

About the Author

Harper Lee

Nelle Harper Lee, whose family is related to the Confederate general Robert E. Lee, was born in Monroeville, Alabama, on April 28, 1926. She was the youngest of the three children of Amasa C. and Frances Finch Lee.

Lee attended the University of Alabama, where she studied law. She also studied for a year at Oxford University in England. Lee left the University of Alabama before completing her law degree. But she considered her legal courses valuable as "good training for a writer" because both writing and the law demand logical thinking. And, of course, the cases she studied serve as wonderful sources for story ideas.

After leaving school, Lee moved to New York City and worked in an airline reservations department. She spent her leisure hours writing stories. After some time, Lee submitted a number of short stories to a literary agent. The agent liked one of the stories and encouraged Lee to expand on it.

Thus motivated, Lee gave up her airline job and moved into a cheap and tiny apartment. There she was able to give full concentration to her writing. Eventually Lee's short story was lengthened into a novel called *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In 1957 Harper Lee sent her novel to publisher J. B. Lippincott. But editors there felt the book seemed more like a collection of short episodes than a unified novel. However, Lee was stubborn and refused to give up on her book. She spent the next thirty months rewriting and revising the entire work. At last, in 1960, the novel was published.

The book was an instant success. It won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for fiction—the first time since 1942 that a woman had received this honor. The novel also

received the Paperback of the Year Award, the literary award from the Alabama Library Association, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews Brotherhood Award. *To Kill a Mockingbird* also spent eighty-five weeks on the best-seller list and became an Oscar-winning movie of the same name.

In many ways, Lee's novel parallels her own life. Atticus Finch is modeled after Lee's own lawyer father, whom she greatly admired. In fact, Lee says of Amasa Lee, "My father is one of the few men I've known who has genuine humility, and it lends him a natural dignity. He has absolutely no ego drive, and so he is one of the most beloved men in this part of the state." There are similarities between Harper Lee and her narrator, Scout Finch, as well. Like Scout, Harper Lee was a curious child who often questioned society's rules. And Lee would have been about Scout's age at the time the novel takes place.

Lee also looked to the citizens of Monroeville when setting up her cast of characters. Dill is patterned after one of Lee's childhood friends, Truman Capote. Lee's father was the model for Atticus. And the town of Maycomb is modeled after Lee's own hometown. The schoolyard in the novel is the same one Lee played in as a child. And the Maycomb courtroom is the Monroeville courtroom, down to the last detail. Lee even patterned her characters' speech after the Southern dialect she grew up with.

To date, *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains Harper Lee's only novel. One reason is that, for Lee, writing is extremely difficult work. She might write from noon until early evening and produce only one or two pages that she is satisfied with. Yet this one-book author remains one of our major writers. And her novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, has become an American literary classic.

Critics' Comments

When books are published, critics read and review them. The following statements are comments that have been made by the critics of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The praise Miss Lee deserved must be qualified somewhat by noting that oftentimes the narrator's expository style has a processed, homogenized, impersonal flatness quite out of keeping with the narrator's gay, impulsive approach to life in youth. Also, some of the scenes suggest that Miss Lee is cocking at least one eye toward Hollywood. Moviegoing readers will be able to cast most of the roles very quickly, but it is no disparagement of Miss Lee's winning book to say that it could be the basis of an excellent film.

—Frank H. Lyell

The New York Times Book Review

The shadows of a beginning for black-white understanding, the persistent fight that Scout carries on against school, Jem's emergence into adulthood, Calpurnia's quiet power, and all the incidents touching on the children's "growing, outward" have an attractive starchiness that keeps this southern picture pert and provocative.

—Virginia Kirkus' Service

This is in no way a sociological novel. It underlines no cause. It answers no questions. It offers no solutions. It proposes no programs. It is simply an excellent piece of story telling, which on the way along suggests that there are in Maycomb, Ala., persons of good will in whom love and generous loyalty supersede law, and others in whom meanness—along with envy and fear—breeds lying persecution, under law....

—Richard Sullivan
Chicago Sunday Tribune

To Kill a Mockingbird is...frankly and completely impossible, being told in the first person by a six-year-old girl with the prose style of a well-educated adult. Miss Lee has to be sure, made an attempt to confine the information in the text to what Scout would actually know, but it is no more than a casual gesture toward plausibility.... What happens [in the story] is...never seen directly by the narrator. The surface of the story is an Alcottish filigree of games, mischief, squabbles with an older brother, troubles at school, and the like.

—Phoebe Adams
The Atlantic Monthly

Miss Lee does well what so many American writers do appallingly: she paints a true and lively picture of life in an American small town. And she gives freshness to a stock situation.

—Keith Waterhouse
New Statesman

Students enjoy reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but my experience has been that their appreciation is meager. Over and over again their interpretations stress the race prejudice issue to the exclusion of virtually everything else....

The achievement of Harper Lee is not that she has written another novel about race prejudice, but rather that she has placed race prejudice in a perspective which allows us to see it as an aspect of a larger thing; as something that arises from phantom contacts, from fear and lack of knowledge; and finally as something that disappears with the kind of knowledge or "education" that one gains through learning what people are really like when you "finally see them."

—Edgar H. Schuster
English Journal

Voices from the Novel

The following quotes are from *To Kill a Mockingbird*.*

"First of all," [Atticus] said, "if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (30)

"You mean if you didn't defend that man, Jem and me wouldn't have to mind you any more?"

"That's about right."

"Why?"

"Because I could never ask you to mind me again. Scout, simply by the nature of the work, every lawyer gets at least one case in his lifetime that affects him personally. This one's mine. I guess." (75-76)

"You know what's going to happen as well as I do, Jack, and I hope and pray I can get Jem and Scout through it without bitterness, and most of all, without catching Maycomb's usual disease." (88)

Atticus said to Jem one day, "I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." (90)

"I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won, all ninety-eight pounds of her. According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew." (112)

"Son, you'll understand folks a little better when you're older. A mob's always made up of people, no matter what. Mr. Cunningham was part of a mob last night, but he was still a man. Every mob in every little Southern town is always made up of people you know—doesn't say much for them, does it?" (157)

"But there is one way in this country in which all men are created equal—there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of an Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president. That institution, gentlemen, is a court. Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on this jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up." (205)

"I don't know, Henry. Jews contribute to every society they live in, and most of all, they are a deeply religious people. Hitler's trying to do away with religion, so maybe he doesn't like them for that reason."

Cecil spoke up. "Well, I don't know for certain," he said, "they're supposed to change money or somethin', but that ain't no cause to persecute 'em. They're white, ain't they?" (245)

"Well, coming out of the courthouse that night Miss Gates was—she was going down the steps in front of us, you musta not seen her—she was talking with Miss Stephanie Crawford. I heard her say 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. Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an' then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home—" (247)

*All page numbers provided are from the Warner Books edition of the novel.



GLOSSARY



Understanding who the following people are or what the following terms mean may help you better understand *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

acquit: to find an accused person innocent in a court of law.

change of venue: process of moving a trial to an area different from where the supposed crime occurred.

constructionist: one who believes in a law or constitution in a specific way and allows no room for different interpretations.

John Dewey: man regarded as the most important educational reformer of his day; he believed that schools should reflect society.

entailment: land or property that is handed down from one generation to another.

Henry W. Grady: newspaper editor of the late 19th century; leading spokesperson of the New South movement which tried to build the economy of the South through industrialization.

Great Depression: the severe economic crisis of the 1930s, supposedly set off by the stock market crash of 1929. At the height of the Depression 16 million Americans (one-third of the work force) were unemployed.

Hoover carts: broken-down cars driven by mules; named after President Herbert Hoover, who served during the early part of the Great Depression.

indict: to charge a person with committing a crime.

Ku Klux Klan: secret society with anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, and anti-African American views; uses terrorist tactics to intimidate "inferior" groups.

morphine: highly addictive drug often used to deaden pain.

NRA (National Recovery Administration, 1933-1936): agency established to help industries grow and to fight unemployment during the Great Depression.

philippic: a speech full of bitter feelings or abuse.

