-novelette in the early thirties that means during the great depression. In the towns there is hardly any work to find. In the countryside there is at least work, but the circumstances aren't very nice. There is no place in society for mentally retarded people like Lennie, there is no social system, which would help them Crooks is discriminated because of the color of his skin. He has no contact to the other farm workers. Candy has no social security after his accident and in some years, when he is too old for doing his work, he will be dismissed and nobody will care about him. It's said that Steinbeck wasn't a political writer, but in his play-novelette, *Of Mice and Men* he shows themes of the time like discrimination of Afro-American people, no place for mentally retarded ones, and no social security. His critics often blamed him of a philosophy supporting socialism. Lennie and George have no real home, being migrant workers. They work the season, and then move on, so they have no family, no community, not ties except each other. Candy is a senior citizen with a physical handicap, and even though we get the sense he has been at the ranch for some time, he has few ties or friends either, and tells Lennie and George later in the story that he has no family, no kids. He is alone in most senses of the word. Curley's Wife is in an unhappy marriage, and more or less trapped on the farm. She seeks the male company of many of the workers simply for someone to talk to and since Curley himself is such an abusive jerk.

Steinbeck's trilogy novels address facets of social problems that impact the marginalized people of society in profound ways. There are many social problems that are explored in this novel, including the treatment and perception of people who are poor, people who are mentally challenged, and African Americans. Examine Steinbeck's treatment of these social problems, and consider whether he presents them as equivalent.

At its heart, *Of Mice and Men* is a story about brotherhood with George and Lennie's relationship. Chapter One, in particular, portrays the depth of George and Lennie's mutual reliance. Lennie relies on George to keep him safe out of trouble and in a job. It teaches a grim lesson about the nature of human existence. Steinbeck records a profound human truth, oppression does not come only from the hands of the strong or the powerful. The novella suggests that most visible kind of strength that used to oppress itself born of weakness.

Ultimately, however, the world is too harsh and predatory a place to sustain such relationships. Lennie and George, became closest to achieve this ideal of brotherhood, are forced to separate tragically, with this a rare friendship vanishes, but the real of the world, represented by Curley and Carlson, who watch George stumble away with grief from his friend's dead body fails to be found in the world.

Before the action of the story begins, circumstances have robbed most of the characters of these wishes. Curley's wife, for instance, has resigned herself to an unfulfilling marriage. This makes all of these dreams typically American is that the dreamers wish for sustain themselves and most important, offer them protection from an inhospitable world, represented a prototypically American ideal. The journey awakens George to the impossibility of dream.

Given Lennie's compromised intelligence, this can be difficult. In fact, George's life is constantly complicated by the fact that Lennie doesn't know his own strength or his own mind. But George sticks with him. He fulminates about it, sometimes gets angry at Lennie for being a burden. But George is committed. Call it love, call it obligation, call it what it means to be brothers. Whatever the motivation, George is determined to do right by Lennie.

And yet, George relies on Lennie, too. Lennie is the voice of innocence in *Of Mice and Men* was the flame of optimism that George has burning inside him, and which Lennie allows him to give voice to. Their shared dream of freedom and independence is made real by their bond. George articulates it, but Lennie draws it out of him.

*Of Mice and Men* essay on loneliness is a basic part of human life. Every one becomes lonely once in a while but in Steinbeck's novella *Of Mice and Men*, he illustrates the loneliness of ranch life in the early 1930's and shows how people are driven to try and find friendship in order to escape from loneliness. Steinbeck creates a lonely and blue atmosphere at many times in the book. He uses names and words such as the town near the ranch called Soledad, which means loneliness and the card game "Solitaire" Which means by one self. He makes it clear that all the men on the ranch are lonely, with particular people lonelier than others. In the opening chapter, Steinbeck introduces the idea of loneliness and men who work on ranches living temporary lives, with no aim in life. Steinbeck uses the setting to convey these ideas. The way Steinbeck describes the bunkhouse indicates their lonely lives. Also by only having two shelves for their personal belongings shows their lonely insecure lives. However, there are particular people in the ranch who have lonelier lives than others. The loneliest person on the ranch has to be Crooks, who suffers from extreme loneliness because he is black and he is living in a ranch and the surrounding area which is very racist. He lives by himself, because the other men do not like him. He does not take part in any of the social activities in the ranch and is left out completely. He is so lonely that he turns to books, which soon becomes boring and he will become lonely again. He is so desperate for company and for someone to talk, even though he does not really show it. Lennie came into his room he just talked and doesn't care if Lennie is listening or not, because he is so desperate. George and Lennie have something which all the men on the ranch envy and that is friendship. Crooks calls Lennie nuts and does not believe that Lennie will own his own land with George and Candy. He exclaims "An' never a God damn one of `em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Everybody wants a little piece of lan'. It's just in their head." (MM 106) this shows that he has no hope for the future and that he has no belief in men from that ranch going to heaven or a better place.

