

An unjustifiable act deliberate cruelty in a streetcar named desire essay

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



1. The climactic scene between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is inevitable, the tragic but logical conclusion to a story in which an unscrupulous brute comes to utterly dominate an unbalanced woman. Stanley's rape of Blanche is unjustifiable, a brutal act perpetrated on a deluded and already-defeated soul. Stanley's cruelty is clever, conniving. By contrast, Blanche may be guilty of bigotry in her treatment of Stanley but it is defensive behavior motivated by fear and confusion, not deliberate cruelty.

Stanley is the raw immigrant type, whose animalistic behavior is untempered by the cultured refinement that Blanche embodies. Tennessee Williams appears to be saying that it takes time, perhaps generations, for a potent yet crude, "unwashed" immigrant to acquire that which is needed to soften his bluntness, for a "union" of raw and virile human energy and civilized sensibility to produce a more moderate "American."

Blanche is at the other end of the equation, the aristocrat who's lost that which made her aristocratic. Her class is in descent, has lost its direction, relevance and vigor. In scene two, Blanche muses that Stanley may possess exactly what her people need. "Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve" (Williams 2: 45).

But Stanley has no such notion of assimilation. He symbolizes the tendency of succeeding generations to overwhelm the past, often violently. In this sense, Stanley is profoundly the predator.

2. Blanche is just as profoundly the prey. Misfortune has robbed her of her identity. A southern belle who relies on her looks and charm, she's lost Belle Reve, the family estate that symbolizes her status and glamour. She's also at odds with her sexuality, her feminine identity, which has been undermined by the loss of her marriage and the discovery of her husband's homosexuality. Tied to Stanley by her pregnancy, Stella has come to grips with the circumstances of her altered lifestyle but Blanche is utterly incapable of doing likewise. Unable to accept her demise, Blanche creates a fantasy world, which makes her vulnerable. Though not without fault, she is ultimately helpless against Stanley's psychological and emotional assault.

Stella has chosen to overlook his vulgarities. Blanche, perhaps becoming aware of a vague physical attraction, tries to make her sister see Stanley through her eyes. " He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something sub-human - something not quite to the stage of humanity yet!" One has the impression that Blanche is morbidly fascinated not just by Stanley's animal sexuality but by a kind of human being she has never encountered before. The product of a repressed society, Blanche is accustomed to indulging in fantasy but, deep down, she seems to have a primal understanding of what her relationship with Stanley will mean. She admits to Mitch that, " The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner!" (Williams 6: 111).

In spite of her insistence in scene 10 that she has never been guilty of deliberate cruelty, Blanche freely derides Stanley for his ethnicity and his social " station," drawing on her now illusory class superiority. His anger and

impatience growing, Stanley explodes at Blanche, claiming that “ what I am is a one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don’t ever call me a Polack” (Williams 8: 134).

3. The fact that she believes so fervently in her innocence is further evidence of her self-delusion. She has frustrated and angered Stanley with her haughtiness and for coming between him and Stella. But by the time Blanche frantically defends her own behavior, she has become a pathetic figure not fully in touch with reality. In the final scene, Stanley verbally tears down Blanche’s protective emotional wall, an act of rape in itself. By now, he has gained a clear dominance over her but psychological rape is not enough for Stanley. As the play’s final and most unforgivably heinous act of cruelty unfolds, he says to Blanche as he carries her to the bed, “ We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning!” (Williams 10: 162). Stanley’s rape of Blanche is the cynically cruel and unjustifiable act of an exploitative personality. Blanche might have been capable of cruelty but it was Stanley who wielded it with intention, because he enjoyed having power over her. To Blanche’s spiritual defeat Stanley adds rape, the ultimate act of domination.