Prohibition: the time when laws prevented the manufacture or sale of alcoholic beverages in the United States. In 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment ended Prohibition.

prosecutor: lawyer who represents the state in a criminal trial; this person tries to prove the accused is guilty.

rectitude: moral judgment.

Rice Christians: those who become Christians only after being promised food or medical services.

Sir Walter Scott: Scottish novelist and poet; author of the historical romance *Ivanhoe*.

scuppernong: type of grape common to the southern United States; scuppernongs are yellow-green in color and taste somewhat like plums.

shinny: illegal liquor used during Prohibition; bootleg whiskey.

statute: written law.

subpoena: document issued by a judge ordering a person to appear in court.

union suit: undergarment for children, so called because the undershirt and pants were combined into one piece.

WPA (Works Progress Administration, 1935-1943): agency designed to provide work for the unemployed during the Depression. WPA workers constructed public buildings and public roads. They also carried out public improvement projects.

A Time in HISTORY

The following timeline traces some of the major events dealing with race relations and the Great Depression.

1890



U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* makes segregation on railroad cars legal (1896)

1900



NAACP is founded (1909)

1910



Ku Klux Klan receives charter from Fulton County, Georgia; Klan spreads to other Southern states (1915)

1920



U.S. Congress fails to pass anti-lynching bill (1922)

1930



1940



Haywood Patterson, one of the Scottsboro defendants, escapes from prison and flees to the North (1948)

1950

Last of the Scottsboro defendants freed on parole (1950)

1930



Great Depression (1929-1939)

First meeting of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (1930)

1931



Nine African-American youths charged with the rapes of two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama; eight of the nine convicted and sentenced to death (1931)

1932



U.S. Supreme Court reverses convictions of the seven Scottsboro defendants on grounds that their constitutional rights were violated (November 7, 1932)

1933



Second Alabama trial of the Scottsboro Boys; defendants again convicted (1933)

1934



Franklin D. Roosevelt elected 32nd President of the United States (1933)

1935



NRA (National Recovery Administration) begins (1933)

Hitler named German chancellor (1933)

1936



U.S. Supreme Court again reverses Scottsboro convictions (1935)

WPA (Works Progress Administration) begins (1935)

Jesse Owens wins gold medal in Summer Olympics in Germany (1936)

1937



Franklin D. Roosevelt reelected U.S. President (1936)

Four Scottsboro defendants freed; others sentenced to long prison terms (1937)

1938



1939



World War II begins (1939)

Nazi invasion of Poland (1939)

1940

Another Small-Town Halloween Party

Harper Lee based most of the characters and events in *To Kill a Mockingbird* on her own childhood experiences in Monroeville, Alabama. For example, Atticus is very much like Lee's own father, and Dill is drawn from her playmate, author Truman Capote.

An incident told in a biography of Capote reveals the similarities between the characters and events in Lee's early life and those in her novel. In *A Bridge of Childhood: Truman Capote's Southern Years*, author Marianne M. Moates tells of events that occurred during a Halloween party Truman gave at the home of his aunt, a neighbor of the Lees. Here we learn that sometimes even whites weren't safe at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan.



Don Uhrbrock, Life Magazine

Harper Lee and her father, Amasa, at home in Alabama, 1961

Note: The story is told in the voice of Big Boy, Truman's cousin and a friend of both Truman and Harper Lee. In the following excerpt, Harper Lee is referred to as "Nelle."

The party was in full swing when Sally Boular, dressed in a fluffy princess costume, burst into the house, shrieking, "Help! Please help! The Klan's got Sonny over at Mr. Lee's house! They're gonna hang him!"

She screamed her words as she described what happened. "We got on our costumes and walked as far as the Lees'

when the Klan saw us. They yelled, "There's one of them now!" and started running after us. We got scared and started running. Sonny tripped and fell in Mr. Lee's yard. He couldn't get up. They grabbed him and said they're gonna hang him! Come quick!"

Someone yelled, "Call the sheriff!"

While the adults crowded to the door in a hubbub of activity, Truman, Nelle, and I darted out the back door, down the steps, across the yard, and through the hedge. We reached Nelle's front porch before any of the adults managed to get there. All except Mr. Lee, who had heard

continued

Another Small-Town Halloween Party *continued*



Truman Capote

Granger Collection

the commotion and was standing outside in his undershirt and blue pants. He waded into the middle of the sheet-covered Klansmen, who had gathered in the middle of the road holding their torches high.

The Klansmen didn't offer any resistance to Mr. Lee, a big, strong man who had the respect of everybody in town. He was a member of the state legislature, editor of the *Monroe Journal*, and an upstanding citizen. No one wanted to be the one to cross him. When Mr. Lee got to the center of the activity, he came face-to-face with a Klansman wearing a hood with green fringe. This was the Grand Dragon.

In the center of the group was a series of silver-painted cardboard boxes that had been wired to make a square head, body, arms, and legs. Round eye-holes were cut in the front of the box on the head. The strange figure could barely walk with all the boxes wired to him, and he couldn't get his arms up to pull the box from his head....When [Mr. Lee]

finally removed the box, there was Sonny, white as a sheet, with tears streaming down his face. He tried to cling to Mr. Lee, but the boxes kept him back. "I wasn't going to hurt anybody," he said. "I was coming to the party as a robot, that's all."

Mr. Lee turned to address the crowd of Klansmen. "See what your foolishness has done? You've scared this boy half to death because you wanted to believe something that wasn't true. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."...

One by one [the Klan members] silently ground their torches into the dirt and faded into the blackened night....

While we discussed the excitement and danger, Truman was getting it all in perspective. Then his comments and questions bubbled out: "...How about Mr. Lee? Did you notice after he spoke there was no shouting, no more talk? Did you see the look on the people's faces?" He paused, then said thoughtfully, "The power of the Klan is gone. Nobody has to be afraid of them anymore."



Proper Clothes— Proper Behavior

*In the following excerpt from a 1920s article in **Progressive Farmer** magazine, Dr. Lee Vincent talks about the importance of proper clothing for children.*



Clothes Affect Behavior

Dr. Lee Vincent of the Merrill-Palmer School says: "For years I've been increasingly convinced that there is more connection between behavior problems and clothing than most people would dream possible. Many cases of shyness are due to the fact that children are dressed conspicuously¹—dainty...suits for boys who should be wearing wool socks and corduroys or tweed, ruffly dresses on adolescent girls who need simplicity, childish clothes for the boy or girl who is no longer a baby. With young children clothing can facilitate or retard the process of learning in an astonishing manner."

It is important, therefore, in choosing the child's clothing to keep in mind his need for social and emotional security as well as his need for physical growth. In order to contribute to his sense of personal and social well being, each garment should be suitable to his age and sex and be sufficiently like those of his friends so that he is not contrasted unfavorably or too favorably with the group.

If styles are such that garments bind or pull, harmful effects as round shoulders, varicose veins,² flat feet, or a nervous disposition are apt to result. Clothes so made that a child can learn early to dress himself will save many hours for the mother. Make it a point in planning clothes to see the dresses in smart shops, in fashion books, and on well dressed children.



¹ *conspicuously*: noticeably; attracting attention

² *varicose veins*: swollen veins, usually found on the legs or thighs

MORPHINE

A Southern Lady's Drug

*Morphine is a highly addictive pain reliever that is still used today, although it is strictly regulated. In the early 1900s, morphine addiction was more than an isolated occurrence. Following is a look at the "typical" morphine addict of the early 20th century. The data are summarized from **Dark Paradise** by David T. Courtwright.*

1920s Typical Morphine Addict

- white female
- middle-aged or older
- widowed
- homebound
- lives in the South
- property owner
- began using morphine for medical reasons

*The account that follows, from Courtwright's book, shows how Mrs. Dubose in **To Kill a Mockingbird** typifies the morphine addict of her time.*

There is, by way of summing up, a character in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* named Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose. Mrs. Dubose is a propertied and cantankerous widow residing in a small Alabama town. She is also a morphine addict, having become addicted years ago as a consequence of a chronic, painful condition. Informed that she has only a short while to live, she struggles to quit taking the drug, for she is determined to "leave this world beholden to nothing and nobody." Although fictitious, Mrs. Dubose personifies the American opium or morphine addict of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If all of the foregoing statistics were condensed into a single, modal type, it would closely resemble Mrs. Dubose: a native Southerner, possessed of servant and property, once married, now widowed and homebound, evidently addicted since late middle age. In all respects—her sex, age of addiction, race, nationality, region, class, and occupation (or lack thereof)—she is typical. Typical, too, is the origin of her condition: she was addicted by her physician.



