

America the "great"

Business



“ She was white, and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a black man. Not an old Uncle, but a strong young Negro man. No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards” (20). The Depression and the complex racial relations within the South form the historical context of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

To Kill a Mockingbird seeks to portray the racial injustices and prejudices against African Americans in the South, while also making a statement about civil rights issues that were occurring in the present day. The trial of Tom Robinson, in the book, is reflective of the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case of the 1930's, because both argued that racial inequality infected all areas of society (History. com 1). Also, as Lee was writing the novel, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had just been reached and many events in the Civil Rights movement had taken place.

The History. com article points out that, Rosa Parks had stirred events leading to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Authenine Lucy had entered the all white University of Alabama (History. com 2). The racial tensions leading to these events are reflected in the plot and themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the court-case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. “ The handful of people in this town who say that fair play is not marked White Only; the handful of people who say a fair trial is for everybody, not just us... The handful of people in this town with background, that's who they are” (24).

The court case *Plessy vs Ferguson* was pled on the premiss that separate was not equal. Many agreed with this as shown in this passage from *To Kill a*

Mockingbird. After Tom Robinson was shot in the exercise yard, Miss Maudie expresses her distaste towards the mistreatment of Robinson based on his color. Though they were not willing to stand up and fight themselves, many in small town America were happy to let lawyers like Atticus Finch and Plessy stand up for equal rights. Through the use of setting, Lee was able to portray the South in the 1930s at the height of the Depression. " A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer.

There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County" (1). During the Depression, over farming had exhausted the soil, and tenement farming worsened the conditions. The separate but equal law that was upheld by the Plessy vs. Ferguson case made the depression even more challenging for blacks because there were even fewer jobs available to them. Maycomb is a representation of any small town in the American South affected by racism. The book also comments on the social system of the Depression era in the South.

According to Ivers, there was a definite caste system in the rural South. The South had a stubborn will to hold onto its traditions of the past (Ivers, 1). In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the author comments on the difficulty in changing perceptions. " Mrs. Maudie tries to make the children understand the difficult situation of the Tom Robinson case.

Mrs. Maudie explains things well, telling the children even though Atticus lost, he won by forcing the town to truly examine their perceptions of race and equality. It took a great deal of time for the jury to come to their verdict,

and this alone demonstrates that Atticus succeeded in causing the men of the jury to examine their views of race. Therefore, although unpleasant, Atticus's work is of great importance and will affect the future of race relations in Maycomb" (23). The social hierarchy in society must be maintained.

The book illustrates racism and the fear of interracial relationships in its portrayal of the justice system. It is made unmistakably plain that as a black man, Tom Robinson will not receive a fair trial. The book accurately depicts locals forming a lynch mob because they feel there is no need to even try Robinson. The book suggests that racial relations were complicated on many levels in southern society. Plessy vs. Ferguson is the big picture, the story you will find in a history book, the moment that began to inspire change.

While *To Kill a Mockingbird* is like the home video, the personal side of the complicated historical story. Weaving the two together, gives a more complete picture of how racial tensions during the Depression era were felt by both the African-Americans and the whites. It allows us to know where our nation's story came from, and ensure that we never allow it to go back.