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Essenbaum 1

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Professor L. Mikulecky

ENG 301:01

28 April 2004

Censoring Gaines and Steinbeck

Once again this course provided me the "excuse" I needed to read two award-winning books: *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) by Ernest Gaines and *Of Mice and Men* (1937) by John Steinbeck. Both novels were well worth my time, and it is easy to see why they won awards and why some teachers would want to use these books in their classrooms. But the first question that this paper addresses is "Why are these books censored so often?"

It seems to me that there may be "given" reasons and there might be more unconscious reasons for censoring books like the two titles above. In Gaines's book, people may vocally oppose the portrayal of African Americans. These people may be offended by the common use of "nigger" throughout the book (used by white and black characters alike). For example, six pages into the novel the plantation mistress says, "Where the rest of them no 'count niggers at, I wonder?" Opponents may say that the book stereotypes African Americans as ignorant and uneducated—the author does let Jane Pittman talk in her own dialect (making the book tricky to read for a white northerner like myself). Here are a few samples from lines by African Americans in this book:

"I don't want see them kill him in front of me."

"What, potatoes and corn y'all done stole?"

"You don't have to say nothing less you want."

Those opposed to this book may also feel that the references to violent acts and sexual

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