Cotton pickers at work in the field

Library of Congress

Cotton Picking and “the Bear”

*Following is a firsthand account of the backbreaking work of picking cotton in the South, from **A Season for Justice** by Morris Dees.*

By the time I was ten, I was working with Wilson and the rest of the hands in the field. I picked cotton, toted¹ water, and sharpened the hoes used for chopping weeds. While none of this was easy, picking was the hardest.

By the time cotton is ready to be picked, the split bolls have become hard, thorny, unforgiving burrs which even the

most talented fingers cannot escape. Experienced pickers pinched the cotton between their fingertips at its roots in the burr to bring it out cleanly in one pluck. But the action was repeated too many times to come away unscathed.² Like everyone else in the fields, I hoped my fingers would toughen sooner instead of later.

continued

¹ *toted*: carried

² *unscathed*: unharmed

Cotton Picking and "the Bear" *continued*

If the burrs were the only thing to put up with, it would be bad enough. But there's the cramping of the hand, the sharp pain in the back from constantly bending over and dragging the cotton in the increasingly heavy sack slung over the shoulder or the white oak basket held on the arm. And there is the heat, the unrelenting heat that the hands call "the bear" because once it gets hold of you, it doesn't let go. As the old song "Cotton Field Blues" went:

I work hard every day, I get me plenty
o' res',³
Looka here, peoples, I'm gettin' tired of
this ol' cotton-pickin' mess.

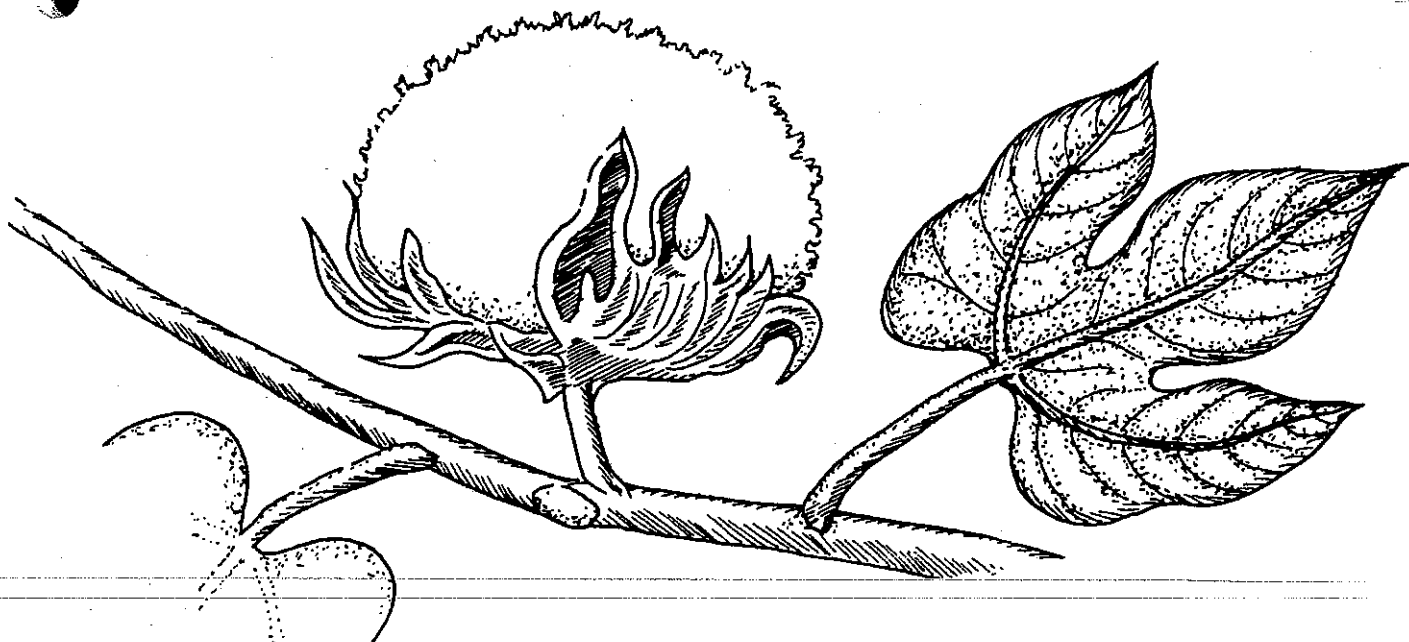
We cherished our break time. At the dinner hour, Momma would send me a quart of iced tea and a big plate of food (didn't matter what it was, just as long as

it was big), and after wolfing everything down, tired as I was, I'd take off with the black kids, Little Buddy, Thump, and John Henry, for salvation: one of the creeks that meandered toward the Tallapoosa River from the cool hardwood swamps.

It was a perfect swimming hole, no briars, the banks all stomped down, the water clear, and the bottom sandy. We'd tear off all our clothes and swim until we had to go back and face the bear.

There's no way to speed up the clock when you're working in a cotton field, but the hands tried to make the time go faster by singing religious songs with a feeling only they had.

I want Jesus to walk with me,
I want Jesus to walk with me,
All along my pilgrim journey, Lord,
I want Jesus to walk with me.



³res': rest. Here the songwriter is probably being sarcastic, since many cotton pickers worked long hours.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Great Depression was in full swing in the mid-1930s. Many families didn't have money even for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Here is an advertisement created by the President's Organization on Unemployment Relief, started by President Franklin Roosevelt.

Help Your Poor Neighbor

Grandmother never waited! When a neighbor's wife was having a baby and the doctor couldn't get there, grandmother put on her bonnet and shawl!

Mother never waited! When the neighbor's house burned down in the night mother opened her door. She said, "Come right in."

The instinct to help is in your blood. It has never turned a worthy man or woman down!

A few valleys away may be folks who need your helping hand right now. Maybe right in your own town. They're sturdy Americans like you. They want work, but there is no work for them. They don't want charity. But my, how they'll bless you for a mite of help!

Won't you take a look at your fruit and vegetables? Couldn't you spare a few jars? They might help feed families who have no food. Have you any warm clothes that you've put away for "sometime"? They might keep poorer folks warm right now! Is there an extra side of bacon or a ham in your smokehouse? It would be a royal gift to mothers who haven't any.

Tell your local welfare or unemployment relief organization what you have that you can spare. By giving generously you will have your share in a great common achievement. America is marshaling her forces to deal a death blow to depression. She is setting an example to the world. She is laying the firm foundation for better days for all.

THE PRESIDENT'S ORGANIZATION ON UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF

WALTER S. GIFFORD, Director

COMMITTEE ON MOBILIZATION OF RELIEF RESOURCES

OWEN D. YOUNG, Chairman

continued

The Great Depression



Dear Mr. President...

The Great Depression *continued*

During the Great Depression, thousands of people wrote to President and Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt. Following are excerpts of two such letters, which were printed in *Down and Out in the Great Depression* edited by Robert S. McElvaine.



