Racism in To Kill A Mockingbird

Maycomb County is a microcosm of the Deep South of America. It is emblematic of the prejudice, racial injustice, narrow-mindedness, and Great Depression devastation that was present under the Jim Crow era. In this novel, Harper Lee projects racism and details how it ruins social harmony. In addition, Lee utilises the case of Tom Robinson to illustrate the characters who fight against bigotry, namely Atticus. Throughout the novel, we see Atticus' attempts for justice and how he puts his morals higher than his reputation in the white community.

highlighting the old, ingrained attitudes the majority of the community possess. Symbolism is apparent within the quotation "black dogs suffered on a summer's day", with Lees use of the negative verb 'suffered' and metaphor for African-Americans highlighting the injustices many experienced in the Maycomb community due to segregation imposed by Jim Crow Laws. The Jim Crow Laws served to legally and socially restrict African-Americans from voting poll tax (too expensive), literacy tests (too difficult) and intimidation and were a major factor in the Great Migration during the early part of the 20th century as opportunities were so limited in the South that African-Americans moved in great numbers to northern cities to seek a better life. Prejudice however, is particularly apparent within the significant quotation "but around here once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black", with Lee's use of a declarative and a caesura (which creates a sense of finality, therefore reflecting on Maycomb's ignorance towards tolerance) highlighting how extreme and fundamental prejudice is within Maycomb life.

A real life example of this in the Deep South would be when Homer Adolph Plessy bought a train ticket from New Orleans in 1892 and sat in the whites - only car. However, because he was 1/8 African, he was arrested and jailed. This clearly demonstrates how the majority of the white community view Negro blood almost like a disease, infecting their humanity.

FOCUS	KEY IDEAS	CONTEXT	EVIDENCE	ANALYSIS
Maycomb	However, this is very ironic as it is "Maycomb's usual disease" that is the root cause of this.			
	Disease		"Maycomb's usual disease"	Noun "disease" refers to the hatred and racism which continues to spread due to the town's homogenous tribe mentality, resulting in the prejudice becoming normality, further reinforced by adj
	According to Atticus, prejudice and racism send people "stark raving mad", which can be seen in the lynch mob episode outside Maycomb Jail. Mr Cunningham is described as a			
	Lynching	Lynching was an extra-judicial execution … in order to punish an 'alleged' transgressor …. It was essentially a means of social control and approxi-mately 3,500 African Americans were lynched in the US between 1882 and 1968 (just as in the novel, a lynch mob gathered outside the jail in the	"good man but he has his blind spots"	The adj "blind" shows how racism can block the path of justice, leading to events like lynching.

		Scottsboro case of 1931, demanding the boys be surrendered).		

