

Prejudice as seen in
harper lee's to kill a
mockingbird and
through the movie
gat...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

All throughout history, prejudice has been a part of society. Discrimination and intolerance are built into human nature. Less than 100 years ago, Blacks were still in the bonds of slavery. However, Blacks were not the only ethnical group that was ever mistreated. During the First World War, Germans in the United States were looked down upon by nearly all of the other citizens. Only a few years later, during World War II, the Japanese that happened to be in America were put into camps due to the incident at Pearl Harbor.

During the mass immigration to the United States in the early 1900s, the Irish were met with signs in the workplace stating, " No Irish Need Apply. " Harper Lee's, *To Kill a Mockingbird* focuses on two prejudices throughout here novel. The most obvious of the prejudices deals with skin color. Set during slavery times, Whites believe they are far superior to Blacks. The other injustice that occurs throughout the novel is the prejudice that children feel. Due to the fact that Arthur Radley is a recluse and is rarely seen, Jean Louise (Scout), her brother Jem, and their friend Dill, all think of him as something less then themselves.

Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* deals with futuristic prejudice. In the movie, geneticists have the power to eliminate all of the flaws of mankind, making a superior being. The naturally conceived are looked down upon by society as they contain flaws and imperfections; hence they are given the name " Invalids. " The " Valid," or genetically superior human beings, have every advantage in life. Jobs are not given based on resume or experience, but instead are given to the genetically superior without question.

Vincent tells the viewer, " For the genetically superior, success is easier to attain" (Gattaca). Though *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Gattaca* are set in different time periods, deal with different issues, and have completely different characters, they are linked by the common theme of prejudice, proving that no matter the time period or the location, prejudices will always exist and will never be eliminated. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the Whites' prejudice of the Blacks is the most visible conflict in the novel.

Tom Robinson, a crippled Black man, epitomizes the hatred most people felt towards the Blacks in the time period. Robinson is accused of raping a White girl, and despite being obviously not guilty, is found guilty by the jury of White men simply because he has dark skin. It would have been impossible for Robinson to commit the crime, but his skin color sealed his fate. Had he been a White man, the jury would not have found him as guilty, instead charging Mayella and Bob Ewell with slander charges. Robinson was not the only time racism and discrimination occurred in Maycomb County.

Mrs. Dubose, an elderly White woman, tells Jem and Scout, " Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for" (Lee 106). Due to his upbringing, Jem does not discriminate because of race. He tells his father, while crying, after the trial, " It ain't right, Atticus" (Lee 215). However, Jem is not the only citizen of Maycomb that does not discriminate based on race. After the conviction, Mr. Underwood, the publisher and writer of the town newspaper, wrote how Robinson's killing had been senseless.

Scout reads the article and understands the meaning, " Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret

courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed" (Lee 214). Lee intends to prove that no man lives without some form of prejudice in his mind. Gattaca informs the viewer of Niccol's idea of future prejudice: people will be discriminated against due to the DNA that makes up their bodies.

In this futuristic society, procreation occurs in two forms: natural reproduction and reproduction with the help of a geneticist. These two methods have divided people into two categories: the Valids and the Invalids. Invalids are seen as people meant only to serve below the Valids; there is not a task that an Invalid can do that a Valid cannot do better. Due to this mindset, job discrimination occurs all over the planet. The viewer is informed, " Of course it is illegal to discriminate, genoism it is called, but no one takes the law seriously" (Gattaca).

Similarly, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, racism in the South is seen as a natural way of life, nobody saw anything odd about it. In the movie, Vincent Freeman, an Invalid, believes that there is more to his life than what the doctors and society predict. Ever since he was a young child, he has had one dream: to be a navigator at Gattaca space center. At birth, Vincent was diagnosed with a 99% chance of heart failure, making him nearly useless to the people at Gattaca space center. He tells his father that he still has a one percent chance of not being affected by heart disease and that he'll take it, but his father replies that the management at Gattaca would not. Vincent is not an only child; he has a genetically engineered brother named Anton who is far superior to him on paper. Despite Vincent's imperfections, he is able to beat his brother in a swim race, proving to himself that he is capable of

<https://assignbuster.com/prejudice-as-seen-in-harper-lees-to-kill-a-mockingbird-and-through-the-movie-gattaca/>

reaching his goals. Many people that are discriminated against like Vincent see themselves as they are told. Vincent tells Irene, " They have got you looking so hard for any flaw, that after awhile that is all that you see" (Gattaca).

At the beginning of Vincent's career at Gattaca, he is a lowly janitor, longing to be on the other side of the glass. To reach his goal of becoming a navigator at Gattaca, Vincent takes the identity of Jerome Morrow, a valid who had been paralyzed after being hit by a car. Vincent had realized that, " No matter how much I trained or how much I studied, the best test score in the world wasn't gonna matter unless I had the blood test to prove it" (Gattaca). As in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there are people who are not prejudiced towards Invalids.

Dr. Lamar, Gattaca's main doctor and tester, realizes from the beginning that Vincent is only pretending to be Jerome Morrow. He explains that his son is not all he was supposed to be; he has slight imperfections that will keep him out of the program. His son too dreams of becoming a navigator at Gattaca, but due to his genetic coding, he will never be accepted. Despite his realization that Vincent is a fraud, he never says a word and does not expose Vincent, as he wants to see him succeed and reach his dream.

While a stranger has faith in Vincent's life, his own family does not even believe in his dreams. While reading *Careers in Space*, Vincent's father Antonio tells him, " Son, the only time you're going to see the inside of a space shuttle is if you're cleaning it" (Gattaca). His brother Anton is no better, Vincent asks him, " Is the only way you can succeed is to see me fail"

(Gattaca)? Later in the film, while inside the Gattaca workroom, Anton tells Vincent, " I have a right to be here, you don't" (Gattaca).

After hearing this from his own brother, they play their childhood game of chicken again out in the ocean. Again, Vincent emerges victorious, proving to his brother that although he is not a Valid in society, he is every bit as capable as anyone else, and is deserving of his place as one of Gattaca's elite. As long as humans are alive, discrimination and prejudice will be a part of everyday life; To Kill a Mockingbird and Gattaca show that in a span of around 100 years, the prejudices have changed, but still exist in alternate forms.

Vincent realizes this change, saying, " I belonged to a new underclass, no longer determined by social status or the color of your skin" (Gattaca). While modern day groups, laws, and people, such as Affirmative Action, Martin Luther King Junior, and Caesar Chavez, seek to change the public prejudiced view, they will never be completely successful. Though the newfound political correctness in the United States and other world superpowers give the appearance of equality, equal opportunity is not, and will not, ever be available to all people.