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Augusta Ga
Oct 22, 1935

1936 cartoon from the New York Sunday News

Dear Sir Mr. Franklin D

Rosevelt, the president of the United state of american, I am wrighting you a few lines to let you know how I am getting alone. I had to whight you, to tell you, a few things about my condition. I am out of work I aint got nothing to do, and been beggin feelworkers¹ of the relief for work and they wont give me anything to do, and they tells me that we cant give you any work and cant give you anything to get food with, they laughs and make fun about me asking for something to eat dear Sir, Mr president I haven,t even got a bed no beding of no kind of my own and old lady iS funishing me Some old beding to use until the relef give me something and they wont do nothing for me but 12 lb of flour and four cans of beef and 4 lbs of prunes, and nothing to cook it with, and can you please Sir give me something to do. its is people that haves their own homes, and plenty around them gets it and I can't get work and nothing and please Sir, do Something for me and my three children and my old 70 years old mother, we ain,t got nothing to eat nor cloth....now dear Sir mr president will yo ell them something to do for me please sir tell me what to do, I am eating flour bread and drinking water, and no grease and nothing in the bread....so please sir do some thing for me and my children have wrote for them to give her so cloths and she had to stop School-cause she had [no] cloths and shoes.

[Anonymous]

¹feelworkers: fieldworkers

continued

Arkansas
March 1936

Dear President.

In the past several months more than one time it has come to me that I should write you about this relief that is so widely and fast spreading all over these unitedstates, Mr Roosevelt I want to ask you to please stop it, there is plenty of people today on relief who have plenty, just want to idle about not work think its fine for some poor working man to keep them, there are hundreds and hundreds of folks who should bee making there own liveing and could get work if they wanted it, but it is coming to the point where no one wants to work, avery one is fighting and strugling to get on relief.

And Mr Roosevelt, I do believe if you could reaily see the ruin it is doing you would I know stop it, the idleness it is causing, the sin it is causing and all sorts of mean things. penty of richfamilys here with a half dozen or more niger¹ familys liveing on their farms one to run at their call they furnish them ahouse and manage to get them on relief for food and clothes. this relief is realy geting thigs in abad condition. there is plenty here in my sight both black and white on relief, Iam sick most all time cant hire one to do a thing have to struggle along somehow, dont aven raise agarden or a thing to help theirselves just go around braging about the goverment keeping them, and more and more getting on every day, people seperating and men being put in pen for their awful crimes and there families put on relief, screening and fixing all the houses they have never had a screen before and wouldnt have now if they had to earn them. nigers and all.

Mr Roosevelt I realy believe if you could see aven what I do everyday you would change your mind and put this relief out of sight, and let men and wimen go to work and keep out of so much sin and the terrible things idleness leads to, Mr President I dont think God intends or wants us few slaves to keep up the idle world, Do you? keep them in idleness and sin, for God is a just God he says so in his Holy word. and this is not just. there is work for every one in this land if they would get out and do it, God has furnished plenty of land and every for every one of us to havesomething to do besides loaf and get into all sorts of trouble and sin.

The taxes are getting so heavy on us few who are trying to get along it takes all we can make to pay our tax, my last word is Please put the relief offthe map and make folks go to work.

Mr Roosevelt, I hope you read this letter and feel that it is really sincere,

And Yours Truly,
A poor Southern Ark Woman.

¹ Although the word "nigger" was used at one time to refer to African Americans, today it is considered an insulting term.



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VIEWPOINTS

on Equality

These quotes from speeches, letters, books, and pamphlets reveal some Americans' feelings on race relations and equality.

Not many of the aspects of life in Alabama are untouched by the influence of racial attitudes. The Negro problem has given a distinct coloration to our judicial procedures, to our social attitudes, to our educational points of view and even to our artistic and scientific endeavors. Religion itself has not been immune to the influence.

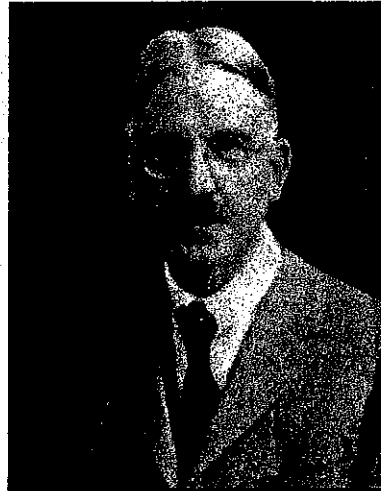
—Birmingham News
(January 12, 1934)

...To the Negro in these counties in the South the image of America is the image of the Sheriff.

—James Nabrit, Jr.,
May 1, 1963

As a race the Negro is definitely inferior to the white. The only fields in which they are superior are in their physical strength and their natural capacity as entertainers, making fun of themselves for the benefit of others.

—Robert Patterson,
journalist



John Dewey The Granger Collection

Belief in equality is an element of the democratic credo....All individuals are entitled to equality of treatment by law and in its administration. Each one is affected equally in quality if not in quantity by the institutions under which he lives and has an equal right to express his judgment....In short, each one is equally an individual and entitled to equal opportunity of development of his own capacities, be they large or small in range.

—John Dewey,
Intelligence in the Modern World, 1939

The real problem is not the negro, but the white man's attitude toward the negro.

—Thomas Pearce Bailey,
1914

We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the underlying assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction on it.

—Justice
Henry B. Brown,
who argued with the majority opinion in
Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896

Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law.

—Justice
John Marshall Harlan
(the only Southerner on the Supreme Court), who disagreed with the majority opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896*

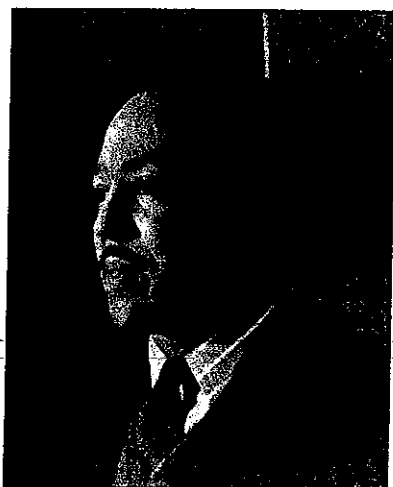
The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.

—W. E. B. DuBois,
1903

continued

Now where rests the responsibility for the lynch law prevalent in the South? It is evident that it is not entirely with the ignorant mob. The men who break open jails and with bloody hands destroy human life are not alone responsible. These are not the men who make public sentiment. They are simply the hangmen, not the court, judge, or jury. They simply obey the public sentiment of the South—the sentiment created by wealth and respectability, by the press and pulpit. A change in public sentiment can be easily effected by these forces whenever they shall elect to make the effort. Let the press and the pulpit of the South unite their power against the cruelty, disgrace and shame that is settling like a mantle of fire upon these lynch-law States, and lynch law itself will soon cease to exist.

—Frederick Douglass,
August 11, 1892



Langston Hughes

LOC



Eleanor Roosevelt

LOC

I think understanding and sympathy for the white people in the South is as important as understanding and sympathy and support for the colored people. We don't want another war between the states and so the only possible solution is to get the leaders on both sides together and try to work first steps out.

—Eleanor Roosevelt,
1956

We Negroes of America are tired of a world divided superficially on the basis of blood and color, but in reality on the basis of poverty and power—the rich over the poor, no matter what their color. We Negroes of America are tired of a world in which it is possible for any one group of people to say to one another: "You have no right to happiness, or freedom, or the joy of life."... We are tired of a world where, when we raise our voices against oppression, we are immediately jailed, intimidated, beaten, sometimes lynched.

—Langston Hughes,
1937

What, then, is the cause of lynching? At the last analysis, it will be discovered that there are just two causes of lynching. In the first place, it is due to race hatred, the hatred of a stronger people toward a weaker who were once held as slaves. In the second place, it is due to the lawlessness so prevalent in the section where nine-tenths of the lynchings occur.

—Mary Church Terrell,
1904

Nowhere in the civilized world save the United States of America do men, possessing all civil and political power, go out in bands of 50 to 5000 to hunt down, shoot, hang or burn to death a single individual, unarmed and absolutely powerless.... We refuse to believe this country, so powerful to defend its citizens abroad, is unable to protect its citizens at home.

—Ida B. Wells,
1898

We are citizens just as much or more than the majority of this country.... We are just as intelligent as they. This is supposed to be a free country regardless of color, creed or race but still *we* are slaves.... We did not ask to be brought here as slaves, nor did we ask to be born black. We are real citizens of this land and must and *will* be recognized as such!

