
Racism and Sexism in The Great Gatsby Of Mice And Men

Following the major economic boom in the roaring twenties, America was plunged into a dark time known as the Great Depression. All economic success that was brought by the victory of war diminished into desperate, starving workers. With the drastic change, the popular culture of America quickly changed to match its economical despair. As reflected in many fictional works such as *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *Of Mice And Men* by John Steinbeck, the culture and social values of 1930's America allows people to get away with what one would frown upon in the 21st century. The 1930's social values were disturbingly racist, sexist and a self-contradictory mess trying to balance the needs of people to maintaining order in a capitalist society. These values were reflected in all forms of fictional works ranging from books to movies. Although racism and sexism in the 1930's is not breaking news at this day and age, it is still disturbing to look back on how the society condoned such discrimination.

In *Of Mice And Men*, Crooks was the victim of racism because he was black. Frankly, it was socially acceptable to treat a black person as inferior. With those values Crooks was constantly called "the N word" and forced to live separated from everyone else on the ranch. Steinbeck used Crooks as a way to reflect the racist values of society. Additional examples can be found reflected in other works of literature such as *Gone With The Wind* by Margaret Mitchell published in 1936. Mitchell refers to white slave traders as "noble" people, while making negative remarks about blacks as slaves to the white. Clearly, racism was so prominent in society that even the more educated like writers believed in it. Meanwhile, women were also deemed powerless by society in the 1930's as the negative values of the 1920's carried over.

The typical fate of a woman was marrying and devoting her life to a man, similar to Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. Daisy makes a remark to Nick that women must be "pretty fools" in order to please men as the perfect toy. More often than not, a pretty face is not enough to attract a man forever. Even for Daisy, named the prettiest girl in town, her marriage was defiled by her husband's affair with another woman. While women were unhappy in their marriages, they were not able to seek a living for themselves. After marrying, women do not have the right to share their husband's properties. With the economic depression, life for women was particularly hard. The few female politicians who rose up in the 1920's experienced unsuccessful careers, and suffrage for women was not a topic in parliament at this time. A woman having a job outside of her home was considered odd, and her wage would be lower than a man's. With independence almost impossible, women were forced to rely on their husbands or men in the family, making them less significant figures in society. While the social values in 1930's America condoned racism and sexism, these forms of discrimination are dying.

As social values evolved through the years, discrimination became less and less tolerable in society. Flash forward to the 21st Century, discrimination based on race or sex can cause a serious chain of charges for a person. For instance, a Starbucks employee was fired for calling the police on two black customers (Steinbeck) stomers for no valid reason, and Starbucks closed internationally for a day to re-train all employees on racial biases. Meanwhile, women are now able to vote and have the same rights as men, as stated in official legal documents like (Canada) the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. It is clear that discriminatory values such as racism is no longer planted in our society's set of values, which is reassuring to hear.

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