

The culture and tradition of racial prejudice in maycombs society in "to kill a m...

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



The Culture and Tradition of Racial Prejudice in Maycombs Society In “ To Kill a Mockingbird” Essay Sample

Racism is the prejudice of skin colour and the way in which Harper Lee shows racial prejudice in “ To Kill a Mockingbird” is by taking the reader through various methods used by Maycombs society.

The focal point presenting racial prejudice is channelled through the language used by Maycombs people. The common use of language such as “ nigger lover” and “ darkies” especially when used in front of children or, of all places, in a court of justice shows how casual and how lawful it is to say words of a racist nature. In today’s society if a person was caught saying words like “ nigger” or even “ darkies” they would most certainly be branded racist and could even face a jail sentence. However in the 1930s when “ To Kill a Mockingbird” was set Harper Lee shows it was a way of life; it was seen as normal behaviour for racist remarks to be directed at African Americans.

The racial mannerisms of the adults clearly have a negative influence on the younger generation. For instance you have Cecil Jacobs who attends the same school as Jem and Scout. Cecil Jacobs calls Atticus a “ nigger lover” but he can not be entirely blamed for this as his home environment and upbringing breeds racial prejudice which he is subsequently following. Then you have Mrs Dubose who says Atticus is “ no better than the niggers and trash he works for!” This shows us how the older generation influences the young by saying racist remarks in their presence making the young people think there is nothing wrong with this. This behaviour has a danger of setting

a chain reaction of a deep-rooted tradition of racial prejudice in future generations.

As well as a lot of verbal abuse there is also a great deal of racial physical abuse. A great example of this is Tom's death where he gets shot 17 times. Guards are instructed only to shoot-to-kill when the escapee has reached the second boundary, however Tom was shot at the first boundary. This is an example of institutionalised racism within the prison system. Another event in the book which talks about racism through physical means is when the Lynch Mob comes to kill Tom. This event is significant in the sense that it shows a small sect of white people just simply wanting the black man (Tom) killed even though they knew he would be sentenced to jail. It was felt that when an African American was accused of harming a white person he only deserved death.

Ironically Harper Lee portrays most of the racism to the reader through the courtroom and trial, showing a clear distinction between the racist from the non-racist. The racism is physically apparent in the courtroom layout, where the black people are segregated from the white. Caucasians sit on the ground floor at the front and the African Americans sit on a balcony at the back. We also find that the whole jury is white, the lawyers are both white and the judge is also white. In the sheriff's testimony there is a hint of racism towards Tom as when sheriff Heck Tate was called by Bob Ewell who told Heck Tate that "some nigger'd raped his girl." As Bob mentioned a nigger Heck Tate ran out to his car as fast as he possibly could but if the suspect had been a white person he would have asked more questions to see if it

was a hoax or not. We then get people like Atticus who are definitely not racist. We can tell this from the way he puts his heart and soul into trying to defend the black suspect unlike most other lawyers. Atticus also treated Tom like a man by addressing him by his name but the prosecution lawyer, Gilmer, addressed Tom by “ boy”. This tells the reader how Gilmer thinks he is superior to Tom.

Scout is the narrator of the story “ To Kill a Mockingbird” and is probably the most important figure of the book. She asks questions which are not intended the way people make them out to be but more on the innocent side. A great example is when Scout asks the Missionary Circle, “ Are you talking about Mayella Ewell?” When in actual fact they were talking about Helen Robinson. She asks this as she knows that the only person that needs guiding right now is Mayella Ewell but as she is white the missionary circle regards her as on the right path and thinks of Helen Robinson who is not leading a “ Christian life”, but this is only thought of due to the colour of her skin (black). Scout shows two great attributes of her personality. She firstly shows how she catches on to things, how she is not blinded from racial hate and lies. Secondly Scout shows the Missionary Circle (without herself or the Missionary Circle knowing) how their hypocrisy and racial prejudice misguides them, makes them think that black people are all sinful and do not lead a “ Christian life” and whites are all good. Scout though rightfully guessed, possibly like most readers, that it was not Helen Robinson that need guiding but Mayella Ewell, but due to their racial prejudice and hypocritical beliefs members of the Missionary Circle do not see the truth.

Scout is a character that has not been exposed to hate and racism in her home but has been taught good values of life. Because of her age and minimal education of racism and rape she finds herself asking questions which are some what surprisingly challenging for the person who is on the receiving end.

Racial prejudice is portrayed in the book through language, physical abuse, segregation of black and whites in public events and examples of racism being passed down generations. The author uses these various methods to illustrate the culture of racism at the time in society.