—Mrs. Henry Weddington,
in a 1941 letter to President
Franklin Roosevelt

Legal Segregation

The segregation of blacks after the Civil War wasn't just an unspoken rule. "Jim Crow" laws—laws separating African Americans from whites—were actually written into many state codes and law books. Following are some examples written in the Alabama State Code between 1923 and 1940.

Note: The headings have been rewritten, but the text is the actual wording as found in the Alabama State Code.



Segregated theatre

Library of Congress

No white female nurses in hospitals that treat black men

No white female nurse shall nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed for treatment, or to be nursed....Upon conviction for a violation of this section, the court shall assess a fine of not less than ten, nor more than two hundred dollars, and it may also, as additional punishment, sentence such persons upon conviction, to confinement in the county jail, or to hard labor for the county for a term not exceeding six months.

Separate passenger cars for whites and blacks

All railroads carrying passengers in this state, other than street railroads, shall provide equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races by providing two or more passenger cars for each passenger train, or by dividing the passenger cars by partitions, so as to secure separate accommodations....If any passenger refuses to occupy the car, or the division of the car, to which he is assigned by the conductor, such conductor may refuse to carry such pas-

senger on the train, and for such refusal neither the conductor nor the railroad company shall be liable in damages.

Separate waiting rooms for whites and blacks

All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races, but such accommodations for the races shall be equal.

Separation of white and black convicts

It shall be unlawful for white and colored convicts to be chained together or to be allowed to sleep together.

Separate Schools

...Separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race.

No interracial marriages

The legislature shall never pass any law to authorize or legalize any marriage between any white person and a negro, or descendant of a negro.



Segregated water fountains

Standard Oil Co. Collection



Courthouse in Somerset, Ohio, 1938

Library of Congress

JUSTICE FOR ALL

The following amendments were added to the U.S. Constitution to ensure fair treatment in the courtroom.

Amendment Six

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to have compulsory process for obtaining Witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

Amendment Seven

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Amendment Eight

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

Amendment Fourteen

Section 1

1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.
2. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States;
3. nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law;
4. nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

SEPARATE



Public school for white children

Bettman



Public school for black children

Bettman

but **EQUAL?**

*In the 1930s, African Americans were forced to attend segregated schools. And while these schools were legally supposed to be equal to "white" schools, they almost never came close to measuring up. In this excerpt from **Echo in My Soul**, Septima Poinsetta Clark describes her beginning days as a black principal in a Southern black school.*

Here I was, a high-school graduate, eighteen years old, principal in a two-teacher school with 132 pupils ranging from beginners to eighth graders, with no teaching experience, a schoolhouse constructed of boards running up and down, with no slats in the cracks, and a fireplace at one end of the room that cooked the pupils immediately in front of it but allowed those in the rear to shiver and freeze on their uncomfortable, hard, back-breaking benches....

I had the older children, roughly the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The other teacher had those through the fourth. But my pupils in the seventh and eighth grades...were most erratic in their attendance, for they were old enough to work in the fields. They didn't come in until the cotton had been picked, and often it was Christmas and sometimes even January before all the cotton was gleaned.¹ To add to this difficulty, most of these children had to stop school in early spring to begin preparing the fields for the new crop. Naturally, the attendance varied greatly from day to day.

We tried as best we could to classify these children. But it was difficult. Some subjects I was able to teach most of them at the same time, and so was the other teacher; we could make better time that way. But there were subjects that required almost individual teaching. Another problem was the lack of textbooks. There were so few, and what we had were not uniform. In the spelling classes, I remember, I often wrote out lists of words to be studied....

In those days the state financed the schools, but sometimes the counties provided small supplements and Charleston County was one of them. Soon I was getting a supplement of five dollars, which made my salary \$35 a month. But right across from me—it happened that the white school and the Negro school in this community were not far apart—was the white teacher getting \$85 a month and teaching three—yes, three—pupils.

It wasn't fair, of course; it was the rankest discrimination.

¹ gleaned: gathered

A Southern Vacation

*In the 1930s, the Federal Writers' Project—a division of the WPA—sent questionnaires to hundreds of Arkansas communities, surveying them about their treatment of African-American tourists. They wanted to use the information gathered in the **Arkansas State Guidebook**, which they were hired to write. Following is one response to the survey.*

Newport, Arkansas, July 6, 1936

Dear Madam:—

In regard to your letter of June 26th, 1936, please pardon the delay. Will try and give you the information you request. I do not think that there is any section in the state of Arkansas that the negro would be discriminated against as long as he knows his place and most of our southern negroes do. However, the negroes from the north and east are not familiar with the conditions and laws in the south especially, in Arkansas, and would possibly have a right to feel that they are being discriminated against. For reason they are not allowed certain privileges of the white people. Namely, eating at the same table, rooms at the same hotel, riding in the same sections on trains. Divisions are made of the passengers in buses, trolley cars and other conveyances. These are laws our state enforces very rigidly.

However, I assure you that in the negro tourist traffic through Arkansas he must resort to negro tourist camps or colored quarters. I am sure you will find the same conditions in all southern states.

There is no feeling against the colored race as far as his being a tourist is concerned. He has the same road protection that any other person would have.

Hoping this is the information you desire.

Yours very truly,

(Signed)

Marion Dickens,

President, Chamber of Commerce

LYNCHING

Moral Cowardice

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

—Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontent*, April 23, 1770



Mark Twain

Library of Congress

Author Mark Twain had some strong views on mob violence. Here's an excerpt from his essay "The United States of Lyncherdom." Though he wrote it in 1901, it wasn't published until 1923.

It must be that the increase [in lynching] comes of the inborn human instinct to imitate—that and man's commonest weakness, his aversion¹ to being unpleasantly conspicuous, pointed at, shunned, as being on the unpopular side. Its other name is Moral Cowardice, and is the supreme feature of the make-up of 9,999 men in the 10,000. I am not offering this as a discovery; privately the dullest of us knows it to be true. History will not allow us to forget or ignore this commanding trait of our character. It persistently and sardonically² reminds us that from the

beginning of the world not one revolt against a public infamy or oppression has ever been begun but by the one daring man in the 10,000, the rest timidly waiting, and slowly and reluctantly joining, under the influence of that man and his fellows from the other ten thousands. The abolitionists³ remember. Privately the public feeling was with them early, but each man was afraid to speak out until he got some hint that his neighbor was privately feeling as he privately felt himself. Then the boom followed. It always does. It will occur in New York, some day; and even in Pennsylvania.

....No mob has any sand⁴ in the presence of a man known to be splendidly brave. Besides, a lynching-mob would *like* to be scattered, for of a certainty there are never ten men in it who would not prefer to be somewhere else—and would be, if they but had the courage to go.

....Then perhaps the remedy for lynchings comes to this: station a brave man in each affected community to encourage, support, and bring to light the deep disapproval of lynching hidden in the secret places of its heart—for it is there, beyond question. Then those communities will find something better to imitate—of course, being human they must imitate something. Where shall these brave men be found? That is indeed a difficulty; there are not three hundred of them in the earth. If merely *physically* brave men would do, then it were easy; they could be furnished by the cargo.

....No, upon reflection, the scheme will not work. There are not enough morally brave men in stock. We are out of moral-courage material; we are in a condition of profound poverty. We have those two sheriffs down South who—but never mind, it is not enough to go around; they have to stay and take care of their own communities.

¹ *aversion*: feeling of deep dislike

² *sardonically*: mockingly

³ *abolitionists*: people who sought to abolish, or end, slavery

⁴ *sand*: courage

continued

Southern Women Speak Out Against Lynching



1934 cartoon by Reginald Marsh

Granger Collection

In November 1930, the first meeting of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching was attended by women from eight Southern states. At this gathering the following statement was made.

