

Tkmb

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Examine the ways in which Harper Lee presents the black community in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The book was written by Harper Lee during the 1950's in America, and coincided with the rise of the civil rights movement. At this time in history, racism played a very important role in society. There was a lot of racial hatred between black and white people. It is set in the 1930s a small town called Maycomb, in Alabama, one of the Southern States. Although Maycomb is a fictitious place, real places and towns such as Montgomery are referred to in the novel. There are a lot of factors, which explain the attitudes of the people towards each other throughout the book. Harper Lee wrote this book in order to expose the racial suffering that black people were exposed to. The way in which Harper Lee presents the black community is that they are law abiding, hard working people, who respect white people. This is illustrated in Chapter 12, when Scout and Jem are in church with Calpurnia, the black housekeeper for the Finch family. Scout says: "When they saw Jem and me with Calpurnia, the men stepped back and took off their hats; the women crossed their arms at their waists, week day gestures of respectful attention". In contrast to this show of respect, during chapter 12, where the Finch children go to church with Calpurnia, we are introduced to Lula, a black churchgoer who does not want white people in her church. She is the only black character in the book, who openly expresses her hatred for white people. She says: "You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun here - they go their church, we got our'n". Fortunately, though, the rest of the congregation rally around the group. Calpurnia is presented very positively in the book, and as a strong mother figure towards Jem and Scout. The reader can also see that Calpurnia sees Jem and Scout as

her own children, as it says in chapter 12: " I don't want anybody sayin' I don't look after my children'. She is also one of the few who can negotiate between the very separate black and white worlds of Maycomb. The Finch family also see Calpurnia as an important part of their family, as it says in Chapter 14 when Aunt Alexandra tries to persuade Atticus to fire Calpurnia. He says: " You may think otherwise, but I couldn't have got along without her all these years. She is a faithful member of this family and you'll simply have to accept things the way they are". This makes the discrimination that they suffer at the hands to the white community even more unjust. For example they are not given the same opportunities regarding education, illustrated by the visit to the Negro church where only a few can read. As a result they have no opportunity to obtain a decent job and their families are doomed to live in poverty. A good example of this is Calpurnia's eldest son, Zeebo, who can read and write, but he is still only able to get a job as a dustbin man because he is black. In addition when any criminal act has taken place the blame immediately falls on the black community. As the church is the centre of the black community, Reverend Sykes is one of the most respected black figures in the community. He is very welcoming to Jem and Scout when they come to the church with Calpurnia. He says: " Brethren and sisters we are particularly glad to have company with us this morning. Mister and Miss Finch. You all know their father". As well as being very welcoming Reverend Sykes is also presented as kind and generous to the Finch children because during the trial he finds seats for Jem, Scout and Dill. The most important character in the book is Tom Robinson. He is presented like most of the black community as a very hard working, respectful man who goes to church on a

regular basis. This is illustrated in Chapter 12, where Reverend Sykes says: "You all know of brother Tom Robinson's trouble. He has been a faithful member of First Purchase since he was boy". Tom Robinson suffered injustice as he was charged with a crime he did not commit. His side of the story was not believed because he was black, which emphasises the prejudice during the time the novel was set in. Through the whole trial, he did not retaliate at the white people, he did not get angry even though he was wrongly accused, he just showed the level of respect, which everyone deserves. He handled the injustice with a manner reserved only for gentlemen, which is a good description of what he really was. Harper Lee portrayed him in this way so it would emphasise just how narrow minded and lacking in honesty most of the white community were. The trial begins In Chapter 17 and the contrast between the two lawyers is very evident in their questioning of Mr Heck Tate. During Mr Gilmer's cross-examination, he does not pursue any real lines of enquiry with Mr Tate and his questions are very straightforward. " Did you go?", " What did you find?". On the other hand, in his questioning, Atticus Finch tries to get beyond the face value of the case, and reveal Heck Tate's prejudiced views. Mr Finch, also, due to his simple and subtle questioning, shows that Mr Tate is not totally sure about what he is saying, and is really going on what Bob Ewell has told him. This is shown when he says: 'Sorry, that's what they said.' Mr Bob Ewell comes across as man with no respect for the law, as Bob Ewell replies to Mr Gilmer," That's m'name cap'n,". We are also shown how prejudiced Mr Ewell is, and what a despicable and disgusting man he is, when he says: " I seen that black nigger yonder ruttin' on my Mayella" These characteristics indicate that the prejudice in Maycomb county

