

Alexis Finch's personal cook, Calpurnia, plays an extensive

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Alexis Depaco Mrs. Bonnar English 915 December 2017 Extending Dignity
In the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* Harper Lee emphasizes that to truly extend one's dignity one must recognize a person's worth regardless of their race or social status. To have dignity requires calm, serious behavior. It involves being worthy of esteem and honor. When a person extends dignity towards another it allows them to feel more respected and worthy. The novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* traces the Finch family, who live in Alabama, throughout the 1930's. The Finch's personal cook, Calpurnia, plays an extensive part in their lives. Calpurnia is greatly appreciated and loved in the Finch household.

She enlightens the Finch children about the community and people that surround them. Calpurnia teaches Scout Finch about her classmate, Walter Cunningham's, family morals and discusses how they are different from their own. Calpurnia tells Scout, " There's some folks who don't eat like us... but you ain't called on to contradict 'em at the table when they don't. That boy's yo' comp'ny and if he wants to eat up the table cloth you let him, you hear... Don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, and don't you let me catch you remarkin' on their ways like you was so high and mighty! Yo' folks might be better'n the Cunninghams but it don't count for nothin' the way you're disgracin' 'em-if you can't act fit to eat at the table you can just set here and eat in the kitchen" (Lee 33). Calpurnia gets irritated with Scout because of the impolite remarks she makes toward Walter. She explains to Scout that not all people eat the same as she does. Calpurnia tells Scout to respect Walters' ways even though her family is socially inferior to Walter's family.

She extends Walter's dignity as she proceeds to tell Scout about his family morals. Calpurnia addresses that, although Walter comes from a poor family, he is still worthy as a person. Walter's social status may not be as high as the Finch family, but that doesn't mean the Cunninghams are not as respectable and deserving as them. Lee informs that Calpurnia extends Walter's dignity when she advises Scout to treat Walter with respect because he is worthy of esteem. Furthermore, dignity can be extended by looking beyond the surface of a person, despite what others think of them. Looking beyond the surface of a person can let one see their true worthiness.

The extent of one's dignity makes a person respectable and able to see their value. Atticus, father of the Finch children, Jem and Scout, is an experienced lawyer with a strong argument for Tom Robinson's case. Tom, a black field worker, has been accused of raping a white resident of Maycomb. Atticus believes in a fair trial, but is aware of the black and white views of the jury. He will defend the suspect, Tom, as the case proceeds.

Atticus says, "The evil assumption—that all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women, an assumption one associates with minds of their caliber... You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women... But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men" (Lee 273). Atticus believes we need to judge people as individuals no matter what race. He tells the courthouse that all people can't be trusted, not just the African-Americans. He extends both Tom Robinson's and the African-

American's dignity when he defends them, and discusses that all people should be treated the same no matter the color of their skin. He talks about the roots of racism and doesn't care how his case will affect his reputation. Atticus recognizes Tom's value and continues to give him dignity. Lee asserts that Atticus extends Tom's dignity as the case progresses, defending an African-American man, until justice is served.

Atticus says, " Alexandra, Calpurnia's not leaving this house until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn't have got along without her all these years. She's a faithful member of this family and you'll simply have to accept things the way they are..

. We still need Cal as much as we ever did" (Lee 182). Scout says, " People have a habit of doing everyday things under the oddest conditions.

I was no exception: ' Come along , Mr. Arthur,' I heard myself saying, ' you don't know the house real well. I'll just take you to the porch sir" (Lee 364).