

Of Mice and Men - Exam Practice - 'In this passage, how does Steinbeck present Crooks?'

In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck uses the character of Crooks as a microcosm of how black people were treated at the time; mainly the manner in which they were disparaged against and isolated in society. There are various references and allusions to this throughout the introductory paragraph where Steinbeck shows the reader where he lives prior to him talking to Lennie - as well as Candy and Curley's wife subsequently.

Firstly, whilst describing Crooks' possessions, the writer says 'And he had books, too', having already listed some basic items. The word 'too' is relevant as it suggests surprise and incredulity on the part of the narrator; that the fact Crooks reads is an afterthought to him, and that it's something he wouldn't expect. Given the fact that a person who reads consistently is often perceived as being more intelligent or intellectual, the surprised, borderline-sarcastic way in which this is presented could be emblematic of an ingrained attitude; implying that they're not meant to be knowledgeable or informed.

The books listed are a 'battered dictionary' and a 'mauled copy of the California civil code for 1905'. Given the fact that he lives alone with few belongings to his name, this shows a desire to remain enlightened. The books suggest intelligence, but the adjectives used to describe them - 'battered' and 'mauled' - demonstrate the state of his living as being poor and downtrodden. Those being two of his few possessions suggests that he wants to know his rights and be as well educated as he can, perhaps as a means of 'one-upping' his oppressors. Alternatively, it could be an insight into Crooks' outlook on life; that he values knowledge over popularity, something that probably would have been instilled in him by the vitriol he's received by the society at large.

When Lennie enters Crooks' room, you gain an idea of how he - and possibly, by extension, others like him - treat other people having been isolated from society himself. The first thing that Crooks says is that 'You got no right to come in my room. This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me.' Despite ostensibly being an educated person, Crooks is presented as being monosyllabic in his speech; his sole use of simple sentences in that quote showing a lack of willingness to engage with others, perhaps as a byproduct of his forced seclusion. He's used to being alone and therefore becomes intolerant of others.