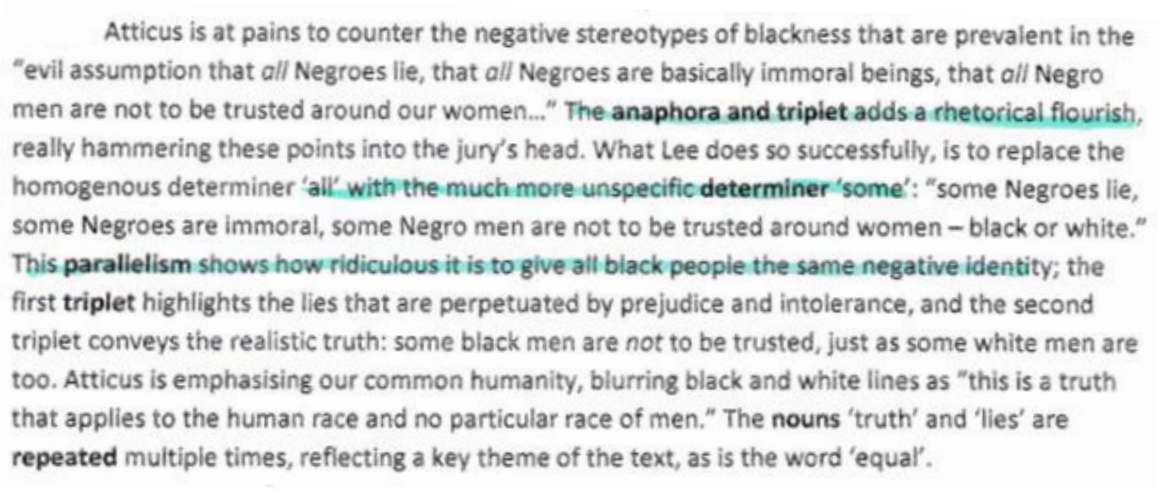
Before we even get to the legal trial, it is clear from the symbolism of the courthouse that justice in Maycomb is unbalanced and ineffective. It is described as a "miniature Gothic joke" and the fact that it looks "like something Cousin Joshua St Clair might have designed" reflects the theme of insanity and madness, reminding us of the metaphor about "Maycomb's usual disease", prejudice, infecting the legal system. Lexical choices like "fantasy", "façade" and "someone's dream" continue to highlight the pretence of justice, just as the white community treating the trial as though it's a form of entertainment ("gala occasion") shows the mockery of the institution. Miss Maudie aptly uses the simile of it being "like a Roman Carnival" bringing to mind connotations of the cruelty of ancient Roman circuses in the treatment of Tom.

Segregation continues in the courthouse, with the black people having to sit upstairs in the balcony just as they have their own "Negro quarters" (again, a legalised consequence of the Jim Crow laws which mandated the segregation of public schools, public places, and public transportation. The Plessey v Ferguson case of 1896, for example, was a case that helped cement the legal foundation for the doctrine of 'separate but equal' as Plessy's argument that the state law which required East Louisiana Railroad to segregate trains had denied him his rights under the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution was overturned). Ultimately, however, the focus is on Tom's predicament and it is through this that Lee comments on the unfair treatment of so many black men and women. One of the most notorious cases was that of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old black boy who was kidnapped, beaten and shot in the head for reportedly flirting with a white cashier at a grocery store in 1955. The men were tried for murder, but an all-white, male jury acquitted them. Not only is this a historical parallel to the injustice Tom faces, but when we consider the brutality of Till's death (his eyes were gouged out, for instance) it is quite clear that Tom would "not have dared to strike a white woman…and expect to live long, so he took the first opportunity to run – a sure sign of guilt." Tom is caught between two equally unviable options, and although he knows he is innocent, he highlights his plight when he says to Atticus, "if you was a nigger like me, you'd be scared too". The repetition of the verb 'scared' (also repeated in his statement that he was "scared I'd hafta face up to what I didn't do") has the effect of reflecting the fear black people must have had knowing they were facing a legal system that appeared to take no notice of the actual facts. Again, the trials of the Scottsboro boys, the nine black teenagers falsely accused of rape in Alabama in 1931, was another notorious example of a miscarriage of justice that lends historical credence to these fears. Even though one of the alleged 'victims' admitted that she had fabricated the entire story, the defendants were still found guilty, so when Tom asserts that he is scared he'd have to face up to something he hasn't done, his fears are legitimate.

