The whole play is set in an apartment in the French Quarter (also known as the Vieux Carré) of the city of New Orleans, in the state of Lousiana. New Orleans features most vividly in the opening stage directions. Williams describes the district with considerable affection. It lies between the Mississippi River and the L&N railway tracks – drily mentioned by Stella in Scene One, and which probably explains why it is a poor area. However, Williams adds that, **‘*unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm*’** (Scene One, p. 1). In other words its charm lies in its being carefree, fun-loving and unconventional. This idea is reinforced by Williams’s description of the **‘*music of Negro entertainers*’**, which characterises the area, and which **‘*expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here*’.** However, Williams also mentions **‘*the atmosphere of decay*’**, suggesting that this area, like the South in general, has seen better days. The building in which the Kowalskis live was probably at one time occupied by one family, but now, as in buildings in so many inner city areas, it is divided up into two flats. The Kowalskis live in the downstairs one.

Published in 1946, A Streetcar Named Desire reflects the cultural tensions that pervaded the nation after the horrors of World War II, when an idealistic and ambitious American nation attempted to prove its superiority and its power to the global community by attempting to - and succeeding in - squashing the threat of Nazi Germany. Millions of Americans lost their lives in an effort that left Germany powerless in the hands of America and the other Allied forces.

When A Streetcar Named Desire came out, the country had just emerged from the war after battling through the Great Depression of the 1930's, and suddenly the national spotlight focused on the middle and lower classes as the true bearers of the heroic American spirit. Young men who had served in the war returned to their families and were ready to settle down - with wives, with children, and with steady jobs. The nation had suffered through a terrible war, and it was ready to embrace the "old-fashioned" values of family and home. Stanley has just come back from the war as a decorated soldier, and after proving his masculinity on the battlefield, he is ready to assert his manhood within the home. Consequently, the theme of pure, almost savage masculinity that is so ripe in A Streetcar Named Desire is one that filled America after the war - an air of bravado and victory following its defeat of the Nazi threat.

This focus on the middle and lower classes was popular throughout much of the literature of the 1930's and 1940's. During the Great Depression, the entire nation suffered from extremely high unemployment and interest rates, and millions of Americans found themselves buried in deep debt. The upper classes were scorned by the impoverished masses, who saw the wealthy elite as indifferent to and even contemptuous of their daily financial struggles. Consequently, many American writers during and after the 1930's chose to focus on the brave individual stories of those who were members of the lower and middle classes, believing that their strong work ethic and their ambitions characterized them as true Americans.

The men in this play represent the everyday American that society championed after the Depression: hard-working men who were proud of themselves because of the work that they had accomplished with their own hands - they weren't trust-fund babies who had been fed with silver spoons. Being a member of the working class was "cool" because these blue-collar workers were the antithesis of the indifferent and uncaring aristocrats who just didn't seem to care about anyone else but themselves. For example, the play takes place in an area of New Orleans named Elysian Fields, which refers to the place that ancient Greeks believed served as a home for the dead. After victorious soldiers died in battle, they went to Elysian Fields for eternity, to celebrate their lives, their courage, and their accomplishments. So too have Stanley Kowalski and his friends returned to Elysian Fields after the war, coming back to the States as successful and hopeful soldiers ready to make a name for themselves on their home soil.

A Streetcar Named Desire also champions a certain nostalgia for the old Southern charm that had been replaced during the 1940's by an air of industry and efficiency that had taken over the country after the Great Depression. After the war, the country experienced one of the biggest economic booms in history - with the return of soldiers came an increase both in the production and in the consumption of goods, and the economy soon soared after the end of the war. Consequently, you could say that America experienced a second Industrial Revolution after World War II. This revolution effectively killed the mystical charm of the Old South, where aristocracy and chivalry reigned. Women in the South seemed to possess an intangible charm that could enchant any man, and men prided themselves on their manners and a mysterious code of conduct that valued honor rather than industriousness. The ongoing power struggle between Blanche and Stanley thus reflects the battle between old Southern values and new industrial efficiency.

Tennessee Williams, one of the greatest playwrights of the 20th century, was the man behind unforgettable characters like Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. He gave the audience characters that they were going to remember for the rest of their life. His plays were a crystal clear vision of the life down South and the different forms and strata of the human society. He has been rightly called the Master playwright, the greatest Southern playwright in the history of American Drama. Just like his characters, he too was troubled and self-destructive. He was addicted to drugs and was a hardcore alcoholic. His plays are autobiographical in nature and we can see glimpses of his own life in his plays. He was a fan of the concept called ‘poetic realism’—when one watches the same thing over and over again, the act seems to take on a symbolic meaning after some time. His plays were filled with extremities which were justified because he believed they were a part of the human condition. What Williams wrote was very honest and came from a heart that had endured everything that he wrote about. His vulnerability was what that made his work so much more important. His genius lay in his heartfelt struggle to tell the world his innermost stories.