

Of Mice and Men - Social and Historical Context

The Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression

Post-WW1, the United States experienced a long period of economic prosperity, referred to as the Roaring Twenties. During this time, people were investing in the stock market because of the ever-increasing value it posed. In September of 1929, the market experienced sporadic, but sharp drops, causing people to panic and sell their shares in order to salvage some of the money they would have lost. This eventually reached the point where, on a day named Black Thursday, the number of selling orders became so large that the Exchange could not keep up with the transaction. The panic was briefly assuaged, but the following week saw it return; thirty billion dollars had been lost.

Millions of investments had been wiped out and that number continued to fall, alongside the amount of consumer spending, sending the country into what is recognised as the worst and most abject economic depressions of all time. The unemployment rate reached the tens of millions, which adds context to the story; the lengths that George and Lennie went to in order to find work and their dream of owning their own house - the general feeling of despair and despondency present throughout Of Mice And Men.

The Dust Bowl

During the 1930s, a major drought occurred; the soil in the area became weak and was susceptible to being picked up by winds and swirled into dust clouds, or 'black blizzards'. The chaos that ensued drove people from the region; farmers were forced to move off their land. Many people attempted to find land and work in California, but a large amount were turned away for fear of being inundated by economic migrants. This left a lot of people without anywhere to go, resulting in them seeking work as casual farmhands.

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