

# What does John Steinbeck suggest about racism in his presentation of Crooks?

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1900s America was a tough place to live in for black people, or in fact, anybody that was not white. During this time, black people were treated like second class citizens and frequently found themselves segregated and ostracised due only to the fact of the colour of their skin. They did not have the same rights as white people and in some parts of America were in fact considered no better than animals. They were also not allowed, for example, to share the same space as white people and often had their own areas to live in. In the novel, *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, a social hierarchy controls the ranch. The boss is the most powerful and recognized while Curley is second, followed the white ranch workers, Candy, Curley's wife, and lastly, Crooks. Society views and treats the three bottom tiers of the social ladder, the elderly and crippled, women, and African Americans, each in a distinct and disrespectful way, because of their physical ability, gender, and race, which also led to depriving them of their dreams. John Steinbeck represents the discrimination in different ways. Candy's dog is shot by Carlson because 'it was getting too old'. This causes Candy to think about his future. Once he is too old and he isn't of much use to the Boss, will he be fired?

From the start of the book, the skin colour of Crooks is made very apparent. "Sure. Ya see the stable buck's a nigger". "The boss gives him hell when he's mad." The boss regards Crooks as an inferior being. When Christmas came to the ranch, the boss brought in a gallon of whiskey and let a young buck go after Crooks. This shows that the boss doesn't even regard Crooks as a human. He is banned from the bunkhouse and has a small room next to the stables. "For being a stable buck and a cripple" and "he was more permanent than the other men" emphasises that the combination of racism and his disability would make it extremely difficult if he wanted to find another job.

In the chapter that we meet Crooks, Crooks understands that he has a sort of power over Lennie. He 'flexes his muscles' and inevitably Lennie becomes angry because he misunderstands the meaning of what Crooks said. "I didn't mean to make you angry" This shows that under his tough exterior, Crooks has a kind