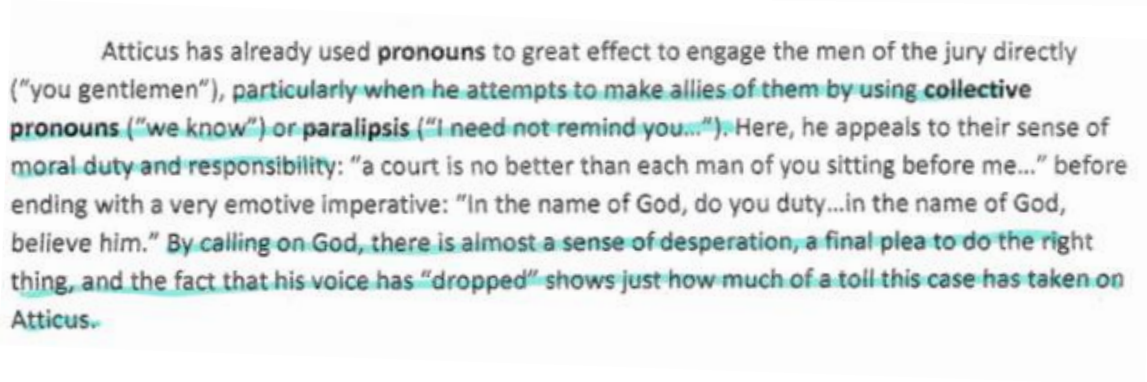
Dill is particularly affected by the trial, crying and repeating "it made me sick, plain sick" which feeds back into the idea that this is a side effect of Maycomb's disease. Jem's certainty that they have won ("You think they'll aquit him that fast?") similarly reflects on the purity of the children and the way in which they are judging the case as it *should* be judged. Despite the protests of the children, however, in the context of this world, Tom's demise is inevitable, and the fact that he dies with 17 bullet holes (as opposed to Tim Johnson's one) highlights that in this community, a microsmic version of the entire south, a dog could be treated more humanely than a black man.

+ More on children moral purity

However, Atticus, one of the few individuals who fight against bigotry, puts his all into helping Tom stand the best chance he possibly could. However, before the trial, he comments, “were going to pay the bill for it”. This is an obvious reference to the Civil Rights Movement, which was gaining momentum at the time Lee wrote this novel. A significant example of the progress they were making would be the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Beginning on December 5, 1955, it lasted for 381 days led by Martin Luther King. In the Browder vs Gayle legal case, NAACP lawyers successfully won the case, with the Supreme Court announcing racial segregation was a violation of the amendments. Moreover, this is closely tied with the poem, If we must die, written by Claude McKay, where he explores how black people will “fight against this murderous cowardly pack”. The defiant, accusatory tone highlights his frustration and how he is trying to reverse the stereotypes, similar to the attempts Harper Lee makes through the character of Atticus.



Atticus is at pains to counter the negative stereotypes of blackness that are prevalent in the "evil assumption that *all* Negroes lie, that *all* Negroes are basically immoral beings, that *all* Negro men are not to be trusted around our women..." The **anaphora and triplet** adds a rhetorical flourish, really hammering these points into the jury's head. What Lee does so successfully, is to replace the homogenous determiner 'all' with the much more unspecific **determiner** 'some': "some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women – black or white." This **parallelism** shows how ridiculous it is to give all black people the same negative identity; the first **triplet** highlights the lies that are perpetuated by prejudice and intolerance, and the second triplet conveys the realistic truth: some black men are *not* to be trusted, just as some white men are too. Atticus is emphasising our common humanity, blurring black and white lines as "this is a truth that applies to the human race and no particular race of men." The **nouns** 'truth' and 'lies' are **repeated** multiple times, reflecting a key theme of the text, as is the word 'equal'.



Atticus has already used **pronouns** to great effect to engage the men of the jury directly ("you gentlemen"), particularly when he attempts to make allies of them by using **collective pronouns** ("we know") or **paralipsis** ("I need not remind you..."). Here, he appeals to their sense of moral duty and responsibility: "a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me..." before ending with a very emotive imperative: "In the name of God, do you duty...in the name of God, believe him." By calling on God, there is almost a sense of desperation, a final plea to do the right thing, and the fact that his voice has "dropped" shows just how much of a toll this case has taken on Atticus.

Conclusion	Throughout the novel, Harper Lee highlights the many examples of racism faced by the black community. In Maycomb, a microscopic version of the Southern states, we can just see how deeply enrooted it is, starting from the roots of the families. Moreover, we saw the effects it had on many characters, such as Calpurnia and Tom, illustrating the injustice caused by racism. However, there are a few characters who stand up against prejudice, and a significant one would be Atticus. Having taken these points into consideration, I conclude that racism is a significant theme in this novel.