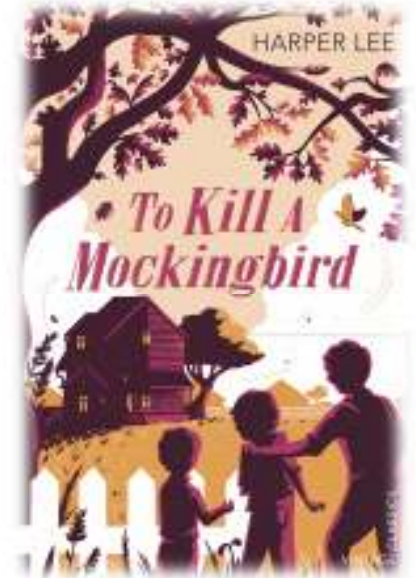


DEPICTING RACISM IN A SELECTED NOVEL OF HARPER LEE

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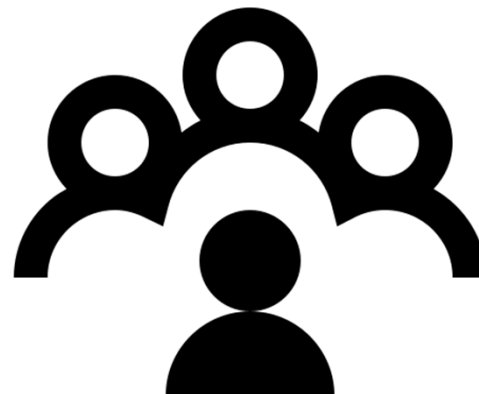
OUTLINE

- What is racism?
- The Civil Rights Movement
- Racism and women in the American novel
- A general insight into *To Kill a Mockingbird*: plot, setting, autobiographical elements
- Roles of women in *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Forms of racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*



WHAT IS RACISM?

- The Cambridge dictionary: “the belief that people’s qualities are influenced by their race and that the members of other races are not as good as the members of your own, or the resulting unfair treatment of members of other races.”
- The Cambridge dictionary’s definition is a basic definition, which was further examined in my thesis



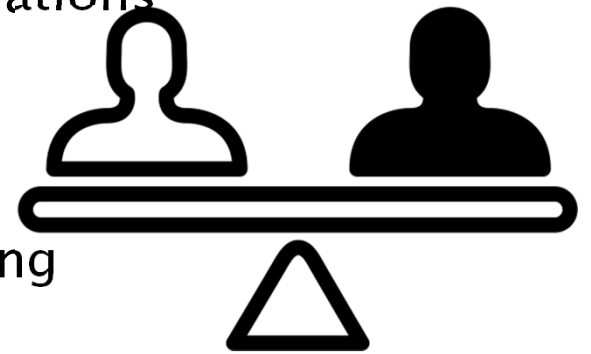
FORMS OF RACISM

1. Classic model of discrimination:

- first step – discrimination in social and in personal relations
- second step – discrimination in public facilities
- third step – discrimination in politics
- fourth step – discrimination in means of earning a living

2. Institutional and ideological racism

- Institutional: schools, jobs, laws
- Ideological racism: attitudes, values, norms, everyday speech



THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

- After abolishing slavery former slaves got equal rights and the right to vote. Most of the times they could not live the law and their social situations had not change.
- New laws were introduced, segregation and racism became a common practice.
- They fought against racism and segregation with boycotts, strikes, demonstrations and in courtrooms and in the press.
- Some organizations, like NAACP, SCLS and SNCC, helped the movement.
- The biggest achievement of the movement was the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which ended segregation in the United States and outlawed discrimination

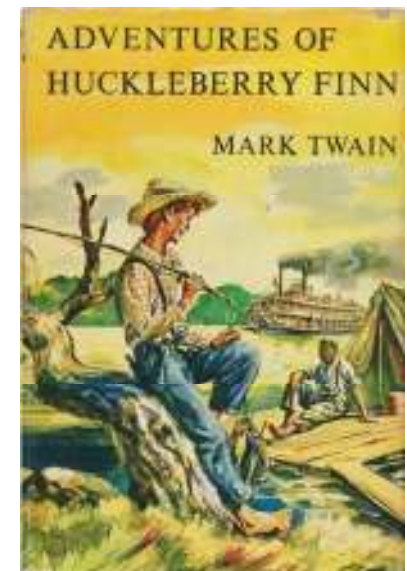
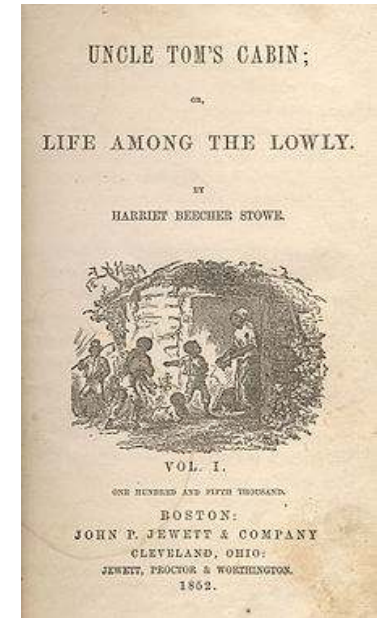
The Washington March, August 28, 1963



Signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act

RACISM IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL

- A theme, which appeared in literature since the beginning of American literature.
- There are three stock characters in American literature that white characters could either accept, reject or ignore.
 1. Accommodative slave: ignorant, coward and gullible people, with animal-like look (early stage of American literary history).
 2. Brute: black characters who defied against race relations, who, because of that, deserved their punishment.
 3. Buffoon: irresponsible, shallow, vain
- There was a slight shift at the end of the nineteenth century and a new black characterization appeared. Authors started to use more individualistic characteristics, like being independent, being responsible, having knowledge. They were not dehumanized anymore.
- Famous novels of the 19th century: Harriet Beecher Stowe – *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly* and Mark Twain: *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*



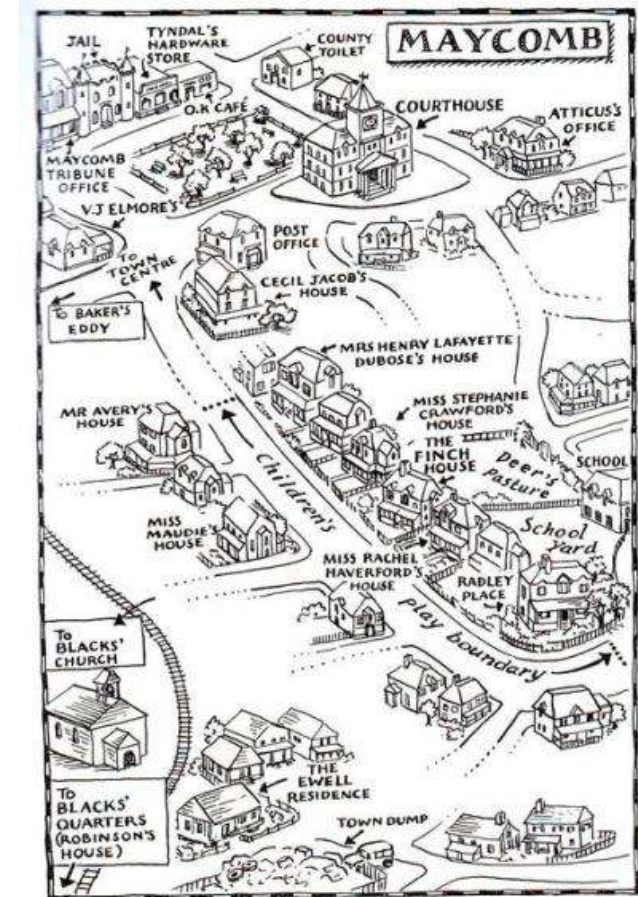
WOMEN IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL

- Women in the 19th century were idealized
- Male authors emphasized male supremacy, while women authors wrote about women who tried to escape their social status.
- Virginia Woolf was the first woman who declared that there must be a 'feminine psychology', she also highlighted that male writers had always misunderstood and misrepresented women in their works.
- In Twain's novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, women have an important role, because they shape Huck's personality.
- In the 20th century, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, women are considered as objects, whose love can be bought.



A GENERAL INSIGHT INTO *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

- The novel covers three years of the Finch family.
- The main character is Jean Louis 'Scout' Finch. Her father is Atticus Finch and she also has a brother, Jem Finch. The novel is narrated by Jean Louis Finch.
- The story takes place in Alabama, Maycomb.
- Atticus has to defend an African American person, Tom Robinson, in court. He wants to do his job right, but the town do not like the idea of that. The story circles around this case and affects Scout's life as well.
- The novel deals with the questions of racism and prejudice. Hints about segregation can be found in the novel as well. The novel was published in 1960, during the Civil Rights Movement and its influence can be observed in



AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

- Harper Lee grew up in Monroeville, Alabama, a similar town to Maycomb.
- Some characters were modeled about real life persons.
- Jean Louise has the same characteristics as the author.
- Her childhood friend, Truman Capote inspired Dill's character.
- Atticus's character carries the most similarities. Lee's father was a lawyer, she admired him and she really liked to sit in her father's lap.
- Lee borrowed her mother's maiden name Cunningham Finch.
- Tom's story is also based on a true story. Lee tried to help two African American men who were sentenced to prison with murder.