We are profoundly convinced that lynching is not a defense of womanhood or of anything else, but rather a menace to private and public safety and a deadly blow to our most sacred institution. Instead of deterring¹ irresponsible and criminal classes from further crime, as is argued, lynching tends inevitably to destroy all respect for law and

order. It represents the complete breakdown of government and the triumph of anarchy.² It brutalizes children who frequently witness its orgies³ and particularly the youth who are usually conspicuous participants. In its indiscriminate⁴ haste for revenge the mob sometimes takes the lives of innocent persons and often inflicts death for minor offenses. It brings contempt upon America as the only country where such crimes occur, discredits our civilization and discounts the Christian religion around the globe. We would call attention to the fact that lynching is not alone the crime of ignorant and irresponsible mobs but that every citizen who condones⁵ it even by his silence must accept a share of its guilt.

We therefore call upon all our public officials to use every power at their disposal to protect from mob anarchy the laws they are sworn to defend; upon our religious leaders to cry aloud against this crime until it ceases to exist; upon parents and teachers to train up a generation incapable of such relapses into barbarism and upon all right-thinking men and women to do their utmost in every way for the complete eradication of this crime.

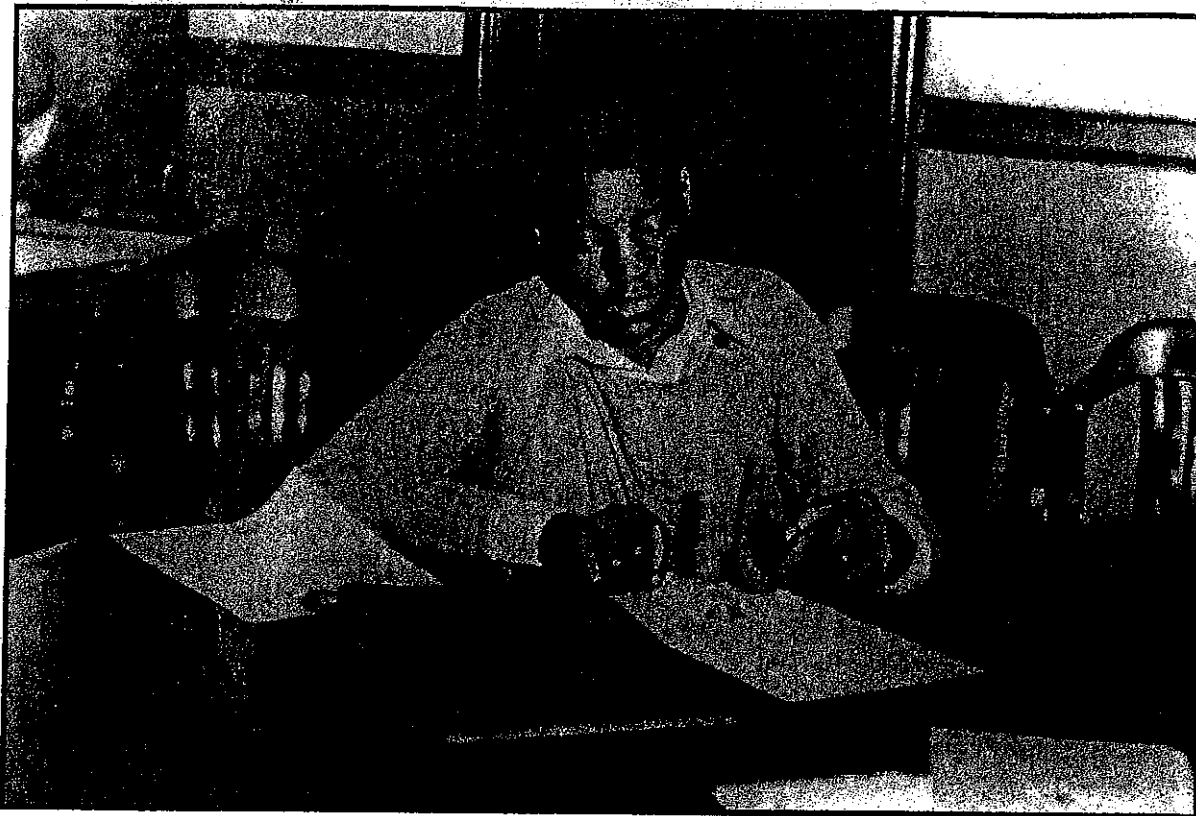
¹ *detering*: discouraging

² *anarchy*: absence of government; lawlessness due to lack of government

³ *orgies*: things that result in lack of control

⁴ *indiscriminate*: unrestrained

⁵ *condones*: overlooks; looks the other way



Haywood Patterson

Bettmann

An Occurrence in Scottsboro, Alabama

Haywood Patterson

In 1931, nine African-American youths were tried in Scottsboro, Alabama, on charges of having raped two white women on a train passing through Alabama. In spite of a lack of concrete evidence, eight of the nine were found guilty and sentenced to death or to 75-99 years in prison. Twice the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the convictions. In 1937, charges against four of the defendants were dropped; the rest received long prison sentences. Three were freed in the 1940s, and Haywood Patterson, the subject of this excerpt, escaped from prison in 1948 and fled to the North. In 1950 the last "Scottsboro boy" was freed on parole.

According to Haywood Patterson, the incident began when Patterson and his friends got into a fight with some white boys on a train as it passed through Paint Rock, Alabama. All were hauled to jail, but only the African Americans were detained. It wasn't until after they were put in jail for fighting that they were charged with rape.

*Patterson was tried in Alabama four times. Three times he was sentenced to death, and his fourth sentence, seventy-five years in prison, had been partially served at the time he wrote **Scottsboro Boy**, which details his experiences. The following is an excerpt from the book, which was published in 1950.*

After we were shoved into the truck I saw for the first time all us to become known as "The Scottsboro Boys." There were nine of us. Some had not even been in the fight on the train. A few in the fight got away so the posse never picked them up.

There were the four from Chattanooga, Roy Wright, about fourteen; his brother, Andy Wright, nineteen; Eugene Williams, who was only thirteen; and myself. I was eighteen. I knew the Wright boys very well. I had spent many nights at their home and Mrs. Wright treated me as if I were her own son. The other five boys, they were Olen Montgomery...; Willie Roberson...; a fellow from Atlanta named Clarence Norris, nineteen years old; Charlie Weems, the oldest one among us, he was twenty; and a fourteen-year-old boy from Georgia, Ozie Powell. I was one of the tallest, but Norris was taller than me.

All nine of us were riding the freight for the same reason, to go somewhere and find work. It was 1931. Depression was all over the country. Our families were hard pushed. The only ones here I knew were the other three from Chattanooga. Our fathers couldn't hardly support us, and we wanted to help out, or at least put food

continued

An Occurrence in Scottsboro, Alabama *continued*

in our own bellies by ourselves. We were freight-hiking to Memphis when the fight happened.

Looking over this crowd, I figured that the white boys got sore at the whupping we gave them, and were out to make us see it the bad way.

We got to Scottsboro in a half hour. Right away we were huddled into a cage, all of us together. It was a little two-story jim-crow jail. There were flat bars, checkerboard style, around the windows, and a little hallway outside our cell.

We got panicky and some of the kids cried. The deputies were rough. They kept coming in and out of our cells. They kept asking questions, kept pushing us and shoving, trying to make us talk. Kept cussing, saying we tried to kill off the white boys on the train. Stomped and raved at us and flashed their guns and badges.

We could look out the window and see a mob of folks gathering. They were excited and noisy. We were hot and sweaty, all of us, and pretty scared. I laughed at a couple of the guys who were crying. I didn't feel like crying. I couldn't figure what exactly, but didn't have no weak feeling.

After a while a guy walked into our cell, with him a couple of young women.

"Do you know these girls?"

They were the two gals dressed like men rounded up at Paint Rock along with the rest of us brought off the train. We had seen them being hauled in. They looked like the others, like the white hobo fellows, to me. I paid them no mind. I didn't know them. None of us from Chattanooga, the Wrights, Williams, and myself, ever saw them before Paint Rock. Far as I knew none of the nine of us pulled off different gondolas and tankers ever saw them.

"No," everybody said.

"No," I said.

"No? You...niggers! You raped these girls!"

