
To Kill a Mockingbird as a Dark Side in American Society

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Abstract

Racial prejudice and injustice against African Americans have persisted among many organizations since their inception. Historically, individuals of color, especially African Americans, were marginalized in American society because of the perception of white superiority and dominance. Despite the good contributions of Black individuals via physical labor in sustaining the framework of the white industry, they are subjected to poor treatment by whites, who see them as inferior and dehumanized beings meant to serve their interests. This study illustrates issues of prejudice and racism from the perspective of children in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Keywords: Racism, Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, injustice, African Americans.

Introduction

Literary reviewers and experts agree that Harper Lee's *Killing a Mockingbird* is a classic. To everyone's advantage, it has just been named the second most-read book in the United States. Historical period after the Bible. This book is a part of the American Education high school curriculum. 'Radical inequality,' a dominant subject in the middle of the twentieth century, provided the justification for its immediate class status.

African Americans were already social outcasts before they were enslaved. The leader rose to prominence from among the common folk. Fair treatment was given to them so long as they were faithful, good citizens and moral individuals to "The Whites."

Different parts of society were at different levels of society. The Cunninghams were one of the most esteemed Finch families; they were also one of the most proud, despite their poverty. Famously reclusive and living in abject poverty, the Ewells were a divisive

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and troublesome family. Scout and her older brother Jem Finch, who play a pivotal role in the story, were just children when they first faced the realities and challenges of life. Despite facing several challenges, they were able to grow up and have a more nuanced perspective on life's happenings.

They were quite naive and impressionable when they first started. Nevertheless, their understanding of everything was widened by the excellent education they received from their father, Atticus Finch. This novel focuses on individuals from a culture and race distinct from that of the Finch children while also including the idiosyncratic Boo Radleys of the world, who are as divergent. Individuals we are acquainted with may be seen as witchlike and demon-like inside the awareness of a homogenous group. Ultimately, disparity is disconcerting, even intimidating. As the children develop, it requires a resilient intellect and a kind spirit to ultimately embrace Boo Radley, whom they first dread; moreover, it takes considerable bravery to protect an individual who differs from themselves against societal injustices rooted in fear.

Indeed, as Atticus articulates in his last remarks to the jury, not all foreigners are inherently virtuous individuals. Bob Ewell serves as an example.

The youngsters realise that some foreigners they meet, such as Mayella Ewell, merit their compassion, while others, like Mrs Dubose, may possess more complexity than first perceived. Nonetheless, as Atticus asserts, they are all human beings. They are, in some respects, victims. A second theme that all over the story is the complexity and inherent contradictions of the rules and ordinances upheld by the municipality of May comb.

This novel opens with an epigraph by Charles Lamb: "Lawyers, I suppose, were children once." This primary elder character is an attorney, and his kids seem fated to pursue legal careers. They are already acquainted with legal terminology at a young age. Their African-American maid recognises the distinctions inside a lawyer's family and has acquired the ability to read from a foundational legal text. Part One of the book delineates the children's introduction to a reality far more grotesque than the sheltered existence within their father's home, constructed upon legalities and societal norms, both compliant and transgressed: Scout's "offence" of commencing first grade with pre-existing reading skills, the historical arrest of Boo Radley and his companions for their boisterous conduct in the public square, Boo's subsequent arrest for inflicting a stab wound on his father, the impending lynching of Tom Robinson, the accusation of rape against him, the "entailments" concerning Mr Cunningham, the unlawful trespassing by the children on the Radley estate, and the violations of hunts and tardiness regulations by the Ewells. (Johnson 3)

Racism in To kill a Mockingbird

This topic is more important than others. Its widespread presence appeals to a worldwide audience, despite the American educational system's denials. I will talk about a few of the sub-themes that I have noticed that are impacted by race. Education for a Negro people to education was one of the few coloured people in this novel who can read and write is Calpurnia, the Finch family's maid. It shows that black people had the chance to get education and literacy in certain cases, and some of them took advantage of it. She uses improper terminology and creates wrong sentence structures when she is among black people. She teaches the children that this kind of conduct is necessary. Because black people, especially those of their own race, tend to dislike being taught by outsiders. Some members of the Black community harboured animosity against their classmates who went to school or were smarter.

