

The way crooks is
presented in of mice
and men



Explore the ways Crooks (a minor character) is presented in *Of Mice And Men*. John Steinbeck created the character of Crooks in order for him (Crooks) to embody the marginalisation of the black community during the 1930s. Crooks is a minor character, but this does not stop Steinbeck using him to bring attention to the racism of the time and the reality of 'the American Dream'. When we first see Crooks it is apparent that he is very lonely "had his bunk in the harness room; a little shed that leaned off the wall of the barn".

He is isolated from the rest of the ranchers, the white male ranchers. They all bunk together whereas Crooks has to live in a tiny room by the stable, where the animals live. This signifies the fact that he is treated not as a rancher, but as an animal. We also see another example of this when the room is being described, "Crooks had his apple box over his bunk, and in it a range of medicine bottles, both for himself and the horses" the fact that his medicine is kept with the animals medicine illustrates further that he is equal to the horses.

"And scattered about the floor were a number of personal possessions; for, being alone, Crooks could leave his things about" This clearly shows that Crooks is lonely due to the fact he has had to live by himself, without company, for too many years. After a lonely description of Crooks, when we first see dialogue with him, he appears to be a very grumpy, bitter man. "This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me" But why is he so bitter?

He is probably bitter because of the way he is treated, the way he is isolated and not allowed to go into the bunkhouse or to play rummy with any of the other ranch men. He is bitter because he is not taken seriously by anybody, and never has been his whole life no matter where he travelled. “ If I say something, why it’s just a nigger sayin’ it” Although this does show us how and why he is bitter, we also see some sense of self-pity in this and the fact that he has almost accepted that he is a lesser human.

“ I ain’ wanted in the bunkhouse and you ain’t wanted in my room” At this point he is trying to instil some pride in himself and get the little revenge that he can on the white man “ You go on and get outta my room”, but it is useless. He knows that his loneliness, his desperate need for company is overpowering of his pride. We can see this as he says “ S’pose you couldn’t go into the bunkhouse and play rummy ‘ cause you was black...Sure, you could play horseshoes ‘ til dark, but then you have to read books” shows that Crooks pities his own circumstances and vulnerability.

However “ his tone was a little more friendly” and “ I didn’t mean to scare you” gives us the impression that underneath his harsh exterior, Crooks does have a heart. Steinbeck uses Crooks to bring the loneliness experienced by all the characters in “ *Of Mice and Men*” into perspective by saying “ Books ain’t no good. A guy needs someone – to be near him. A guys goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody. Don’t make no difference who the guy is, long’s he’s with you. I tell ya, a guy gets too lonely, an’ he gets sick.”

He is telling of the need for human interaction, the need for company and the need for someone to care and provide security. The oppression Crooks

experiences in living in a barn and not in the bunkhouse where he could play rummy as one of the group leads him to this desperate plea to be realised as equal. John Steinbeck is portraying here the feelings of Americans of his day and age: their loneliness and their salvation – in the American Dream. It becomes apparent that the treatment of Crooks has made him cynical.

Whenever the American Dream (Just like Lennie's dream to "live of the fatta the lan'" the dream of owning your own land, be your own boss, and most importantly having independence) is mentioned he dismisses it immediately. He says scornfully "I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches with their bindles on their backs an' that same damn thing in their heads. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on. An' never a god-damn one of 'em gets it." This blunt realism gives us an impression that Crooks has no hope, if he ever did have any in the past it failed to come through.

However when he later says "I remember when I was a little kid had a strawberry patch. Had an alfalfa patch. Used to turn the chickens out on the alfalfa on a sunny morning" this reinforces the idea that everybody, black or white, has a dream; something to aspire to, some light and the end of the tunnel that keeps them working until one day, they will eventually get that piece of land they had always pictured in their head. This makes the reader connect crooks to the white ranchers, they all have their dreams and so does crooks, they are the same.

Even Crooks, who appears to be incredibly demoralised and bitter, has a dream; even he, the "just a nigger" may hope to one day experience his

childhood joys again. In conclusion, even though Crooks is a minor character, Steinbeck powerfully questions the unreasonable notion that blacks should be treated differently to whites. Using other characters too he links this to the sense that it is unfair the way all minority groups were treated at the time, the female, the old, the crippled, the black, the injured, the sick.

This is what made the novel so powerful at the time, because this was the story for every man, woman and child who had ever been marginalised in their life, and made to feel like they are a lesser member in society. Even though Crooks appears to be solely a bitter and angry black man on the face of it, when investigated further it is apparent that he has feelings just like everybody else, and he has only been demoralised over time because of his treatment by society.