**The Effect of Racial Prejudice on Morals**

Throughout the 1900’s in Southern United States, a plague of racism dug deep into the hearts of many. Racial prejudice was evident in people of all ages, injustices served often to those with black skin. **So how do encounters with injustice shape our beliefs about justice and morality?** **In both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Help*, young white people come to the realization of the mistreatment and injustice African Americans face based on something as simple as their ethnicity. In an attempt to change people’s prejudice, lawyer Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes the opportunity to defend a black man, Tom Robinson, who was accused of raping a white woman. When he was given the chance to defend Tom, he took the opportunity to do so.** Written during the era of civil rights movements, author Harper Lee showcases the bias African Americans faced and how that could affect their time in the legal system. *The Help,* written by Kathryn Stockett and the movie based on the novel directed by Tate Taylor in 2011, features **Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan, an aspiring writer who creates her own opportunity of reducing racism after seeing the serious effect of it in her hometown once her time at university in the North opened her eyes. Regardless of the differences, both books express attempts to correct the injustice and** **bias towards African Americans and succeed in opening the eyes of their community.**

Both Calpurnia and Constantine from *Mockingbird* and *Help* respectively, play essential roles in the young protagonists’ lives as maternal figures. Ever since Skeeter was a little girl, she had a special bond with the Phelan’s black maid, Constantine Bates. As the two shared a special relationship, Constantine had come to influence Skeeter’s morals with advice that made Skeeter believe “I actually had a choice in what I could believe,” (*Help*). Filling in for Skeeter’s overly critical and traditional mother, Constantine offers Skeeter a clear view on racial segregation, prejudice and how to love herself. This caring personality affected the way Skeeter would perceive coloured people, politics and racial differences. Jean Louise “Scout” and Jeremy “Jem” Finch’s mother died when they were two and six, since then their African American cook, Calpurnia, became their feminine role model. Calpurnia’s interaction with the children subconsciously impacts the way Jem and Scout regard black people. Calpurnia brought the children to her black church once, exposing the Finch’s to the difficult lives black people live in order to survive. Scout and Jem learn that black people must alter the way they dress, act and speak in order to be deemed acceptable in white society otherwise become more inferior. The role, impact and bond the African American women had with the white protagonists affected the way the children perceived racial prejudice and the way they handled racial segregation.

Hypocrisy is one of the most evident characteristics all the socially elite women of both Maycomb, Alabama and Jackson, Mississippi possess. All the white women gather often to have tea or enjoy luncheon to gossip and discuss town matters. One summer afternoon after Tom Robinson’s trial, Aunt Alexandra had insisted that Jean Louise join the women’s missionary circle for tea, which was hosted at the Finch’s. During their “holy” meeting, the women gossip poorly about Atticus defending Tom Robinson: “Some good but misguided people in this town…some of ‘em in this town thought they were doing the right thing a while back, but all they did was stir ‘em up,” (Lee 311). The women go as far to critique Atticus in his own house in the presence of his sister and daughter, revealing their limited and racist views. Furthermore, the women praise J. Grimes Everett’s missionary work with the poor Mrunas in Africa who live in the jungle but complain when their black help sulk over Tom Robinson’s devastating loss in court. Their conversations exposed Scout to the ignorant, racist, prejudice and hypocritical views the white women of Maycomb share, leading Scout to conclude that the women are simply insensitive and “hypocrites…born hypocrites,” (Lee 313). Much like the women apart of missionary circle in Maycomb, the women of the Jackson Junior league share similar ignorant attitudes. They are avid in supporting the Poor Starving Children of Africa and willing to collect canned goods for them but aren’t willing to send them money saying, “You cannot give these tribal people money…How would we know if they’re even feeding their kids with it? They’re likely to go to the local voodoo tent and get a satanic tattoo with out money.” (*Help*). Their intents are to mainly paint themselves a charitable picture, as good, caring women. Similarly, Skeeter realizes that the other women support Hilly and her patronizing ideas as they only wish to seem as good people and are not willing to help the African Americans near them. The irony in both *a Mockingbird* and *The Help*’s socially elite women is that they are willing to support the poor tribal African people living in jungles but refuse to support and aid the struggling black people in their own communities.

Clarity of racial segregation had come to Eugenia, her perspective on the world forever changed. Seeing the effect of racism in her own town, Skeeter takes the opportunity to educate the community on the injustice black women face at the hands of a white woman. Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter’s goal is to convey the message that not much difference is between one person and another despite their race. From witnessing Hilly’s racist actions, to learning about the injustice through the stories of African American women, and constantly remembering Constantine’s advice, Skeeter concluded that “We are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I’d thought,” (*Help*). In the case of Jem and Scout Finch, watching the trial their father had taken part in had completed their learning journey on injustice and morals. Both children, Jem particularly, was devastated upon hearing the jury’s verdict deeming Tom Robinson a guilty man. Their father, Atticus Finch, defended Tom Robinson as he felt that is was morally right and that all people should be given an equal chance to get a “square deal in a court…be he any colour of the rainbow,” (Lee 295). Atticus knew there was going to be a bias in the jury and it was a case that was unlikely for him to win but it did not stop him. The children realize that racism is an evident part of society and is quite difficult to erase. Though Jean Louise and Jeremy were able to clearly see the innocence of Tom Robinson, the ingrained racial prejudice was far too superior in the time of the trial.

Ultimately, whenever one witnesses injustice first hand, their moral beliefs are bound to alter. Different aspects of people’s lives may impact their beliefs on justice and morality. In *a Mockingbird*, from watching their father’s trial, Jem and Scout Finch learn about racial segregation and its affect it has on the coloured people in America. Scout and Jem are bewildered by Tom’s conviction, never truly having grasp the extent of racial prejudice in their county. Atticus explains to the children thereafter, “You’ll see white men cheat black men every day of your life…whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash,” (Lee 295). Realizing the insensitivity and racist acts white folks in her community demonstrate, Skeeter willingly attempts to educate her community that “not much separates us,” (*Help*). Though there are various other factors besides having close African American familial relationships and realizing the hypocrisy of many white people, injustices encountered first hand are the ones that are most astonishing and awakening. Racial prejudice and injustice have long been a part of society but there are a few bold souls willing to attempt and change it: “Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win,” (Lee 101).

# Works Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960. Written.

*The Help*. By Tate Taylor. Dir. Tate Taylor. Perf. Emma Stone, Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer. DreamWork Pictures . Walt Disney Studios , 2011. DVD.