Harper Lee with her father



Harper Lee and Truman Capote

ROLES OF WOMEN IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

- Women's role and contemporary situation in the novel is subsidiary, but significant at the same time. Scout has strong women role models.
- Aunt Alexandra: the true Southern lady, who tries to turn Scout into a lady as well. Despite her efforts, Scout resists, but she achieves some of her goals.
- Miss Maudie Atkinson: pure kindness. She is a moral guidance for Scout, who bakes delicious cakes and loves flowers. She always has some good thoughts to share with her.
- Both of them are unemployed women, who remain strong in the changing world. They both have their own principles and they both have strong opinions and they are not afraid to share them.



Miss Maudie with Scout in the movie To Kill a Mockingbird (1962); portrayed by Rosemary Murphy.

ROLES OF WOMEN IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

- Calpurnia is a strong, hard-working woman, who is an everyday role model for Scout.
- Miss Caroline Fisher is Scout's teacher. Their journey begins roughly, but Scout realizes it is not good for her to be constantly in fight with her.
- They are good role models for Scout, because she can see that a woman can make a career and can earn a living by herself. From them, she learns that hard work always pays off.



*Calpurnia in the movie
To Kill a Mockingbird
(1962); portrayed by
Estelle Evans.*

CLASSIC MODEL OF DISCRIMINATION IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

1. Discrimination in social and in personal relations

- This is the central theme in the novel: there is a black man who is accused with rape and there are a few white people who even doubt the fact that he is guilty.
- The story of Dolphus Raymond: he is a white man whose wife is a black woman; ; because of that people in town ignore him and tell rude things about him. He is pretending to be a drunk and everybody think that it is because of his wife. But on the day of Tom's trial, he confesses the truth to Scout and Dill. He tells them that he is pretending to be drunk, but he actually drinks Coca-Cola. He explains himself:

'I'm not much of a drinker, but you see they could never,



Tom Robinson in the movie To Kill a Mockingbird (1962); portrayed by Brock Peters.

2. Discrimination in public facilities

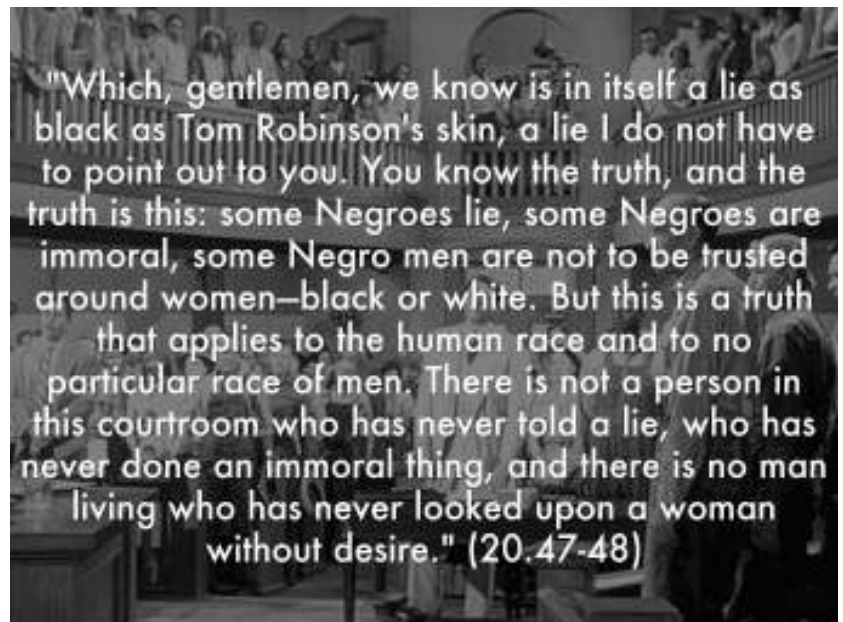
- The book does not deal with this topic openly, but we get a clear image about this situation through the descriptions and acts of the characters.
- The most obvious example of segregation in the book is the trial. White and black people are separated from each other and there are certain rules that has to be followed.
- It is not said in the book that schools are segregated, but neither Scout nor Jem mentions if they would have black classmates, so it can be assumed, that the local school is only attended by white students.
- The church was also segregated. The African-American community had its own place for Sunday church, but the building was used by white men for gambling twice a



