

Contributions to
society and it's
effects-comparing "in
cold blood" and "my
name ...



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Contributions to Society and its Effects Truman Capote's characters, Perry Smith and Dick Hancock, used in one of his most famous works *In Cold Blood*, find ways in which their contributions to society, within their personal lives as well as in their surrounding community, leads them to a fatal state of regret, remorse and actuality, all of which were consequences caused by their very own actions and decisions.

Chaim Potok, author of *My Name is Asher Lev*, creates a similar theme of his characters' ways of contributing to society. Although with a different community and individuality of the characters, both works establish a set of contributions and unexpected reactions of the two communities for each. Truman's characters, Perry and Dick, provided their contribution to society and a Texas community by murdering the Clutter family. Upon hearing the news of the murder of the "perfect" family, who many would describe as being "'real fond of Herb and Bonnie [Clutter]... and saw them every Sunday at church, and even if [one] hadn't known the family, and liked them so well, [they] wouldn't feel any [less sad]'" (Capote 80), members of the community feel insecure, unprotected and eventually come to the realization of reality that they are in fact not all perfect individuals living in a perfect community. The people in the Clutters' small Texas community look down upon both Perry and Dick without even knowing that they were the murderers at the time, simply because they committed a crime that caused heartache and sorrow to those who knew the family.

Asher Lev - a devout Hasidic, orthodox Jew - was in a similar situation with his own community but did not commit a literal crime, like murder. As devout as he was to his religion, Asher became even more devoted to art and

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painted his first painting that happened to be a crucifixion, despite the ideology that “observant Jews do not paint crucifixions. As a matter of fact, observant Jews do not paint at all – in the way that [he was painting]” (Potok 3). Once exposed to his community, Asher, along with his painting, was criticized with all different reasons; some of which stated that he was going against all of the rules and morals a Jew was expected to possess: devotion to God and religion, respect for one's parents, oneself, and fellow Jewish community members.

Asher tells the reader about his parents, Aryeh, his father, and Rivkeh, his mother, who was shocked and disturbed by their son's painting and how he was scolded by both about how they do not want him to behave the way “a goy behaves.... The people of the sitra achra behave this way. They are evil and from the Other Side. Jews do not behave this way” (Potok 4).

These cold words and feelings towards Asher make him feel neglected and not favored in the community and, to everyone's dismay, would eventually lead Asher to continue this “disrespectful” artwork because it was the only way in which he was able to express himself. Whether it was the illegal crimes the characters committed or the disappointment of the community regarding an individual's insolence in connection with their religion, both instances led to a different kind of satisfaction, or happiness. Once Perry and Dick completed the murder, a sense of gratification came over the two due to their accomplishment of getting away with murdering an entire family.

Happiness in Asher's eyes came about in a different, more optimistic, way.

Because of the communities' disapproval of Asher's paintings and

disappointment in him as fellow Jew, Asher developed a way of thought in <https://assignbuster.com/contributions-to-society-and-its-effects-comparing-in-cold-blood-and-my-name-is-asher-lev-2/>

which helped him disregard almost all aspects of what he was once taught and to focus strictly on art.

Jacob Kahn, a talented artist as well as a Ladover Jewish community member, was not only the main influence on Asher's paintings, but as well as the basis for Asher's way of thought and his attitude towards those in the community unfavorable of him, including his father. Asher and Kahn were very fond of each other and treated one another with great respect. On several occasions, Jacob Kahn would recommend a certain way, or a given manner, in which Asher should approach situations brought by others to discourage him and his artwork. This approach would be to simply ignore their insulting remarks and to then use his built up energy and express it in his paintings, which is exactly what Asher did in one instance when " all through that day [he] kept hearing [his] father's words. We must fight against it.

Angered and full of this angry energy, Asher proceeded to go " into [his] room and drew [his] father angry, drew a picture of him in reds and browns, angry and shouting. It was a good picture" (Potok 177). Throughout the book, Dick seemed to bask more in their risky murder escapade than Perry did, who Capote described as someone who had the ability to obtain his moral values during his time spent with Dick, yet finding a way, usually by listening to Dick's ideas, to continuously obliterate his own good conscience in hopes of not feeling guilty and full of regret for committing a murder. It is evident to the reader that Perry is always nervous before he and Dick engage in any illegal actions.

These uncertain feelings cause Perry to indulge in a panic, in which he envisions a possible situation, such as one that could involve “ Dick in the hands of the law, perhaps arrested while writing a phony check, or for committing a minor traffic violation (and found to be driving a “ hot” car)” (Capote 193), which could easily result in the pair’s arrest. On the contrary, it is apparent that throughout Perry and Dick’s mighty “ journey” of trying to pass with first-degree murder, not at any time did Dick seem to come in contact with any struggles, which may also led to Dick’s carefree attitude. An attitude in which being carefree not only led to his blunt confession of murdering the Cuttler family, but also that he was carefree of death, which is the punishment both he and Perry received once found guilty. Grief and despair not only occurred within the lives of Dick, Perry and the Clutters’ community, but as well as in Asher Lev’s community, especially with his parents. Because of the fact that Asher expressed himself entirely through his artwork and was not interested with what others’ remarks were because he simply did not care, Asher rarely thought about which of his paintings would one day cause either a small, or large, controversy.

This train of thought that came over Asher led to his famous nude paintings. These creations, while engaging, one-of-a-kind masterpieces in some eyes, (mainly to those outside of the Jewish community) were perceived as an absolute, substantial insult from those within the Ladover community, particularly his father, which is evident when Asher tries to explain his reason for these “ absurd” paintings by telling him: ““ I have a will, Papa. It makes me want to draw’.... ‘ You will fight it. You will not waste your live with goyische foolishness.

No, it isn't foolishness any more. It's worse than foolishness.... You bring drawings of girls without clothes into the house. What next? Next you will become a goy. Better you should not have been born'" (Potok 176). The indisputable tone of angry rage in Aryeh's voice troubles Asher with struggles of his own - to keep himself and his parents as well as the community happy - and by doing so all at the same time.

These continuous struggles soon become failures. Failures in which Asher hesitates, but then decides to agree, to put his " greatest masterpiece" in a public, well-known art show - where this " great masterpiece" is a painting of his mother. His mother is the center object and character. The painting was a crucifixion. Asher's entire family was beside him when they catch sight of the crucifixion.

He knew that they would not approve just as he told himself earlier, especially his father, who Asher described his face, which " wore an expression of awe and rage and bewilderment and sadness, all at the same time. [Asher] remembered that expression.... Who are you? the expression said. Are you really my son? [My father] had not spoken to me then.

He did not speak to me now" (Potok 361). Everything in the Ladover community was changing. Individuality in any given community is exceptionally important and should be treasured and well kept. It has the ability to make or break a home, a family, a relationship and, of course, a community. Truman Capote and Chaim Potok's characters, Dick Hancock and Perry Smith and Jacob Kahn and Asher Lev, are remarkably similar in a

couple different ways. By comparing *In Cold Blood* with *My Name Is Asher Lev* it was obvious that Dick Hancock is to Perry, as Jacob Kahn is to Asher.

Dick and Kahn, the more controlling of each pair, individually persuaded Perry and Asher to do something that went against their original judgment and conscience. Both Perry and Asher ended up alone - Perry was killed because of a murder he committed himself, and Asher was rejected from his once, loving family because of the crucifixion painting, as well as asked to leave the Ladover Jewish community by Rebbe Krinsky because of the threats made to him of others leaving if Asher was not. Everything in the Ladover community had changed. BIBLIOGRAPHY Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood*.

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