

Do Not Kill a Mockingbird

The Great Depression

When the stock market crashed in 1929, America's economy had been deteriorating for several years. The government had a practice of not interfering with business practices in any way, and when the market crashed, the entire country went into a terrible period known as the Great Depression. During the first two years of the Depression these things happened:

- 25% of those wanting to work could not find jobs.
- The stock market lost 80% of its value in two years.
- Over 13 million people lost their jobs.
- Farm prices fell 53%.
- Thousands of banks closed because people panicked and withdrew their money.
- At least half of the American people lived below the subsistence level (that is, with less money than needed to pay for food and shelter).



Millions of people went hungry and lost their homes. Highways and cities became crowded with the homeless who often built Hoovervilles, communities where they scooped out underground hovels covered by sheets of tin in which to live. Once-wealthy businessmen jumped from high buildings to their deaths rather than to live with nothing. There was no Social Security to support people financially.

The physical troubles of the Depression also caused emotional depression in millions of people. The Depression lasted for years, never really ending until World War II began. Throughout these years, the poor were unbelievably destitute. Conditions for families like the Ewells were common. As sometimes happens when people are desperate, they begin to look for someone to blame (regardless of the truth), and this blame turns to hatred and fear. Consequently, one result of the misery in America during the Depression was the uprising of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Depression affected families in many different ways. People made do with less. Clothing was passed down from one child to another, and most were grateful to have someone else's hand-me-down clothing, shoes, and/or toys. What clothing that was new was usually made by hand, because few could afford to buy readymade clothing. Toys were handmade, also. Most people planted vegetable gardens and raised chickens for the eggs. Those who had no homes often ate in soup kitchens or worked for their meals, if they could find someone who had odd jobs to be done.