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One of the major themes in Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is racism. You are able to see how, at that time, society was split in two sides with blacks on one and whites on the other. Maycomb, a fictional city in Lee’s novel, is similar to what a small town in America would’ve been like during the 1930s, because it is suffering from the downfalls of racism. Throughout the novel, Lee incorporates various examples of segregation and makes it known what the attitudes of the characters are about the topic. It is clear throughout the whole novel that blacks were never treated as fairly as whites.

It seemed like a way of life for the people of Maycomb County. The colored people didn’t interact with the whites very often. They didn’t even live in the same area. The Negroes always had their own part of town where they all “lived in a small settlement some five hundred yards beyond the Ewell’s” together (Lee 171). This settlement that they claim as home is at the end of “a dirt road that ran from the highway past the dump” (171). The Negroes aren’t even given the chance to live in a home near the whites and their church isn’t even within the city limits. The “First Purchase African M.E. Church was in the Quarters outside of the southern town limits” (118). Not only is it located out of town, but while the “negroes worship in it on Sundays the white men gamble in it on weekdays” (118). The white men don’t even respect the building they attend church in. When the Negroes do have a chance to attend the same public events as whites, such as the Robinson trial, they are still kept segregated. “The Negroes wait for the white people to go upstairs” and then they enter and fill in the “colored balcony” and whatever standing room may be left (163-4). The worst case of racism in Lee’s novel would be Tom Robinson being charged guilty. Everyone could clearly see that Atticus had proven Tom was innocent beyond a doubt, but yet a white woman’s word against a black mans will always win. Judge Taylor knew he would have no chance either way, but gave him a shot by “naming Atticus to defend him” (Lee 215). You are also able to see racism come out in the attitudes that many characters display throughout Lee’s novel.

It is made known from the start that most white citizens of Maycomb County do not associate well with the Negroes. In fact most of them, such as Mr. Link Deas, have Negroes work for them in the fields. Atticus also has Calpurnia, a Negroe, working for him around the house and although he isn’t bitter towards her, Aunt Alexandra makes it clear that Calpurnia is only there to work. The minute Scout asked about visiting Calpurnia in her own home Aunt Alexandra quickly replied, “‘You may not’” (Lee 136). Aunt Alexandra tries to explain the importance of keeping up the family name, which they all seem to be slacking at. Not only does Scout find nothing wrong with it, but Atticus has been appointed to defend a Negroe and Aunt Alexandra disapproves of that as well. Aunt Alexandra tries to teach them they could avoid all the “‘Atticus is a nigger lover’” comments by local school kids and community members if they would just realize they need to stop associating with the Negroes so much (Lee 84). One extremely evident quote of Miss Stephanie Crawford was, “‘It’s time somebody taught ‘em a lesson, they were getting’ way above themselves, an’ the next thing they think they can do is marry us’” (Lee 245). The Negroes can’t seem to catch a break in any part of their lives.

As you can see, Harper Lee is trying to show just how prominent and unfair racism was in the 1930s, the time *To Kill A Mockingbird* was set in. From the everyday acts of segregation to the characters attitudes towards the Negroes, racism was everywhere.

Works Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird.* Pennsylvania: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1960. Print.