The essence is that it was not just white males who dissuaded Blacks. Their own community was unprepared for the reforms, the education, and the independent self-governance. They were either apprehensive or harboured a strong aversion to the concept of education, seeing it as a mechanism exclusively used by white males. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is among the most popular American books in history. Set in the 1930s, this narrative follows a fictitious white attorney, Atticus Finch, who defends a wrongfully convicted black man, Tom Robinson. Narrated from the perspective of Atticus' daughter, Scout, the novel is an exploration of racial relations and justice in the Southern United States. Atticus defends Tom and, at one point, confronts an irate crowd intent on lynching him. Consequently, Atticus has been seen as a paragon for aspiring attorneys. As previously said, the book lacks explicit medical topics; yet, valuable lessons may be derived. (Potyk & Cicely 1360)

In this novel, Scout and Jem are cared for by their black housekeeper, Calpurnia. Scout confides in Calpurnia of their disparities, while Calpurnia assumes the role of a maternal figure for the youngsters. Atticus, recognising Calpurnia's education, held her in high esteem and regard. However, it is language that distinguishes the white from the black community. The trial of Tom Robinson serves as the pivotal and much awaited event of the story. Tom Robinson is accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a young Caucasian lady. The Ewell family, emblematic of the lower class, is deficient in resources as well as education. Mayella assumes the role of a maternal figure to her younger sisters as the eldest kid. Bob Ewell embodies bigotry and racial prejudice, whilst Atticus epitomises justice and ethics. We rapidly acquire knowledge for Tom Robinson is convicted solely due to the colour of his skin. Atticus is diligently pursuing justice. Atticus conveys a harsh reality to Jem and Scout:

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In our courts, the white man invariably prevails when it's the testimony of a white man versus that of a black man. Atticus expresses disdain for white individuals exploiting the lack of awareness regarding Black individuals.(Lee 22)

Scout and Miss Caroline argue on the first day of class. Student Walter Cunningham is offered money by Miss Caroline over lunchtime. Scout informs Miss Caroline that the Cunninghams are impoverished when Walter declines the money. Scout recounts one time Atticus was the Cunningham's lawyers and the Cunninghams compensated Atticus with stove wood and hickory nuts, since they had no money to reimburse him. Later, Jem asks Walter to have lunch at home. While dining, Walter generously sprinkles molasses over his veggies and meat. Not only does Scout mock Walter, but it also highlights the rank disparity between the Cunninghams and Finches.

Racial Prejudices in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* explores the complexities of racism within the context of Maycomb County, Alabama. The narrative commences at the residence of the Radleys, a family whose traditions diverge from those prevalent in Maycomb society. The majority of individuals in The society of Maycomb tends to pre-emptively judge and regard them as outsiders, as the customs they possess are unfamiliar within the context of Maycomb County. Consequently, the majority of individuals find it challenging to embrace them within the societal framework. Subsequently, narratives that reinforce racial bias against the Radleys persist for an extended period. Consequently, it remains entrenched in the collective consciousness of individuals. Moreover, a robust societal perspective regarding the characteristics that are inherited across generations within families is retained for an extended period. As a result, the majority of individuals in Maycomb County tend to evaluate others based on their familial background. Racial prejudice also manifests in the lives of Black individuals. They acquiesce to the racial biases held by white individuals, which contribute to numerous societal issues. The pinnacle of the narrative occurs when Atticus, serving as the attorney for Maycomb, passionately defends an African American individual.

