

I, the juror by joyce carol oates



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Jennifer Chapel 14 September 2006 " I, the Juror" by Joyce Carol Oates " I, the Juror" by Joyce Carol Oates is a thought-provoking essay on the judiciary system seen through the discerning eyes of a juror, who in this case is the author herself. It is a disturbing and starkly realistic essay which strips away commonly held beliefs and myths pertaining to the dispensation of justice and the role of the juror, while laying bare the bones of a hopelessly flawed judiciary system.

According to Oates, the jurors were repeatedly told that their sole duty was to " judge the facts" (1147). However the facts are presented to the jurors as isolated nuggets of information from the contradictory, confused and often unreliable testimonies of the witnesses. Further the defending and prosecuting attorneys do their utmost to obscure the actual facts by drowning the jurors in a deluge of sheer verbosity calculated to bias the jury in favor of their respective clients. Consequently the behavior of the jurors as they half-heartedly try to arrive at the truth is characterized by prejudice and a singular lack of interest in the proceedings that are far-removed from their own lives.

Oates description of the behavior of her fellow jurors is chilling. Their careless thoughtlessness is far more disturbing than deliberate maliciousness or spite, as the sheer subtlety of the former trait puts them in a position to do irreparable damage albeit inadvertently to those supplicants seeking justice. From the clothes worn by the jurors (one juror actually turns up in shorts) to their careless misrepresentation of facts in their final deliberation of the case, the jurors behave with a certain frivolity that shows a lack of respect for the gravity of the situation and their own responsibility to fellow human beings. Age old prejudices based on the color of the skin or <https://assignbuster.com/i-the-juror-by-joyce-carol-oates/>

sex thought long dead and buried rear their ugly heads and manifest themselves in the long-winding, precarious road to justice. Such conduct on the part of the jurors is surprising in the extreme. Their exposure to the dark underbelly of American society is a far cry from the pristine, squeaky-clean existence they are accustomed to. Most react by hastening to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the world of the victim and defendant, in which they want no part. Therefore the jurors made no attempt to grasp the facts or analyze them with any degree of insight or intelligence, the bottom-line being a largely white jury wanted no truck with the blacks and their doings. In this day and age, such a state of affairs is shocking and the behavior of the jurors is reprehensible.

The jurors should played their part in the justice system with responsibility and propriety, because it is this system which is believed to have made our nation great and which has set us apart from the barbarian civilizations of the past. Jury members should have done their utmost to collect all the available facts as accurately as possible, sift through them and view them in their proper context, while trying all the while to see the bigger picture and arrive at the truth.

Like Oates herself, the jurors should have taken notes during recesses to refresh their memory and keep track of the proceedings. They should have made a serious attempt to shed their prejudices brought on by ill-conceived stereotypes. And as Oates put it, " In judging others, the burden is ours to transcend the limits of self, in terms of race, the limits, and blindness, of race" (1153). The jurors should have been conscious of their duty to the unfortunate individuals who have placed their faith in the judiciary system and in fellow human-beings to simply do the right thing.

Works Cited

Oates, Joyce C. "I, the Juror." Making Literature Matter: An Anthology for Readers and Writers. Ed. Schilb, John & Clifford, John. Place of publication: Publisher, Year of publication. 1144 - 1153.