*Jem, Scout and Dill on the balcony for African Americans.
Scene from the movie To Kill a Mockingbird (1962).*

3. Discrimination in politics

- The novel does not deal with the contemporary political situation. It is not obvious from the novel what laws were created against African Americans.
- Tom Robinson's trial is correct. The lawyers select the jury; the judge carries out the trial appropriately.
- On the other hand, all the evidence is not interpreted according to law. The all-white jury relies on their own instincts and prejudices, as a result, this determines the outcome of the case. That is the point when we understand that the legal system is compromised



4. Discrimination in means of earning a living

- It is not clear from the novel how African Americans live. We know that they live outskirts of the town.
- The houses are small and big families live in them.
- We get a clearer image about their lifestyle during Scout's and Jem's visit in their church and also during the trial, when Tom talks about his jobs.
- In the church, people are collecting money for Tom's wife, Helen. African Americans were hired mainly for seasonal jobs, but Helen's situation is even more difficult; she is condemned, because of her husband.

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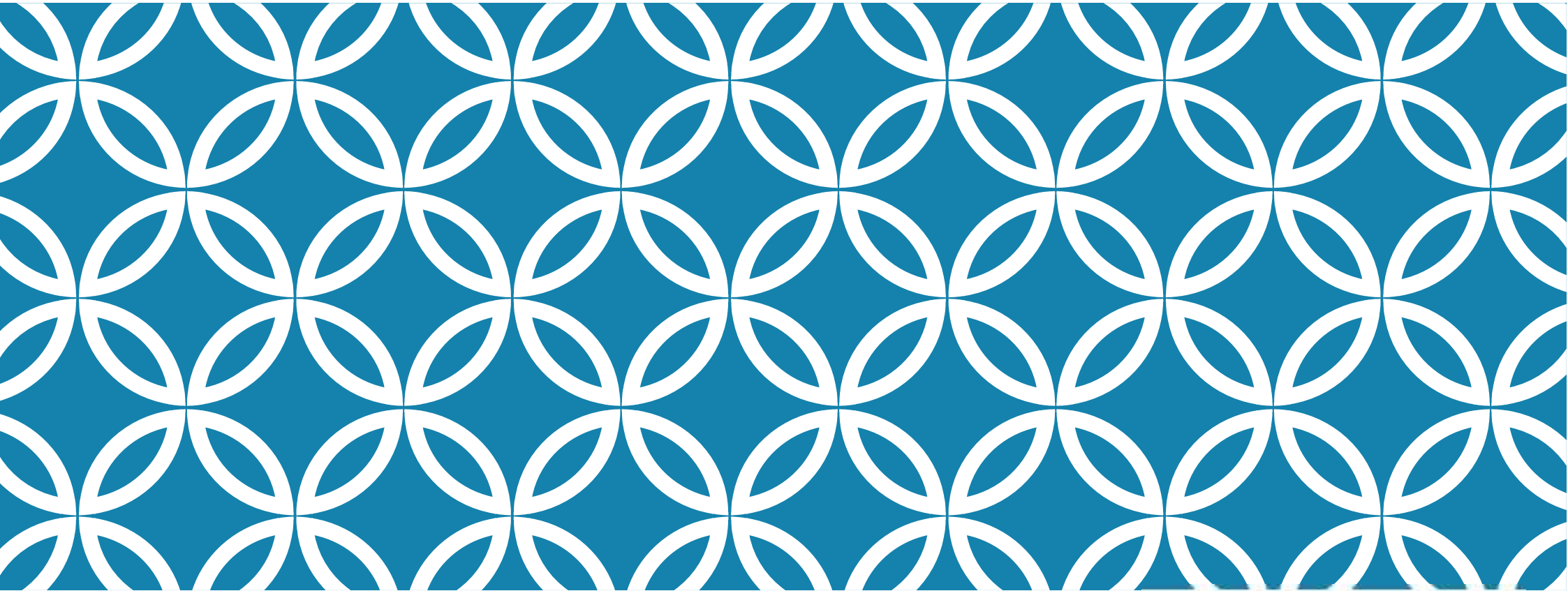
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