

HARPER LEE AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF COLORED AMERICANS IN “TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD”**Nargiza Akhrorova Rakhmonovna**Senior lecturer of Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage.
nargiza.akhrorova1516@gmail.com

Abstract: Novel released during the Civil Rights Era, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, sheds light on the anguish felt by that society as it dealt with issues of racial injustice and segregation in the Alabama town of Maycomb. While the Ewells exemplify the worst of Maycomb's societal problems, Lee emphasizes that most townspeople are diligent and nice, albeit with a general contempt for colored people. The work explores the intricacies of human conduct in a racially divided society, exposing both compassion and bigotry. Lee uses the Finch family to examine themes of innocence and moral integrity in the context of systematic racism. The article illustrates Finch's family's actual attitude to the colored folk as a role model for the entire world.

Key words: societal issues, innocence, colored people, human rights, racism, segregation, Maycomb

Аннотация: Роман, выпущенный в эпоху гражданских прав, "Убить пересмешника," освещает страдания, испытываемые этим обществом при рассмотрении вопросов расовой несправедливости и сегрегации в Алабаме, городке Мейкомб. В то время как Эвеллы являются примером наихудших социальных проблем Мейкомба, Ли подчеркивает, что большинство горожан трудолюбивы и приятны, хотя и с общей ненавистью к чернокожим людям. В произведении исследуются тонкости человеческого поведения в условиях расового разделения, разоблачаются как сострадание, так и фанатизм. Ли использует семью Финча для изучения тем невинности и моральной целостности в контексте системного расизма. В статье иллюстрируется истинное отношение семьи Финча к чернокожим людям как пример для всего мира.

Ключевые слова: социальные проблемы, невинность, цветные люди, права человека, расизм, сегрегация, Майкомб

Annotatiya: Fuqarolik huquqlari davrida nashr etilgan "Mazaxchini o'ldirish" romani Alabama shtatining Maykomb shaharchasida irqiy adolatsizlik va segregatsiya muammolari bilan kurashayotgan jamiyatning iztiroblarini yoritib beradi. Ewelllar Maycombning jamiyatdagi eng yomon muammolariga misol bo'lsa-da, Li shaharliklarning aksariyati tirishqoq va yoqimli ekanligini ta'kidlaydi, garchi qora tanli odamlarga nisbatan umumiy nafrat bilan bo'lsada. Asarda irqiy bo'lingan jamiyatda inson xulq-atvorining sir-asrorlari ochib beriladi, rahmshafqat va tarafkashlik fosh etiladi. Li tizimli irqchilik kontekstida begunohlik va axloqiy yaxlitlik mavzularini o'rganish uchun Finch oilasidan foydalanadi. Maqolada Finch oilasining butun dunyoga namuna sifatida qora tanli xalqqa haqiqiy munosabati ko'rsatilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: jamiyat muammolari, begunohlik, rangli odamlar, inson huquqlari, irqchilik, segregatsiya, Maycomb

Introduction

The official start of segregation is considered to be 1890, when Louisiana passed a law prohibiting black people from riding in the same train cars as white people. This initiative subsequently led to separate schools, restrooms, store entrances, and drinking fountains. It reached the point of absurdity—courts had two Bibles, one of which was used to swear in people of color. For many decades, white people openly demonstrated that their darker-skinned neighbors were inferior beings who would be better off returning to picking cotton under the scorching sun.

..."I dream that one day this nation will straighten up and live in accordance with the true meaning of its principle: "We consider it self-evident that all people are created equal." I dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit together at a brotherly table... I dream today!"

- Martin Luther King, August 28, 1963

For generations, blacks tolerated biased attitudes towards whites, and only in the 1960s, when illusory freedom became commonplace, did they dare to fight for their rights and freedoms. In turn, the work of some whites, such as Harper Lee, subtly changed the attitude towards segregation. Her debut and until recently the only novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird", was published in the summer of 1960, three years before Martin Luther King's aforementioned speech and eight years before his murder.

"The book is written in Southern Gothic genre which illustrates "racial injustice and the destruction of innocence"¹. "To Kill a Mockingbird" was published in 1960 while Civil rights movement was going on in the US when racism was at its peak. The Author, Harper Lee frames the fictional town, Maycomb in Alabama to give a general view of diverse and unequal community and living standards in the South of the US in her book. The reason why she chooses to illustrate the South is that slaveholding lasted longer in its extreme degree in the South than it did in the North." (Mukhammadieva, 2023).

Opposition of Bob Ewell and Atticus Finch

The novel's action begins in 1933, shortly before the long-awaited repeal of Prohibition in the small town of Maycomb. The Roaring Twenties, which had illuminated only large cities with their presence, had lost their voice and faded into nothingness, but the Great Depression wasn't even thinking of weakening its grip. Although there isn't much work on the dusty streets of the worn-out Maycomb, its residents somehow manage to make ends meet and barely maintain their human dignity. Unfortunately, not all of them do.

