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To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee: inequality then and now

“Those who do not read history are doomed to repeat it. Those who fail to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors are destined to repeat them. Those who do not know history's mistakes are doomed to repeat them.”

George Santayana, a Spanish poet and philosopher, paraphrased the main reason that there is so much strife in the world in these three lines. People do not change throughout history. Many refuse to learn from the past, or they refuse to apply it to their present. The motives behind the actions of many do not change, and because of this, mistakes are repeated again and again throughout the generations. One of the best examples is the abuse of minorities in the United States. Although many people believe that ever since the African-American slaves were freed in the late 1800's, equality has been achieved in the United States, they are gravely mistaken. As long as there are still minority groups, there will still be those who believe them to be less than human. This can be seen in both *To Kill A Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, when an obviously innocent man loses a court trial and ultimately life because he was African-American, and in modern times. Several examples from today include the mistreatment of immigrants, specifically Hispanic Americans, as well as homophobia, and sexism. While there are those who support equal rights, both today and in Scout Finch's era, inequality is still a common issue and has been throughout history.

In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, one of the most important events is a trial for a man named Tom Robinson. He is accused of rape and battery of a white girl, which is thought to be all the more grievous because he was African-American. Tom Robinson is very obviously innocent, but is still found guilty by the jury and executed for a deed he never did. Tom had been used as a scapegoat, purely because he was the minority, had few rights, and his accusers could get away with it. The general population did not mind watching him suffer, because most considered him to be less than human. Others realized the unfairness of the situation. "Atticus says cheatin' a colored man is ten times worse than cheatin' a white man" (Lee 201). In the 1930s, if an African-American was cheated by a white man, there was rarely anything he could do about it, because the law was against him. This lack of human empathy can still be seen today in many similar situations. One outstanding example is the deportation of millions of American citizens due to the color of their skin. Every year, thousands of U.S. citizens of Latin-American descent are sent to countries they have never set foot upon because they look Mexican and have a hard time proving otherwise, even though they are legal. They are illegally deported because government officials like to look like they are doing something productive, even if it ruins lives. This belief that their reputation is more important than the well-being of people is very similar to the reasons behind Tom Robinson's trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. One of the more shocking examples was the deportation of Mark Lyttle, a native of North Carolina. Although he had every piece of legal information needed, he was deported by federal officers. Their reasoning was that he double-crossed some of his statements, ignoring the fact that he was mentally unsound and bipolar. During the trip he was forced to take from his home to Mexico, he was not able to take his medication, and was thrown into an even more dangerous cycle of depression and mania. No one would listen to him, because they had decided that he had to be just another illegal immigrant

and refused to hear otherwise. This refusal to listen to the obvious due to prejudice and pride is one of the biggest causes for problems throughout history (Charlotte Observer).

Another prominent example of how today's society can relate to the society in *To Kill A Mockingbird* is the general reaction to the expanding homosexual population. The belief that those who are different from the majority are somehow, less than human. While those in more liberal areas are more accepting of homosexuality, the wide majority of rural areas and religious groups condemn it as immoral. There are still many who believe same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional and unethical. Many politicians are fighting against it, as well (Minnesota Public Radio). "Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too" (Lee 201). People forget that everyone, even people who are different, feel the same way they do and have the same emotions. However, the biggest issue arises when there are those who decide that it is their job to choose what kind of person deserves rights and what kind of person does not. It is not difficult to find similarities between those who impede upon the freedom of not-Caucasian people and those who impede upon the rights of homosexuals.

Another example of inequality found in both *To Kill A Mockingbird* and modern-day society is sexism. Women both then and now have to deal with lower pay, derogatory treatment, and the stereotype of being weak and superficial. Scout, who could have been one of the strongest characters, was often left alone because her brother and her friend thought that girls ruined their games. There were also instances of women who were beaten daily and forced to work- for example, Mayella Ewell, the very girl whose father made her put Tom Robinson on trial for rape and battery. Today, there are still many instances across the nation of domestic violence. Besides this, women are still often paid a lot less than men, and have to deal with

vulgar and derogatory treatment. They are still treated differently in sports, also, to the point that presenters are willing to make public jibes and act offensively otherwise, as well (news.smh.com). To paraphrase, women still have to deal with unequal treatment, as they did in the 1930s.

One of the biggest issues addressed in *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is inequality. While people have been working towards equality since the 1930s and the United States is much less segregated than it was, the theme is no less universal nor applicable to the world today. There are examples of racism, homophobia, sexism, and other types of unequal treatment in both Scout's world and the world today. While there may be different minorities today, the way they are treated is the same as the 1930s. Inequality is as big an issue now as it was when African-Americans were fighting for their rights. And, as Atticus Finch says, "You know the truth, and the truth is this: "You never really understood a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around it" (Lee 70).

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