

Prejudice perverts
justice - to kill a
mockingbird



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Harper Lee's prize-winning novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Atticus represents black defendant, Tom Robinson, in a publicized criminal trial against Bob Ewell for abuse and sexual assault to Mayella Ewell. The jury ruling makes the people who advocated Tom Robinson's conviction and those who were influenced believe that he was innocent, question how prejudicial Maycomb County is, and how that affects how fair the criminal justice system in Maycomb is. Tom Robinson and Arthur Radley are victims of racial prejudice throughout the novel, and prejudice perverts justice through race, the resistance to change, and judgement.

Despite that *To Kill A Mockingbird* was written in a 1930's setting but was written in the 1960s, a time when the Civil Rights Movement was taking place, the people of Maycomb County had a hard time accepting anyone that was different from them, primarily black people. In chapter 9, Scout asks Atticus, " then why did Cecil say you defended [n-words]? He made it sound like you were runnin' a still" (Lee, 100). It's sad to see that black residents are judged on their skin colour instead of their actions and that even children have no respect towards black people because they were raised in a community with parents that purposely attend different churches than them. Or where you could never see a black man ordering a white man because they have fewer privileges. Or where their parents cause societal division through their negative words in front of them. Secondly, in chapter 12, Atticus says to Aunt Alexandra, " you know, it's a funny thing about Braxton, he despises Negroes, won't have one near him" (Lee, 209). This quote demonstrates that black people are inferior to white people. One shouldn't socialize with them because their skin is like a disease. As soon as one

communicates with someone, other than a Caucasian, they'll catch the disease and be judged by the town too. Since Atticus defended Tom Robinson, a black male, in a publicized criminal trial against Bob Ewell, a white male, the majority of the town criticized him and his family's ancestry too. Yet, this doesn't make sense because Atticus defended a "humble" Negro who felt sorry for a white woman that was alone and needed help with her father's house once and awhile. All he wanted to do was support his family and feel appreciated in Maycomb. But once the jury looked at his complexion and saw that he was a black man, they assumed he lied, that he was immoral and that he couldn't be trusted around women. No wonder they were unable to change.

Furthermore, routines are apart of everyone's lives. Although change is unavoidable, it can be difficult to accomplish. Depending on one's personality and attitude, some children are more dependent on their parents than others. Scout's lucky to have a father that taught her to respect diversity and everyone (even those that talk bad to her about her father). In chapter 9, Atticus told Scout, "Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win" (Lee, 101). He implies that even though racism has been around for a hundred years, someone needs to try to change others for the better. Even if Atticus doesn't win the trial, he'd still have told the jury that some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, and that some Negro men cannot be trusted around women, black or white. White men can perform the same crimes as some black men because overall, there's no spiritual difference between Negroes and Caucasians, since they're both human beings. Therefore, Tom Robinson

could be innocent, and Bob Ewell could be guilty. But based on Atticus's concluding statement, the lack of evidence that proves Tom was guilty, and the amount of evidence that proves Bob did this unspeakable crime, one can say that Tom had a stronger case than Bob did of being innocent. Secondly, in chapter 11, Jem gets mad at Mrs Dubose for makes some disrespectful comments on his father. Jem's punishment is to read to Mrs Dubose for 2 hours every day for a month, but as time went by, he noticed that she was making him stay longer and longer every day. He soon found out that Mrs Dubose was a morphine addict and that his reading helped her resist morphine. Unlike the previous argument, this isn't an example of the resistance to change from racial prejudice, but the urge to change from chemical dependency. In the text, Atticus says, " she meant to break herself of it before she dies, and that's what she did" (Lee, 148). Mrs Dubose didn't want to die an addict, so she resisted morphine's curb for several weeks until she was sober. She was a strong woman that did everything she could to succeed, even when her addiction wasn't on her side. In a way, that's exactly what Atticus tried to do, even if the people of Maycomb County didn't agree with him, he still did everything he could to win Tom's trial. The jury was afraid to let Tom Robinson go free because he was an innocent black man and accused a guilty white man of his own deed. They chose to make a false accusation because they didn't want to change the judicial system in front of multiple Caucasians. Yet, all the Supreme Courts in the United States of America are " created equal"? These are lies.

Lastly, prejudice perverts justice through judgement. Look at Arthur. He was charged for " disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, assault and battery,

and using profane language in the presence of a female". He was released to his family's custody and he wasn't seen again for 15 years. Because of this, people made stories about him that made him sound like a vicious animal. When in reality, he was a caring, shy, man. People like Ms. Stephanie Crawford told fake stories about him like the scissor incident: " Boo was sitting in the living room cutting some items from ' The Maycomb Tribune' to paste in his scrapbook [when] his father entered the room.... Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg.... and resumed his activities." (Lee, 13). Boo isn't a psychopath with a mental disability, he cares about Scout and Jem, and he chooses to stay inside. If these rumours were true, then he wouldn't have stabbed Bob Ewell when he was trying to murder Scout and Jem after they finished Trick or Treating; and he wouldn't have sewed Jem's pants when they ripped after they trespassed his property to see what he looked like. Yet, still, the entire town (besides a few people), believe this event happened. Secondly, in chapter 20, Dolphus Raymond said, " when I come to town.... If I weave a little and drink out of this sack, folks can say Dolphus Raymond's in the clutches of whiskey-that's why he won't change his ways" (Lee, 268). Dolphus Raymond hides a can of coke in a sack that makes him look like he's drinking alcohol because he doesn't want people criticizing his lifestyle. He divorced his Caucasian wife for his African American mistress, and he has three mixed children with her. Since he knows how the residents of Maycomb are, he chooses to put on a show and give them what they want so that he won't get judged for his life choices. Moreover, this passage depicts that children learn to criticize people from what they see and believe. Because of Mr Raymond's reputation, Scout thought that he was an evil man and that Atticus and Aunt Alexandra wouldn't like it if they became friends.

Little did she know that Mr Raymond wasn't an alcoholic, but a man managing to survive in their judgmental neighbourhood. One wouldn't be surprised if the jury made their decision on whether Tom Robinson raped and abused Mayella Ewell strictly on rumours they heard in the neighbourhood or through the daily newspaper.

In conclusion, prejudice perverts justice through the race, the inability to change, and judgement. Reason 1, race: the jury might have accused Tom Robinson of raping and abusing Mayella Ewell, instead of Bob Ewell because he was a black man opposed to a white man; and supportively, black people do bad things compared to white people. Reason 2, the resistance to change: the jury might have sent Tom Robinson to jail because they were afraid to do what was right in front of a half-Caucasian crowd, despite the amount of evidence that proved he was innocent. And reason 3, judgement: the jury might have let Bob Ewell go free because they chose to focus on his appearance vs. the truth of what he did to his daughter. It's all composed of rumours and the idea that what you believe is the only thing that's right. Because everyone knows that Negroes " don't deserve" the same privileges as Caucasians. They're " worthless" and inferior compares to them. But that's 100% debatable in *To Kill A Mockingbird* .

Work cited

- Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird* . New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1982.