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Almost Achieving the American Dream

Everyone wants to achieve the American Dream, but what exactly is the American Dream and is it the same for everyone? The American Dream can be interpreted in many ways, and may be different for different people. Many believe that the American Dream consists of working hard to make a good living so one can raise and take care of their family. Also, many aspire to own property and be able to make decisions without the biases of others. But, can the American Dream, really be just a dream? In the book *Of Mice and Men*, the author John Steinbeck shows through the characters of Lennie, Curley’s wife, and Crooks, how the American Dream can be so close, but can be taken away due to factors like loneliness, ignorance, and the lack of power.

To begin with, Lennie’s American Dream was finally in sight after almost losing it once, until he did lose it all in the end. Lennie’s dream was to live with his best friend George, in a little house with several acres of land for them to farm. Lennie almost ruined this dream for the first time, when he and George worked in Weed. Lennie messed up by grasping a woman’s dress and she yelled about being abused, so “the guys in Weed start a party out to lynch Lennie… An’ that night we scrammed outa there” (42). This almost ruined Lennie’s and George’s dream because it forced them to leave Weed, where they had jobs. They were forced to look for work elsewhere, making the dream much more difficult. After they found new jobs, Lennie ruined the dream yet again, but this time was forced to pay the ultimate price. He had murdered Curley’s wife on accident after she let him touch her hair. Although Lennie didn’t know what he was doing because he was mentally disabled, George knew people were ignorant and would not understand what happened between Curley’s wife and Lennie. They would not give Lennie a chance to explain himself. So, they would **cravenly** torture and kill Lennie. George did not want Lennie to suffer so, George found Lennie and talked about their dream together until George had his mind set: “The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger” (106). George was forced to kill Lennie, no matter how **plaintive** George would feel. Lennie had accidentally murdered Curley’s wife, and he paid not only with his American Dream, but also with his life. Maybe if Lennie weren’t so lonely, he wouldn’t have talked to Curley’s wife and felt her hair. Also, if Curley’s wife would have understood Lennie’s disability better, she would have handled the situation differently. In the end, Lennie’s American Dream, and life, ended as did Curley’s wife.

Curley’s wife was close to living her American Dream which was to be rich and happy. She has several opportunities to make her American Dream happen, but none of them have worked out well for her. For example, she was close to living her dream by being in a play until her parents had interfered. Curley’s wife tells Lennie during the story, “Well a show came through an’ I met one of the actors. He says I could go with that show. But my ol’ lady wouldn’ let me” (88). Curley’s wife thought she was going to become rich and happy by being an actress because one of the actors invited her to go along. However, when she told her parents, they wouldn’t allow her to join the show. Her parents had the power to stop that dream and they did. Another time when Curley’s wife almost had her dream, was when she married Curley. When she married him, she became wealthy, but she didn’t love him so she was still **disconsolate** and lonely. Because she was lonely, she decided to talk to Lennie and because Lennie was **intrigued** by soft things, Curley’s wife **insinuated** that he felt her hair, until “he shook her then, and he was angry with her. ‘Don’t you go yellin’,’ he said, and shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck” (91). Curley’s wife had been lonely, so she decided to talk to Lennie. Since she was ignorant of his disability, she did not handle the situation with him well. When he grabbed her hair she couldn’t do anything because Lennie was strong and had all of the power. Therefore, when she tried to fight back, it only stressed Lennie and caused him to kill her. In the end, her American Dream and life ended because of ignorance, loneliness and the lack of power.

Much like Lennie and Curley’s wife, Crooks’ American Dream was also taken away from him. His dream of having a true friend could never happen because of a lack of power and a sense of loneliness brought on by racism. Crooks’ dream of having someone to talk to and having someone to call a friend always seemed to be getting closer and closer until somebody would snap him back into reality. One such time was when Crooks was talking back to Curley’s wife and she **petulantly** told him, “‘Listen, n\*\*\*\*\*,’ she said. ‘You know what I can do to you if you open your trap” (80)? Crooks was finally talking to people and making friends until Curley’s wife walked into the room and they started arguing. During this argument, she made it clear to him that she had power over him because he was black and during that time black people were considered second class citizens by many white people such as Curley’s wife. Also, Crooks always knew deep down inside of him, that he could never make true friends because of the color of his skin. This is finally understood when Crooks says, “Guys don’t come into a colored man’s room very much. Nobody been here but Slim. Slim an’ the boss” (75). This showed that even though Crooks had worked there for a very long time, he was lonely. Racism at the time had prevented black people and white people from being friends. They could work together, but not socialize because society, at the time, had viewed it as unacceptable. Therefore, Crooks’ American Dream could never come true. Racism denied Crooks power and lead to loneliness, which in turn led to the demise of Crooks’ American Dream.

As shown through many examples, John Steinbeck creates a story of failed American Dreams in *Of Mice and Men*. He shows how the American Dream can be different for several characters, and he shows how it can be taken away because of factors such as loneliness, ignorance, and the lack of power. The American Dream is whatever anybody wants it to be. It can be achieved, but there is also room to fail. When many people hear about the American Dream, they think of money and being wealthy. But, is this really the case? Or, is the American Dream called the American Dream, because it is a personal dream that each American can proudly call their own?