Round about dusk hundreds of people gathered about the jail-house. "Let these niggers out," they yelled. We could hear it coming in the window. "If you don't, we're coming in after them." White folks were running around like mad ants, white ants, sore that somebody had stepped on their hill. We heard them yelling like crazy how they were coming in after us and what ought to be done with us. "Give 'em to us," they kept screaming, till some of the guys, they cried like they were seven or eight years old. Olen Montgomery, he was seventeen and came from Monroe, Georgia, he could make the ugliest face when he cried. I stepped back and laughed at him.

As evening came on the crowd got to be to about five hundred, most of them with guns. Mothers had kids in their arms. Autos, bicycles, and wagons were parked around the place. People in and about them.

Two or three deputies, they came into our cell and said, "All right, let's go." They wanted to take

us out to the crowd. They handcuffed us each separately. Locked both our hands together. Wanted to rush us outside into the hands of that mob. We fellows hung close, didn't want for them to put those irons on. You could see the look in those deputies' faces, already taking some funny kind of credit for turning us over.

High Sheriff Warren—he was on our side—rushed in at those deputies and said, "Where you taking these boys?"

Thanks to Sheriff Warren, the youths were spared the mob. They stayed in jail and awaited their trial.

On the night of the first day's trials we could hear a brass band outside. It played, "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" and "Dixie."

It was April 9 when eight of us—all but Roy Wright—were stood up before Judge Hawkins for sentencing. He asked us if we had anything to say before he gave sentence. I said:

"Yes, I have something to say. I'm not guilty of this charge."

He said, "The jury has found you guilty and it is up to me to pass sentence. I set the date for your execution July 10, 1931, at Kilby Prison. May the Lord have mercy on your soul."

The people in the court cheered and clapped after the judge gave out with that. I didn't like it, people feeling good because I was going to die, and I got ruffed.

I motioned to Solicitor Bailey with my finger.

He came over. I asked him if he knew when I was going to die.

He mentioned the date, like the judge gave it, and I said, "You're wrong. I'm going to die when you and those girls die for lying about me."

He asked me how I knew and I said that that was how I felt.

I looked around. That court-room was one big smiling white face.

It was never in me to rape, not a black and not a white woman. Only a Negro who is a fool or a crazy man, he would chance his life for anything like that. A Negro with sound judgment and common sense is not going to do it. They are going to take his life away from him if he does. Every Negro man in the South knows that. No, most Negroes run away from that sort of thing, fear in their hearts....

Now it is a strange thing that what I have just said I never had a chance to say in an Alabama court. No Alabama judge or jury in the four trials I had ever asked me for my views. Nobody asked about my feelings. Those Alabama people, they didn't believe I had any, nor the right to any.

continued

Ruby Bates

Before the second Alabama trial of the Scottsboro boys, one of the defendants, Ruby Bates, reversed her testimony and denied she was ever raped. In January 1932 Bates wrote the following letter to her boyfriend.



The Scottsboro defendants with their lawyer

Bettmann

dearest Earl

i want too make a statement too you....those police-
man made me tell a lie that is my statement
because i want too clear myself that is all too if you
want too believe me ok. if not that is ok. you will be
sorry some day if you had too stay in jail with
Seight Negroes you will tell a lie two those Negroes
did not touch me or those white boys. i hope you
will believe me the law dont. i love you better than
Mary does ore any body else in the world. that is
why i am telling you of this thing. i was drunk at
the time and did not know what i was doing i know
it was wrong to let those Negroes die on account of
me. i hope you will belive my statement Because it
is the gods truth. i hope you be belive me.... i wish
those Negroes are not Burnt on account of me it is
these white boys fault. that is my statement and
that is all i know. i hope you tell the law hope you
will answer

Jan 5 1932
Huntsville Ala Ruby Bates
Connelly Alley

p.s. this is one time that i might tell a lie but it is
the truth so god help me
Ruby Bates

Why I Joined the Klan

*Why do people join organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan? In the following excerpt from **American Dreams: Lost and Found** by Studs Terkel, C. P. Ellis—who at one time was a Klan leader—tells why he decided to become a member of the Klan.*

I got active in the Klan while I was at the service station. Every Monday night, a group of men would come by and buy a Coca-Cola, go back to the car, take a few drinks, and come back and stand around talkin'. I couldn't help but wonder: Why are these dudes comin' out every Monday? They said they were with the Klan and have meetings close-by. Would I be interested? Boy, that was an opportunity I really looked forward to! To be part of somethin'. I joined the Klan, went from member to chaplain, from chaplain to vice-president, from vice-president to president. The title is exalted cyclops.

The first night I went with the fellas, they knocked on the door and gave the signal. They sent some robed Klansmen to talk to me and give me some instructions. I was led into a large meeting room, and this was the time of my life! It was thrilling. Here's a guy who's worked all his life and struggled all his life to be something, and here's the moment to be something. I will never forget it. Four robed Klansmen led me into the hall. The lights were dim, and the only thing you could see

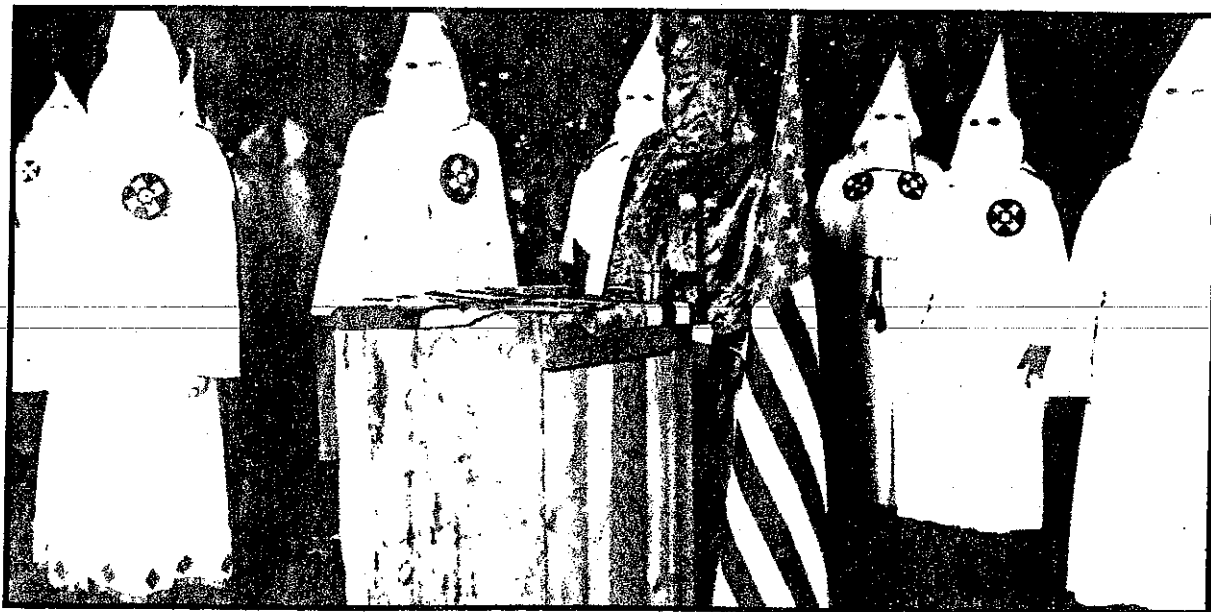
was an illuminated cross. I knelt before the cross. I had to make certain vows and promises. We promised to uphold the purity of the white race, fight communism, and protect white womanhood.

After I had taken my oath, there was loud applause goin' throughout the buildin', musta been at least four hundred people. For this one little ol' person. It was a thrilling moment for C. P. Ellis.

It disturbs me when people who do not really know what it's all about are so very critical of individual Klansmen. The majority of 'em are low-income whites, people who really don't have a part in something. They have been shut out as well as the blacks. Some are not very well educated either. Just like myself. We had a lot of support from doctors and lawyers and police officers.

Maybe they've had bitter experiences in this life and they had to hate somebody. So the natural person to hate would be the black person. He's beginnin' to come up, he's beginnin' to learn to read and start votin' and run for political office. Here are white people who are supposed to be superior to them, and we're shut out.