Thomas Robinson. Nevertheless, there exists a considerable number of white individuals who do not concur with Atticus, as he embraces the notion of defending a black man. Tom faces allegations of raping a white girl, Mayella Ewell, yet there exists no evidence to substantiate these claims against him. Following the jurors' verdict declaring Tom guilty, Atticus and his family experience threats from Mayella's father, Bob Ewell. He attempts to take the lives of Scout and Jem on the night of Halloween. Nevertheless, they may find salvation through an individual deemed the most perilous figure within society. He embodies

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the essence of Boo Radley. Individuals who harbour prejudice are unable to perceive others or groups from an objective standpoint, as their negative judgements have been ingrained over an extended period. In truth, individuals are unable to appreciate others fully without a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. To truly understand how others live, one must first engage with them, as a mere fleeting encounter does not provide sufficient insight for evaluation. However, when bias is firmly entrenched in an individual's or group's mindset regarding another, it impedes their capacity for rational thought and logical reasoning. It may target individuals or groups who are innocent, as individuals frequently harbour biases against others for illogical reasons.(Hutami 45)

The disparities in social standing are extensively examined via Maycomb's intricate social system, which continually confounds the youngsters. The comparatively affluent Finches have a high position within the social ladder of Maycomb, with the majority of the populace beneath them. Uninformed farmers such as the Cunninghams are disadvantaged. The townsfolk and the Ewells, considered white trash, are subordinate to the Cunninghams. However, despite its several commendable attributes, the black community in Maycomb is positioned beneath even the Ewells, enabling Bob Ewell to offset his own inconsequence by victimising Tom Robinson. The tale illustrates that the strict social divisions prevalent in adults world are both unreasonable and detrimental. Discussions are crucial To Kill a Mockingbird on intolerance broadly and racism specifically. Disputes over racism evoke some of the novel's most indelible and compelling moments. The narrative's two tragic fatalities are precipitated by racial strife. To Kill a Mockingbird presents a naive and moralistic perspective of racial prejudice at one level. Atticus jeopardises his reputation, social standing, and eventually the safety of his children due to his anti-racist beliefs, which affirm his moral integrity. Bob Ewell unjustly charges a black guy with rape, brazenly spits on Atticus, and menaces a youngster for exhibiting racism, thereby embodying malevolence. In To Kill a Mockingbird, the portrayal of prejudice is both morally naive and limited in scope. (Hutami 45).Although the title of the novel To Kill a Mockingbird is unrelated to the plot, it serves as a powerful metaphor throughout the book. The "mockingbird" symbolises innocence in this story of good people being murdered by bad ones. As a result, innocent lives are lost when mockingbirds are killed. Jem, Tom Robinson, Dill, Boo, and a many more characters Throughout the novel, characters like Mr. Raymond and Radley are characterised as mocking birds, or innocent victims of wickedness. The relationship between the novel's title and its central idea is established many times throughout the text. Killing a mockingbird, according to Atticus, is a sin. In addition to never causing harm, mockingbirds are also completely harmless. True virtue and innocence are embodied by the mockingbird.

Man's inhumanity to man

A prominent contrast in the novel is the disparity between some citizens of the town of Maycomb who possess many opportunities for a prosperous existence and others who are entirely devoid of such prospects. Dolphus Raymond's comments pertain to what Robert Burns, a Scottish poet, spoke to 'man's inhumanity to man' in his poem titled 'Man was formed to lament'. This seems to be the fate of several residents of Maycomb, particularly the African Americans. Numerous instances exemplify this 'hell' of isolation, ostracism, and the deprivation of essential elements for nurturing human development and contentment; nonetheless, the predominant subject is likely the torment of racial discrimination. The African American population lacks educational possibilities. Calpurnia has instructed her son Zeebo in reading both the Bible and Blackstone's Commentaries, which are her only resources. The use of this text is ironic given the manner in which law is 'satirised' throughout Tom Robinson's trial. A heart-breaking reminder of black illiteracy is obvious in the 'line' event, which captivates Scout, who was 'born reading the Mobile Register. Zeebo's occupation as a dustman illustrates the severe scarcity of employment opportunities for black people, since he regards this position as favourable for a negro. We discover that the earnings of Black individuals are suppressed. Mrs Merriweather compensates her maid Sophy with a minimal salary and anticipates her perpetual cheerfulness, even after Tom's conviction.

