

Justice and the individua



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“ To achieve Justice, Individuals often have to challenge the existing views of society” To achieve justice, many individuals over time have needed to challenge the existing, restrictive views of society, views which have been embedded in the culture and views many are unhappy to let go of. The novel To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee and documentary The Scottsboro Trials - An American Tragedy directed by Barak Goodman and Daniel Anker both feature themes of Social Justice, overcoming prejudice and personal and moral courage.

The concept of justice involves fair, just and equal treatment. These facets are found in a person's personal, moral courage and integrity however fairness and equality can often be limited by prejudice and discrimination. This means that those who fall victim to injustice are not subjects because of their own actions but are rather victims of a system, society or collective action. The historical and social context in which Lee's Novel was written must be considered to understand fully the challenges that faced each of the characters in achieving justice.

Through developing a back-story and ongoing characterisation the audience understands that the town of Maycomb in which this story is set has the same, southern sentiments of racism consistent with 1930's Alabama. Historically the story is also set during the great depression with people having ' nothing to buy and no money to buy it with', we also learn about the small town traditions and that keeping to oneself was ' a predilection unforgiveable in Maycomb'.

This all adds to the restrictive views of society in which the protagonists of *To Kill a Mockingbird* must challenge to achieve justice. Overt Racism, as mentioned above, was one of the challenges faced by Atticus Finch to achieve justice in his defence of Tom Robinson. The ongoing motif of the mockingbird is personified in Tom Robinson, being a symbol for innocence and reiterating the belief that 'it is a sin to kill a mockingbird' however the society he exists in does not have the same view.

Atticus represents a role model for legal and moral justice and teaches his children that you cannot understand a man until you 'climb into his skin and walk around in it' however the society he lives in accuses him of being a 'niggerlover' and even threatens his safety and the safety of his children for his principles and actions towards justice, views they do not accept. The symbolism of the rabid dog further exemplifies the racism held by the people of Maycomb as it brings fear through its unknown nature and Atticus is put in a position where he is the one to rid the town of its menace.

The lawyer has a small success in achieving this justice shown by the time in which the jury were deliberating however Tom Robinson is sentenced to death, comparable to 'the senseless slaughter of songbirds'. Atticus believes that he 'couldn't go to church' if he did not defend that man as it would be unjust and so he goes against the existing views of society, knowing he is already 'licked' to attempt to achieve justice. In a society where ignorance breeds superstition and fear, Boo Radley is a target for unjust prejudice.

Told through the first person, eyes of an eight year old the changing views of Boo Radley are made clear as a measure of the development from a child to

holding an adult perspective with the belief that harming Boo would be like 'shootin' a mockinbird', further developing the theme of innocence through the mockingbird motif. Lee utilises counterbalancing through juxtaposing gothic motifs with small town values to bring out the misunderstood innocence of Boo in situations such as Ms Maudie's fire and Bob Ewell's Attack which contrast with the usual, slow pace of Maycomb conveyed through the tone of the text.

The whole of Maycomb avoids the Radleys and circulate horrific stories about them and this view is challenged when the children 'consider things from his point of view' ultimately leading to a just image of Boo with his killing of Bob Ewell being covered up to protect him. Numerous other individuals are unfairly misunderstood in Maycomb and to achieve justice in the way they are perceived the existing views of society must be challenged. Lee employs Irony to highlight the injustice of Maycomb's views stating that 'over here we don't believe in persecuting anybody'.

Statements such as this are contrasted with the harsh treatment of Ms Dubose whom shows extreme courage in breaking her morphine addiction however is stigmatised by the rest of the town. Charles Baker Harris is also persecuted, being unfairly denied a sense of belonging alongside Mr Raymond who chooses to live amongst the Negroes of Maycomb as he does not feel he truly fits in elsewhere. These 'mockingbirds' display immense personal integrity as they do not alter their own personage or views, continuing striving to achieve a just on look from society.

Much like the injustice Tom Robinson is subjected to; the boys of the “Scottsboro Trial” have to challenge the existing views of society. Their trouble starts with in March, 1931 after being accused of raping two white women on a train, two women with questionable personal histories and integrity however “the second they accuse a black man of rape, they become pure white women”. This racist view is displayed through the use of newspaper articles, letters and diaries as well as cartoons and images from the American media at the time of the trials.

Cartoons depicting African-Americans as having an insatiable lust for white women also meant that Ruby Bates and Victoria Price had the favour of the court from the beginning and despite the lack of evidence the boys were found guilty, proving the bigotry and prejudice faced by the individuals as ‘their blackness convicted them’. This preconception of Alabamian society, in which a majority of these trials took place, had to be challenged before justice could even be imagined. The Scottsboro boys’ lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz had to challenge society’s existing views to achieve justice for his clients but also himself.

Goodman and Anker utilise shock tactics via photographs of lynching plus interviews of people directly involved with the trials showing the viewers the harsh reality of the injustice. Those who were confronted to testify felt that if they did they would ‘never be able to go back to Jackson country’ however many protested through song and slogans with the largest crowd in Scottsboro history attending the trials. The visual motif of the fast moving train symbolised the journey all those involved with the trials had been through and for Leibowitz it had certainly been a life changing one.

Those of the south felt that “ Alabama justice cannot be bought with Jew’s money from New York’ and the lawyer had to stand down with little recognition as the unjust views and stigma of society was also directed at him and his racial heritage. Links to the Communist party were also made and his differing values made him a target for hateful slurs, death threats and abuse due to the lies of Price and Baits strengthened by the use of voiceovers and narration throughout the documentary.

Justice was achieved for 7 of the 8 accused of rape at Scottsboro however it took many years and the damage done was irreparable due to the challenge of the existing views they faced held by society. What each individual mentioned above from *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy* has in common is a distinct lack of justice. Through fear, ignorance, prejudice, racism and blatant lies they fell victim to the destruction of the existing views of the society they lived in, the society that caged them and the society that suffocated them.