

# [To kill a mockinbird racism, sexism, social class conflict](https://assignbuster.com/to-kill-a-mockinbird-racism-sexism-social-class-conflict/)

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" Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education; they grow there, firm as weeds among stones." -- Charlotte BrontÃ« The south, as it was in 1930s America was more than just southern belles and gentlemen. The days moved at the subdued pace of tired old men who took mid-day strolls on the searing sidewalk. Though, now and again, a force so powerful would provoke a sedated southern town into a fury. Ever since the dawn of America division, prejudice, and hatred have been reasons for insurmountable conflict. Maycomb County serves as an important backdrop to central issues which plagued early 20th century southern America: sexism, racism, and social class conflict. Prior to the feminist movement of the 1960s, women had to follow strict gender roles. Scout is a prime example of a female child struggling to fit these roles placed upon her by not only males in society, but women too. The moment Aunt Alexandra enters Maycomb, she places it upon herself to mould young Scout and Jem into their societal roles. Scout especially suffers a great deal of criticism and pressure from her Aunt to be the stereotypical girl; " We decided that it would be best for you to have some feminine influence. It won't be many years, Jean Louise, before you become interested in clothes and boys—."(Lee, 127) Aunt Alexandra's comment directed to Scout, reflects the common values of Maycomb County and of that era. Jem, as he starts to grow up also wishes that Scout " started bein' a girl" (115). Miss Stephanie also informs her that she won't become a lady until she wears more dresses. This also stresses the importance of becoming a " lady". To be a lady in the south obviously means more than simply being a female; one has to look and act the part according to the people of that time. Even Atticus, a man who stands for equality, makes sexist comments of his own; " I guess it's to protect our frail women from sordid cases like Tom's." (221) Atticus' remarks prove that sexism and gender roles are a norm in society, and their offensiveness is not greatly considered. It's not just the men who place women in their roles; it's the women themselves who take it upon themselves to enforce these rules. Racism is an issue that has long been tackled in society, but it is evident that women in society have only just begun to break free of long held values which have oppressed them in the past. Racism is a prevalent theme throughout the novel as it was during the early 1900s. Within the town of Maycomb there is deep-rooted racism and hatred. Though there are those who do go against what is considered the norms of society, and get ostracized for it. Mrs. Dubose clearly has done that to Atticus. " Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for." (102) Atticus is a person who judges people based on their character, and does not hold any bias due to race. He is a lawyer by profession and believes that one cannot fully understand another, and instils that into his children. " You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (30) Though, for every man like Atticus, there are hundreds who have opposing views. The publicity surrounding the trial of Tom Robinson certainly proves the town's character and shows where it stood on the issue of racism. A white man's word, regardless of his reputation or background will always be favoured over that of a black man's. Though, it does seem that racism does not occur solely in the white community but in the black as well. Dolphus Raymond's children are shunned because they are mixed children which shows that blacks, like whites can turn against a person who is different from them. " They don't belong anywhere. Colored folks won't have ‘ em because they are half white; and white folks wont have ‘ em ‘ cause they're colored."(161) When Calpurnia brings Scout and Jem to her church they draw stares and contempt. " You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun—they got their church, we got our'n…" (119) It seems that though some black people of that time might me racist, it was brought on by the extreme prejudice against them which caused them to be defensive. Social class conflict that occurred during that time played a part in creating an unfriendly environment for all those who lived in 1930s. Aunt Alexandra seems to represent the values and norms of a Southern town and her views are once again voiced in an attempt to teach the children. Scout, because of her is then forbidden to play with Walter Cunningham because of his status. " Because—he—is—trash, that's why you can't play with him. I'll not have you around him, picking up his habits and learning Lord-knows-what…" (225) Class was also and important factor in the trial of Tom Robinson. Though Bob Ewell is not held in high regards and is largely detested, Tom Robinson is a class lower than him just because he is black. Tom is a respectable and kind man but he is still lower than the scum of the town. This causes the jury to favour Mr. Ewell, ultimately costing Tom's life. Class was important then as it is today and, according to Karl Marx, is the cause of all society's problems. Southern United States was dealing with many things during the 1930s and well on into the end of the century. Sexism was integrated into society without being noticed and started to cause problems for feminists. Racism originated even before America existed, but then the country became one of the most prejudice places in the world. Class conflict in also caused many problems in society which could have been eradicated by an accepting society. Maycomb county outlined all issues which were problems. And Harper Lee used her setting to paint a fine portrait of society during its darkest times. Works Cited Lee, Harper. To Kill A Mockingbird. New York; Warner Books, 1960.