must be so deep, that the jury will believe Bob Ewell over a caring and kind man like Tom Robinson, purely because he is white. During Atticus Finch's cross-examination of Mayella Ewell he asks questions, which did not seem relevant to Mr Gilmer, however these questions paint a picture of what the Ewell's family life is like. The jury learned: " their relief cheque was far from enough to feed the family, and there was strong suspicion that Papa drank it up anyway.....the younger children had perpetual colds and suffered from chronic ground-itch". The reasons behind this line of questioning is that Atticus wants to demonstrate the power that Bob Ewell had over Mayella and her fear of him, and that this would be reason for her to lie about what had happened. The author, Harper Lee, makes it clear to us that Mayella Ewell wants to make a new life for herself and is very lonely, which could be reason for us to feel sorry for her. However as Atticus says, you cannot feel sorry for a person who is lying to get a man killed, just because of the colour of his skin. In chapter 19, the way in which black people are presented, is clearly highlighted during Mr Gilmer's cross-examination of Tom Robinson. In his cross examination, Mr Gilmer is very aggressive with his questioning, and it appears that he is trying to put words in to Tom Robinson's mouth; for example: " Strong enough to choke the breath out a woman and sling her to the floor". He also talks to Tom Robinson like he is a child and is inferior to him. This is shown when he refers to him as: " Robinson" and " Boy". These views are shared by most of Maycomb County, as they believe that just because someone has a different colour skin from them; they are somewhat inferior and not worth talking about. This is indicated throughout the book, when the white people of Maycomb refer to the black community as, " they".

During Atticus' cross-examination of Tom Robinson, the huge contrast between the lawyers becomes very evident. Atticus' style of questioning is very formal and subtle; he talks to Tom Robinson as a human being and not as a 'nigger' who is completely inferior to him. This again shows that Atticus is not a 'run-of-the-mill-man' in Maycomb. At the beginning of his cross-examination, Atticus uses subtle questions, which show that Tom Robinson has nothing to hide; it presents Tom as a truthful and honest person. As well as this, during his questioning, Atticus also ascertains a couple of facts, which make it virtually impossible to accuse Tom Robinson of rape. Firstly, he finds out that Tom Robinson had lost all use in his left arm when he was a child, and therefore it would be virtually impossible for him to give Mayella a black right eye. He also makes it clear that it was Mayella who tried to approach Tom. The author, Harper Lee, also shows us that Tom Robinson is a very noble and polite man, when he says: "Mr Ewell yonder hollered through the window." " What did he say?" " Somethin' not fittin' to say- not fittin' for these folk's children to hear" However, in Tom Robinson's testimony, it is highlighted by Harper Lee that Tom Robinson may be too honest and caring, when he says: " Yes suh. I felt right sorry for her...." This statement seals the case, as by saying that he felt sorry for Mayella Ewell, Tom Robinson is indicating to the white people in the court that they are in some way inferior to the black citizens in Maycomb. This statement annoys the white people in the court: " Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer." In chapter twenty, Atticus goes over the evidence and sums up. In his summing up, Atticus makes it clear that there is no way that Tom Robinson is guilty of rape, and there is absolutely no solid evidence to argue

that. This is clearly highlighted when Jem says: " we're gonna win Scout. I don't see how we can't." In his summing up, the author, Harper Lee, also makes it clear to us that Atticus is emotionally attached to the case, by saying: " Then he took off his glasses and wiped them, and we saw another 'first': we had never seen him sweat..." It is also clear that Atticus is trying to relate to the jury and make them understand that they are dealing with a human being's life; " he was talking to the jury as if they were folks on the post office corner." Finally, and most importantly, Atticus clearly points out to the jury and the residents of Maycomb how prejudiced they really are, by saying: " confident that you gentleman would go along with them on the assumption- the evil assumption- that all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings...." Although Atticus loses the case, the black community in Maycomb still have a lot of respect for him, due to the fact that he did his best and represented Tom Robinson when no one else would: " All around us in the balcony on the opposite wall, the Negroes were getting to their feet...Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'." This shows the dignity the black community had and illustrates that Harper Lee wanted to present them in this way. When Tom Robinson is killed the white people of Maycomb are indifferent and this is illustrated in the book: " Maycomb was interested by the news of Tom's death for perhaps two days". It is shown in the book that even after his death the white community feels no remorse: " Typical of a nigger to cut and run. Typical of a nigger's mentality to have no plan, no thought for the future, just run blind first chance he saw". In conclusion Harper Lee presents the black community in a very positive light throughout the book. The contrast between the closely knit, honest, and

dignified black community and the prejudiced white community is very stark and serves to re-inforce the prejudice suffered by black people at that time in the south of America. It could be argued that Harper Lee presents the black community as too perfect, for there is only one character, Lula, who shows any overt anger towards white people. However this is the only way that Lee could have put her view across in such a strong way and so ensures that people would take notice of the great injustice that black people were suffering.