Mrs Merriweather seemed to equate 'cheerful' with 'grateful'. An further illustration of their treatment as workers is seen in the manner in which the Missionary Society women relish Calpurnia's culinary skills while disregarding her existence. We often see the derision and contempt directed at Black individuals. At best, they are labelled as 'niggers' and deemed inducible; at worst, they are seen as immoral and perhaps criminal.

Upon being accused for a crime, they are deemed unworthy of a fair trial, as shown by the mob of lynchings and Colonel Jacobs' conveyed statement. The imagery used by Dill to depict Helen's response to the news of Tom's demise encapsulates the manner in which whites see blacks. This indicates both the harsh treatment they endure and their invisibility as individuals. Nathan Radley may fire at them without consequence which foreshadows his murder of Tom when he is 'exhausted. (Armstrong & Lee 43) Mayella Ewell serves as an additional illustration. Her existence is similarly tormented by her dad, who is indifferent to her physical, mental, or moral growth, forcing her into a harsh lifestyle. Although we cannot endorse we may identify with her as a flawed individual and contrast her deprivation of chance and moral instruction with the upbringing that Scout and Jem are getting. In contrast to Dolphus Raymond, a wealthy landowner, Mayella violates the social norm not by volition,

but because of need. She lacks companionship. She is deprived of love, and this is the only approach that she understands to pursue it.

She temporarily transcends her biases against African Americans just to ensnare Tom Robinson in the mechanism that relentlessly leads to his demise. However, she may have been compelled to disclose the truth had she not been consumed by an intense dread of her father. Scout likens Mayella to a 'mixed' youngster who is devoid of belonging. Arthur Radley remained fundamentally childlike in his seclusion, attracted to children. Mayella yearns for a man's affection but lacks the opportunity to get it. The narrative implies that her father has coerced her into an incestuous connection, a further degradation to which she acquiesces out of fear.

Dill is also solitary. He informs Scout that his relatives do better in his absence, however he considers himself the fortunate one among the three familial losses. He is capable of adopting the Finches. This is explicitly shown when he flees from home and is discovered concealed according to Scout's mattress He receives material possessions from his mother and stepfather; nevertheless, like to Mayella and Arthur Radley, he is deprived of affection. Arthur is bereft of parental affection and ultimately isolated from any social interaction; Mayella serves as a 'fake' spouse for her father, existing in aliminal space; Dill is an unseen son, excluded from the real existence of his parents.

In her portrayal of family life, Harper Lee illustrates both the torment of loneliness experienced by the unlucky individuals, juxtaposed with the affectionate ties shared by Scout and Jem, as well as the sad consequences of their circumstances. Her point of view is that reciprocal respect and affection are essential for the emotional, physical, and moral growth of children into stable, well-adjusted individuals, who will thereafter contribute to alleviating inequality in their own worlds.(Armstrong & Lee 44)

The phenomenon of class consciousness perpetuates a profound isolation among various segments of the community. This is apparent all through the novel and can be observed to infuse the entire structure of The societal structure of Maycomb. It appears that only those individuals we regard as the most enlightened are devoid of it. It is also observed that the matter is approached with irony, thereby enriching the complexity of the black experience. Calpurnia, a marginalised figure within the Maycomb community due to her race, takes it upon herself to admonish Scout regarding her behaviour towards Walter Cunningham during lunch. She observes that social status holds little significance when the accompanying duties are overlooked. Scout is deeply influenced by the town's hierarchical perspectives, and she informs Calpurnia that Walter is not 'Businesses', asserting that he cannot be regarded as a guest, as he is merely a Cunningham. Subsequently, we observe that

she has been schooled away from this perspective and is profoundly disturbed when Aunt Alexandra labels Walter as 'trash'.

