The ranch represents **America in the 1930's**. It has a decent leader (**the** **Boss**) who looks out for his men and provides decent accommodation. He questions **George** closely about his relationship to **Lennie**and it is clear that he will not tolerate George taking Lennie's pay off him.*"What stake you got in this guy?"* The bunkhouse is basic but clean and he employs a swamper to make sure it stays that way. He has compensated **Candy** for the loss of his hand and he gives the ranch workers whiskey at Christmas. However, the Boss will retire soon and hand the ranch over to his son. He is a different type of man altogether. He is selfish and egotistical and a bully. He will sack **Candy** and not have so much respect for the men. Life in any country (or ranch) depends on its leader. Hard times are tolerable if the person in charge is doing their best and is fair and caring. In the 1930's America was recovering from the **Wall Street Crash.** Having a President who was fully committed to the welfare of the people was essential.

**Loneliness** leads men being*"mean"*as Slim says,  or *"sick"* as Crooks says. In fact you can see the development of an itinerant worker through the men. **Whit** is young and still has hope and enthusiasm - he still enjoys things - like going into town to **Old Suzy's**and finding a letter from a 'friend' in a magazine. Eventually he will become hardened like **Carlson**. Carlson isn't mean - he doesn't want to "fight all the time" but he protects himself: physically with the luger, and mentally by not engaging with the feelings of others. There's a reason why Steinbeck gives him the last line of the book. Carlson sees George has had to kill his best friend, and he doesn't understand what the big deal is. He has the same attitude to Lennie as **Curley's wife** does to the dead puppy - the whole country's "full of mutts." and you can just get another one.  Steinbeck is commenting on a society where everyone is so consumed with making ends meet that feelings are forgotten. Eventually the men end up like old Candy - alone and facing **poverty in old age.** Whit becomes Carlson and Carlson becomes Candy.

**The American Dream** is played out on the ranch too.**Crooks** comments that every ranch worker dreams of owning a piece of land. But by the 1930's the land is all claimed. Small holders (like Crooks father and the old couple George knows) are losing their land because they can't afford to keep it. George and Lennie's dream is not just their dream - it's a common dream. Somewhere to belong. **Curley's wife** also dreams, but for her it is Hollywood that calls to her. She is very young and very naive and believes what she sees at the cinema. She does not realise that Hollywood is all about image and that the reality is very different. She covers her face in make up to look like a screen star and marries **Curly** to spite the mother who she thinks has put paid to her acting career. To use her own word this is of course baloney. The man she met who said she was a 'natural' was spinning her a line. **Hollywood**at the time was booming - America needed escapism from the reality of life and Curly's wife is no different.

Attitudes to **women** in America at the time were complex. In the movies, women were glamorous and attractive. They were cheerful in the face of adversity and sang their way through their troubles in endless perky musicals. If they were wives and mothers then they were perfect in every way. Women were the moral guardians of America. However, the men on the ranch distrust **Curley's wife**. She makes the mistake of stepping out of her dometic box and behaving in a way which they see as flirtacious. Their fear is not without foundation - men who get involved with other men's wives (like**Andy Cushman**) can end up in a lot of trouble. There's a reason why George says*"You give me a good whore house every time...A guy can go in an' get drunk and get ever'thing outa his system all at once, an' no messes. And he knows how much it's gonna set him back."*The prostitutes that **Whit**talks about to George represent another reality of America at the time. For many women, "respectable" jobs are few and far between. For poorly educated girls, **prostitution** represented a way of earning fairly decent money. There are, and were brothels in every town and they were frequented by all sorts of men. Beneath the veneer of respectability even well off men indulge in gambling and *"tarts"*.

**Crooks**of course represents attitudes to **race**. The **Jim Crow** laws at the time meant that segregation fo blacks and whites is commonplace and not questioned. In fact, Crooks being a*"nigger"*explains everything as far as Candy is concerned. Crooks' room is private, but it is actually the harness room attached to the barn. His bed is a wooden box filled with straw (bought for the horses). He sits on kegs (barrels) which nails are stored in. Even his light is second class "a meagre yellow light".  Crooks has few rights as a black man which is why he hangs on tight to the ones he has *"even if he don't like 'em".* If black people appeared in films they were jolly and smiling and a little bit dim - they sang and danced or they were prortrayed as domestic servants. Steinbeck's portrayal of Crooks as the physically and psychologically damaged victim of Curley's wife's cruelty is very far from this **stereotype.**