

Great depression – american history essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



One of the most fascinating things about time is that certain events remain in the past for good. No matter how dreadful the events were and how despicable the consequences could have been, time passes, blurring the rough edges of certain events. However, there are some things that cannot be washed away by the sands of time, and the Great Depression is one of such things.

Entering every single aspect of people's lives, killing every single flicker of hope and joy, the Great Depression has done its dirty job, sending a great chunk of the American population into the gloomiest mood from the rest of the century. Not being related to each other in any sense of the word, four pieces of writing by Fante, Chandler, West and McWilliams are shot through with the same fleur of despair and touch upon the same social issues, even though belonging to completely different genres and telling absolutely different stories, which can be explained as the effect of the Great Depression.

The first one to be mentioned, Chandler's *Writers in Hollywood* does seem rather mean, with its grotesque descriptions of California, writers' works and the writers themselves. However, though the thicket of sarcasm and irony, one can see despair and disbelief in the power of art, as well as the doubt if art can actually be produced under the name of Hollywood: "I am not interested in why the Hollywood system exists [...] as a result of it there is no such thing as an art of the screenplay" (72).

Thus, Chandler raises an essential question, asking whether the Hollywood treadmill production can possibly kill the art of cinema as it is. On the one

hand, the author's concerns are quite legit; indeed, Hollywood has become a powerful force which shapes the public's tastes and the cinema industry. However, the existence of Hollywood does not presuppose that original thought is not allowed in cinema; therefore, it seems that Chandler's concerns are a bit exaggerated.

Another peculiar novel to discuss, the work of John Fante sends the reader into the America of the early XX century. A thrilling story of a writer who is trying to figure out where he actually belongs, the novel unfolds a tragic love story with its unpredictable twists in front of the readers. However, it is not only the plot that strikes with its gloom and despair but also the setting of the story.

With the help of a careful choice of words to describe every single thing that occurs in the lead character's life, the author creates the specific atmosphere of Los Angeles as Fante saw it: " One day a beautiful letter came. Oh, I got a lot of letters, but this one was the only beautiful letter" (16). With the help of the image of tons of meaningful writing, among which the lead character managed to find something meant exactly for him, the author conveys the message of utter loneliness, which links the novel to the previously described work.

An intriguing novel to consider, *The Day of the Locust* also bears a distinct element of despair. Nathanael West's tone is satirical and unpleasant; it sounds almost like a cry for help, yet the author knows that hardly anyone is going to hear that cry, and mocks his own unhappiness. " It's a bedlam, folks" (West 191), Tod says, and the given sentence summarizes pretty

much the entire novel - as well as the writer's attitude towards what was going on in the early XX century.

However, among the four pieces of writing, there is the one that stands out the most. Unlike the previous three ones, the difference between which becomes evident only after a thorough analysis, the fourth one seems a perfect stranger in this company, since it is a poem. Written by a man called Carey McWilliams, the poem takes the veil off the glorious City of Angels, exposing its ugliness for everyone to see.

What is especially wonderful about the poem is the careful choice of words which make a cadence of images to imply unpleasantness: " Here the American people were erupting, like lava from a volcano" (376). Creating a train of absurd events: " A University of South California football star had been caught robbing a bank" (376), the author builds up the atmosphere of despair which the previously mentioned works are shot through as well.

Although the stories told by the four writers are completely independent and any possible coincidences are supposed to be unintentional, there is actually a lot in common between the four narrations. Starting with the most obvious feature of the stories, one must mention that each of them is autobiographical to some extent. The stories are either told from the perspective of a writer, which is exactly the case of Fante: " One night I was sitting on the bed in my hotel room" (11), Chandler: " I am not interested in why the Hollywood system exists or persists" (72), and McWilliams: " I had spent an extremely active evening in the Hollywood" (376), or, in West's case, from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who, nevertheless,

shares certain features with his character, e. g., the manner of narration: compare Tod's short " We'll get a taxi. I'll go with you" (193) and the narrator's abrupt " Their boredom becomes more and more terrible" (192). Another important detail that links the four stories is the fact that each of them is written in a noir genre, setting the reader in a rather gloomy mood. | Thus, the four stories share a considerable amount of issues in common apart from the depressive mood.

Hence, it is clear that, mostly because of the Great Depression, the American people viewed the world as a structure which is slowly falling apart, with Los Angeles being the place where the last hope dies. Perhaps, it was the contrast between the has-been glory of the place and the further decay of Los Angeles that triggered the feeling of despair which the given pieces are shot through.

Indeed, the contrast between the bright and colorful images which are usually the trademark of Los Angeles, and the gloomy reality enhanced by the effect of the Great Depression, is truly striking. However, when reading the given writings a bit closer, one will inevitably get a kind of a timeless feeling which conveys the idea that the gloomy mood seizing the characters in Los Angeles can actually be related to any other time period apart from the years of Great Depression. Pushing the feeling of loneliness to the nth degree, the authors display the idea of loneliness in the most graphic way, which, perhaps, makes their creations so gripping.