Curley's Wife is not the only one with a dream future, Crooks wishes he could be educated in the future, but like he said, "never a God damn one of `em ever gets it" (MM 145). Candy has a dream of owning a future farm with Lennie and George. Candy is an old ranch worker who is disabled due to an accident in the past. He is now a swamper, which's only companionship, was his dog, until Carlson shoots it for him because it is old and useless, just like Candy. Later on in the book, he wishes he should have shot the dog himself, which is similar to the tragic fate with George and Lennie later on in the book. When his dog dies, he searches for new friendship as he does not want to grow older and older being lonely. He hopes George and Lennie will become these friends, as when he overhears them talking about their dream ranch he offers his savings into that farm, and makes George and Lennie's dream begin to turn into reality. George and Lennie seem to be two lonely men. George has to always keep an eye on Lennie and therefore Lennie is a burden to him. Lennie on the other hand is lonely, but he is too dim to understand. He seems to live in his own world, and evolves everything around whether it pleases George or not. But they have something that all the other men have not got, and that is a true friendship. Lennie is there for George to keep sane, while George is there to help Lennie. George likes to talk to Lennie most of the time about their dream ranch. He says to Lennie that guys like us are the loneliest people in the world but he comments on themselves "With us it aint like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us" (MM 32) This just shows that they both enjoy talking to each other, making each other happy. But later on in the book, George loses Lennie, as he kills him himself. When one of the members of a friendship is removed, there is much misery. When Candy lost his dog, he kept thinking about him. He felt he should have shot his dog himself, not a stranger. When George had to shoot Lennie, he felt terrible. He had just shot his best friend, his only friend in the world. Because of this, he has to live the rest of his life alone and knowing that he killed his only friend. But I think he did the right thing. I think it shows their strong friendship. George did what was best for himself and for Lennie, a she could not watch Lennie die miserably in pain, getting brutally killed by George. He wanted George to die peacefully, thinking about the thing he loves about the most-rabbits. He knew Lennie would have died in slow and cruel way if he left it for Curley.

After George killed Lennie, it seems that he would have a better life without him, but really he would have a worse life and would turn out like the other ranch workers. He will suffer from loneliness and will have no true friends. Of course, his dream will never come true as he could not proceed with it without Lennie. I think the simple moral to the story is everybody needs someone to talk to in order to survive. Curley's wife died because she had no one to talk to. Crooks say he feels sick sometimes because he is so lonely. It is obvious that he will not live a happier life and will probably die soon. And Candy, he is old and lonely and is associated with his dog. Steinbeck writes he will go into the same direction as his dog, which is probably true. It is obvious that all the workers on the ranch will die a sad and lonely death, mainly because they had no friends. If this book taught me anything, it'll have to be, everybody needs a friend to talk to, no matter what race, sex or age, you have to have companionship to prevent you from suffering from loneliness.

A second example which shows that having a dream breeds hope and friendship is Crook's memory of his father's chicken ranch. Whereas Candy, Lennie, and George all look to their future for their dream, Crooks looks into his past, remembering the sense of joy he had as a small boy on his father's chicken ranch. Crooks explains to Lennie that the "white kids [came] to play at our place, and sometimes I went to play with them, and some of them were pretty nice" (MM 46). In this passage Crooks alludes to his dream. He dreams of being able to communicate and be with others on an equal basis. He tells Lennie, "I never knew till long later why he didn't like that. But I know" (MM 47), implying that Crook's father was discriminated against because of his skin color. For George the idea of owning his own place would allow him to keep Lennie from getting into trouble. But more importantly, this dream makes George strive toward a goal. George's dream is not even close to becoming a reality until Candy offers to contribute three hundred and fifty dollars to the cause. The idea that having a dream breeds hope, friendship, and determination, enabling one to strive onward in life with a sense of self-worth and importance is a major theme in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*. Three examples show this idea, which runs throughout the novel. Steinbeck obviously meant to impress upon his readers the idea that dreaming is an important part of every person's life. When one dreams, he hopes, develops friendships, and shows determination, and as a result, he feels a strong sense of value. He learns to value himself more. Without dreaming nothing great is ever accomplished. But even more importantly, sharing a dream with others reaps not only rewards for an individual, but also rewards for all those involved and ultimately all of humanity.

The friendship that George and Lennie share forms the core of the novella, and although Steinbeck idealizes and perhaps exaggerates it, he never questions its sincerity. From Lennie's perspective, George is the most important person in his life, his guardian and only friend. Every time he does anything that he knows is wrong, his first thought is of George's disapproval. He doesn't defend himself from Curley because of George's stern instruction for him to stay out of trouble, and when he mistakenly kills his puppy and then Curley's wife, his only thought is how to quell George's anger. He has a childlike faith that George will always be there for him, a faith that seems justified, given their long history together.

George, on the other hand, thinks of Lennie as a constant source of frustration. He has assumed responsibility for Lennie's welfare and has, several times, been forced to run because of trouble Lennie has inadvertently caused. Life with Lennie is not easy. However, despite George's frequent bouts of anger and frustration, and his long speeches about how much easier life would be without Lennie, George is clearly devoted to his friend. He flees from town to town not to escape the trouble Lennie has caused, but to protect Lennie from its consequences. George articulates this vision by repeatedly telling the story of the future farm to his companion. Lennie believes unquestioningly in their dream, and his faith enables the hardened, cynical George to imagine the possibility of this dream becoming reality. In fact, George's belief in it depends upon Lennie, for as soon as Lennie dies, George's hope for a brighter future disappears.

Steinbeck presciently realized that the suffering of the working class was not due to bad weather, bad luck, or the actions of the working class. It was caused by the rich ruling elite wielding their power and influence across the land in their effort to enrich themselves by any means necessary. Historical, social, and economic circumstances separate people into rich and poor, landowner and tenant, and the people in the dominant roles struggle viciously to preserve their positions.

## II. WORK CITED

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