The city harbored the numerous Ewell family, who dwelled on the outskirts in a neglected shack near the garbage dump, perpetually filthy and famished. The family patriarch, the widowed Bob Ewell, scraped by on odd jobs, drank heavily, and beat his children at the slightest provocation. The children hardly attended school - they showed up only on the first day of the academic year to comply with local laws. The Ewells claimed they missed school due to an abundance of household chores, but in reality, the children idled away their days, withering under the southern sun like wheat left unharvested in the fields.

“Every town the size of Maycomb had families like the Ewells. No economic fluctuations changed their status; people like the Ewells lived as guests of the county in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings. Maycomb's Ewells lived behind the town garbage dump in what was once a Negro cabin.” (Lee, 1960 p.170)

Nevertheless, Macomb deserves praise - individuals like Bob Ewell are very rare here. Most of the city's population consists of worthy, hardworking people who do not consider themselves above anyone and do not prevent others from living without a valid reason. Except for colored people here, as in the whole South, few take them for full-fledged people, although this is not so clear. And in this contradictory world, a small family of Finches lives.

The head of the family, the dignified and thoughtful Atticus Finch, earns a modest but decent living by practicing law and raises two children, Jean-Louise and Jem, alone. At the beginning of the novel, Jean-Louise, who is called Scout for her excessive curiosity, was only six years old, and Jem was nine. The world around them is full of mysteries and enigmas, but he doesn't yet hint at his true, merciless nature. But despite their young age, Scout and Jem are distinguished by extraordinary quick wit and prudence, which, however, does not prevent them from committing petty mischief and foolishness. According to Jonathan K Van Patten (2016), “for me, [Atticus] represents a generation of intelligent, white lawyers, who eventually in the 50s and 60s became the federal judges that changed the South. Really, without them, we would not have had a civil rights movement.”

Due to his advanced age, Atticus, who lost his wife several years ago, is no longer able to properly handle the exhausting work and children's upbringing, so Calpurnia, a slender dark-skinned cook with heavy hands, helps him in the household. But she doesn't just work for Fincea - neither the children nor Atticus perceive her as a servant, after all, over the years, Calpurnia has become a full-fledged member of the family. And this was despite the fact that in those times, white southerners did not allow colored nannies to raise children, so that the perceptive little ones wouldn't gain infectious diseases.

Figure 1

Atticus Finch's children Jeremy (Jem), Jean Louise (Scout) & Calpurnia



Note: Encyclopedia of Britannica, [To Kill a Mockingbird | Summary, Characters, Book, & Facts | Britannica](#)

Being Partially Biographical Novel

According to Harper Lee herself, "To Kill a Mockingbird" is not a biography in the usual sense, and nevertheless, she borrowed many details for the novel from her own childhood. Thus, according to the stories of the writer's acquaintances, in her childhood, she, like Scout, was a troublemaker and wasn't at all afraid to use her fists. And Lee's father, like Atticus, was a lawyer. In 1919, he had to defend two accused of killing Negroes - as expected, that process ended with a guilty verdict and two mutilated bodies hanging on the rails. After this story, Lee's father, who didn't particularly like colored people in everyday life, permanently refused to work with criminal cases.

The novel begins with a quote from the English poet and literary critic Charles Lam: "Lawyers, I suppose, were children once." One might think Harper Lee is addressing her to his father or Atticus Finch out of ignorance, but in reality, she is addressing herself. The thing is, she studied law at college, but in 1949, six months before graduation, she dropped out and moved to New York to become a writer. But before Harper Lee took on "To Kill a Mockingbird," she earned her living as an air ticket clerk for many years. According to the Encyclopedia of Britannica, "In 2015 Lee released a second novel: *Go Set a Watchman*, written just before *To Kill a Mockingbird* but set 20 years later featuring Scout as a grown woman based in New York City who returns to her Alabama childhood home to visit her father. Although some claimed *Go Set a Watchman* is an earlier draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it was actually Lee's first novel, completed in 1957."(n.d.)

The main advantage of the novel lies in its versatility. Although in a global sense, the story is told by an adult already familiar with Jean-Louise's life, in reality, the story revolves around Scout and Jem. All the important events that fit into the three years described receive a clear assessment, not by year. Thanks to this, the main characters naturally evolve along the course of the action.