Numerous instances of the torment associated with class consciousness are apparent in the novel, illustrating how this exacerbates the harm already wrought upon the population by racial prejudice. Maycomb presents a meticulously organised society, and through Aunt Alexandra's perspectives, we gain insight into the true nature of social dynamics. Until her arrival, the Finch family remains indifferent to this facet of Maycomb life; however, their aunt, possessing 'river-boat, boarding school manners', endeavours to install in the children the sense of family pride that she herself embodies. They are the result of meticulous cultivation over numerous generations, she informs them, and they ought to conduct themselves in a manner befitting their lineage, associating exclusively with individuals of comparable social standing. She is taken aback by the manner in which they are being raised, deeming impoverished whites like the Cunningham as unsuitable companions for them. She is appalled to learn that Calpurnia brought them to church, where they interacted with the black community, and that Scout has expressed a desire to visit Calpurnia's home.

Aunt Alexandra provides an intriguing perspective as she classifies individuals and articulates the unique 'Streak' of each family. However, she adheres to a conventional belief that places inherited landowners at the pinnacle of social hierarchy, a notion that Scout seeks to challenge by invoking the example of the Ewells. Jem concludes that the essence lies in the pursuit of knowledge. When Atticus engages with his children at his sister's urging, attempting to elucidate the concept of familial pride, he inadvertently induces considerable distress and anxiety, leading him to forgo his endeavour. Similar to Miss Maudie, he holds the view that an individual's moral value is paramount, rather than their social standing, which serves as a significant theme in the narrative. Harper Lee's appeal is for individuals to transcend the divisive constructs of class and status, embodying the qualities of Atticus, who is characterised by Mrs Maudie as 'modern in his heart.(Armstrong & Lee 45).

Conclusion

Throughout history, African Americans have consistently encountered racial inequity, discrimination, and prejudice due to their distinct skin colour. They were isolated and were subjected to physical and verbal assault because of their identity as undesirable and uncivilised folk. Racial segregation was perceived as a significant barrier that obscured the humanity of African Americans and prevented their positive attributes from being acknowledged by white individuals, which led to their unjust attribution of guilt for any illegal or illicit activities occurring in white spaces without proper investigation of their innocence. The influence of bigotry and bias profoundly affects the lives of black individuals

in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lee's efforts to eradicate segregation, racial bias, and unfairness are almost tangible. The work conveys a moral imperative advocating for global coexistence via collaboration, compassion, and respect. Racial prejudice may arise in Maycomb County due to the Radley family's unconventional practices within the context of Maycomb society. They do not conform to the customary practices of the residents of Maycomb. Many individuals tend to form preconceived notions about the offspring of a particular lineage. Through the lens of detrimental practices as perceived by them. The majority of white individuals in Maycomb County exhibit a profound racial prejudice towards black individuals. There exists a perception among some individuals that black people occupy a lesser position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, the sensation of being distinct within the Maycomb community is likely to persist, as there are individuals who consistently perceive it as a societal issue. They retain it and disseminate it for as long as possible. Consequently, the researcher may ascertain that the foundation of racial prejudice in Maycomb County lies in the distinctions among individuals within society.

The effects of bias based on race can disrupt the equilibrium of social existence. Racial prejudice can lead to societal segregation, creating divisions between certain groups, particularly between minorities and the majority. Predominantly frequently isolates marginalised groups within the social framework. Segregation signifies that specific individuals are denied access to public facilities, which constitutes a violation of their rights as citizens. Individuals of African descent are unable to utilise the same resources as those of European descent. The practice obscures the inherent equality of individuals in their entitlement to the same rights. Furthermore, racial prejudice may also manifest as discrimination within society. Individuals harbouring biases may engage in discriminatory behaviours towards others based on arbitrary justifications. Consequently, individuals within society are unable to receive comparable treatment to their counterparts. Racial prejudice can lead to the oppression of individuals by others. It has the capacity to enable individuals to exert intimidation over others. Consequently, there will be instances of violence, acts of terror, and mockery directed towards others.

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