For understandable reasons, the most exciting events befall Scout and Jim during summer break, when boring school activities don't distract them from adventures. Besides, in summer, Jean-Louise's fiancé, the neighbor's nephew Dill, a terrible liar, visits them. It is believed that Truman Capote, who lived on the same street as Harper Lee in his childhood, served as his prototype. Most of the day, the three of them desperately try to dispel the boredom that crawls like a huge snake between the drowsy and suffocating streets of Maycomb. The first person to appear at the mercy of this restless company turned out to be Scarecrow Radley - a Macomb isolationist who, for unknown reasons, never appeared in public. It awakens such a strong interest in children that their entire first summer passes in unsuccessful attempts to lure it out. And this is such a fascinating and sincere occupation, full of humorous and truly touching moments, that Harper Lee could well have built his entire novel around these extraordinary relationships.

Harper Lee subtly weaves various themes into the narrative - the stratification of society in the example of a separate white part of Maycomb's population; the arduous search for one's own self, including equalization to a contradictory ideal; the difficulties of fatherhood and raising children as such; the position and appearance of a worthy woman in the south of the United States; the human vileness and injustice of life and, of course, the oppression of the colored population. But the beauty lies in the fact that none of these themes is given a central role, all of them are the background on Jem and Jean-Louise's path to maturity, pits of varying depths they need to overcome to break free from childhood into exciting youth. However, one of the themes present in the novel still stands out against the general background, as it becomes the catalyst for the most piercing events that befall Maccomb. At one point, Bob Ewell's eldest daughter, Mayella, the same drunkard, accuses Tom Robinson, a local young Negro, of raping her. Atticus Finch is called to defend the poor man in court. In those years, the accusation of white women being raped meant only one thing for the dark-skinned: lack of adequate defense in court and a painful death at the hands of the enraged mob who wanted to spit on the law.

In the end, Atticus's readiness, sincerely believing in Tom Robinson's innocence, shatters Maycomb. Some call Finches "Nigger lovers," which puts Jim and Jean-Louise in a difficult position; others, without much advertising, wholeheartedly support Atticus's desire to oppose injustice, which is based solely on someone's skin color.

"There's something in our lives that makes people lose their human dignity - they would want to be justice, but they can't. When a white person opposes a black person in court, the white person always wins. Such is the undistorted truth of life." (Lee, 1960, p. 173)

At school Scout had a row with schoolmate because of her father was defending Negro. When Scout asked Atticus about his defense of Negro, he explained this way:

"If you shouldn't be defending him, then why are you doing it?"

"For a number of reasons," said Atticus. "The main one is, if I didn't, I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again." (Lee, 1960, p. 75)

Atticus tried to explain the situation to Scout, but she was too young to understand the whole scenario. He explained that Caplurnia, their nanny, knew their family, she was saying

that they were clean-living folk. As a member of the white people, he could not stand by the injustice situation. Tom Robinson was falsely accused to rape Mayella Ewell. After knowing the truth, Atticus can't help but defending the poor, slandered Negro. "Tom Robinson is a middle-aged African-American who is married and has children. He is such a naive man with a pure heart who forgot about the discrimination he faced throughout his life because of being African-American" (Akhrorova, 2025). He put the rights of the human being higher than the neglect he got from his society for defending Negro. By doing so, he demonstrated the real example of a protector of human rights. "Atticus Finch showed a real role modeling example not only to his children by defending Tom, but also to the whole world, and especially, Maycomb, Alabama." (Akhrorova, 2025)

Conclusion

To sum up, as being published in the period of the Civil Rights Movement, dealing with segregation and racial injustice in the small town of Maycomb, Alabama, it reveals the pain of that society at that time. While the Ewells represent the worst of Maycomb's societal issues, Lee emphasizes that most citizens are hardworking and decent, albeit with a prevailing disregard for colored people. The novel highlights the complexities of human behavior in a racially divided society, revealing both compassion and prejudice. Through the Finch family, Lee explores themes of innocence and moral integrity against the backdrop of systemic racism. The article demonstrates the true relationship of Finch's family to the colored folk as role model to whole world. Despite the strong aggression from the dwellers of the Macomb, Atticus Finch defended Tom Robinson, a peaceful, innocent, and kindhearted African American.

References:

1. Akhrorova, N. (2025). Discussion of Tom Robinson's vulnerability in "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee. ZAMONAVIY FILOLOGIK TA'LIMNING LINGVISTIK VA KULTUROLOGIK ASPEKTLARI: LISONIY VA MADANIY MULOQOT.
2. Fine, L. & Foca A. (2025, October, 13) To Kill a Mockingbird. Encyclopedia of Britannica, [To Kill a Mockingbird | Summary, Characters, Book, & Facts | Britannica](#)
3. Mukhammadieva, F. (2023). Mockingbird Survives. EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES, 3 (1). <https://doi.org/10.55640/eijmrms-03-02-12> pp. 64-68
4. Lee, H. (1960). To Kill a Mockingbird. J.B. Lippincott Co.
5. Jonathan, K. (2016). The trial of Tom Robinson. South Dakota Law Review. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/66943911/The_Trial_of_Tom_Robinson