I can understand why people join extreme right-wing or left-wing groups. They're in the same boat I was. Shut out. Deep down inside, we want to be part of this great society. Nobody listens, so we join these groups.



Klan members at an initiation ceremony in the 1920s

Library of Congress

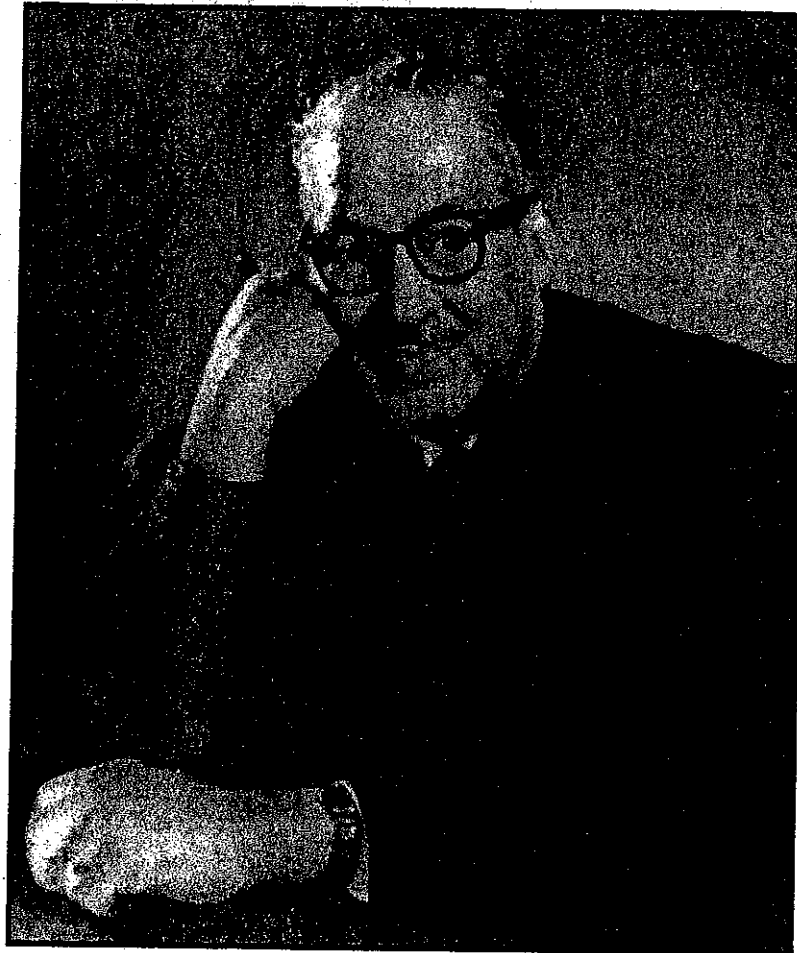
An Interview with Thurgood Marshall

In a 1990 interview with Ebony magazine, Thurgood Marshall stated some of his views on racism and the death penalty.

Ebony: Forty-five years ago you were fighting against the death penalty and today you are still fighting against capital punishment. Since the death penalty was restored in 1976, more than one-third of those executed have been Black, leading some to suggest capital punishment is genocidal.¹ Do you agree?

Marshall: Words like “genocide” are too inflammatory and too loosely bandied about. However, I do think that there has been far too high a percentage of Afro-Americans among the nation’s criminal population. Insofar as that high percentage is the product of deprivations² of constitutional rights, it is important for me, as for every judge, to help reduce that percentage.

Ebony: In your opinion, will capital punishment decrease?



Thurgood Marshall

Marshall: No. There is a tide of sentiment among certain groups in favor of execution. However, government authorities will continue to execute people only over my unflinching objection, for capital punishment violates fundamental constitutional principles.

Ebony: Looking even beyond 45 years, do you believe racism will ever become obsolete³ in America?

Marshall: Racism has always been obsolete in that it has no legitimate use in civil society. The problem is getting people to recognize that it’s obsolete. As I said before, I have a firm faith that justice will prevail, but I fear that it will take some time. Some years ago I said in an opinion that if this country is a melting pot, then either the Afro-American didn’t get in the pot or he didn’t get melted down.

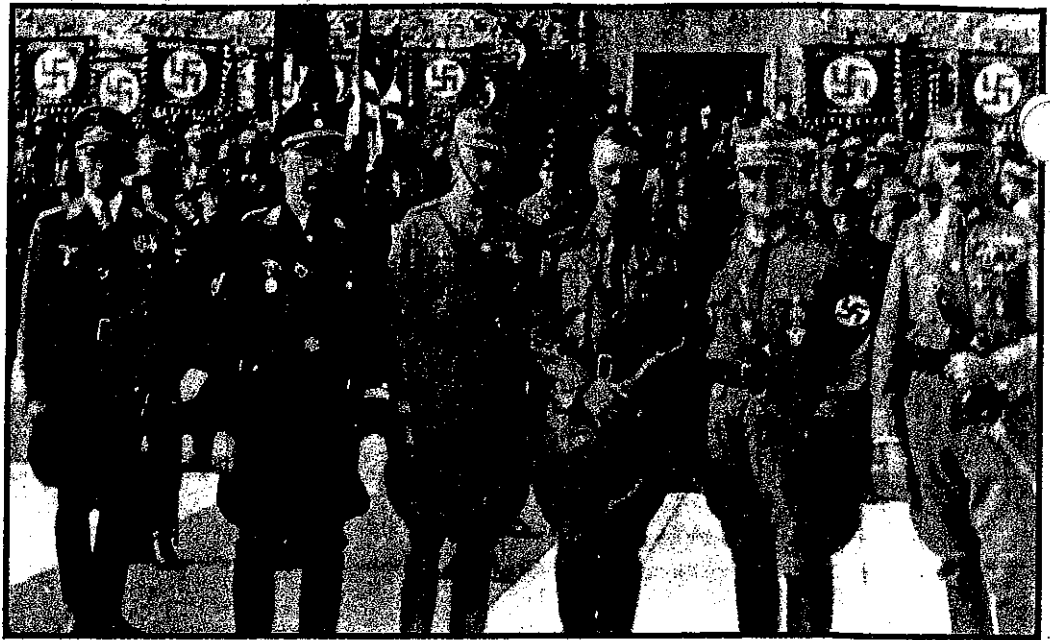
Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States

¹ *genocidal*: destructive of a cultural or racial group of people

² *deprivations*: denials; losses

³ *obsolete*: out-of-date

NAZI RACISM



Adolf Hitler with some of his followers

Library of Congress

Mein Kampf

*In the 1920s, Adolf Hitler wrote a book called **Mein Kampf**. In the book, he attempted to explain and justify the reasons he felt Jews, African Americans, and other races were inferior to Anglo-Saxons. When Hitler took over Germany's leadership, **Mein Kampf** became the most popular book in that country. One of the reasons for this was that the German government gave away numerous copies. Following is an excerpt from the book regarding African Americans.*

From time to time illustrated papers bring it to the attention of the German petty-bourgeois¹ that some place or other a Negro has for the first time become a lawyer, teacher,...in fact a heroic tenor,² or something of the sort. While the idiotic bourgeoisie looks with amazement at such miracles of education, full of respect for this marvelous result of modern educational skill, the Jew shrewdly draws from it a new proof for the soundness of his theory about the *equality of men* that he is trying to funnel into the minds of the nations. It doesn't dawn on this depraved³ bourgeois world that this is positively a sin against all reason; that it is criminal lunacy to keep on drilling a born [Negro] until people think they have made a lawyer out of him, while millions of members of the highest culture-race must remain in entirely unworthy positions; that it is a sin against the will of the Eternal Creator if His most gifted beings by the hundreds and hundreds of thousands are allowed to degenerate⁴ in the present proletarian⁵ morass,⁶ while Hottentots and Zulu Kaffirs⁷ are trained for intellectual professions. For this is training exactly like that of the poodle, and not scientific 'education.' The same pains and care employed on intelligent races would a thousand times sooner make every single individual capable of the same achievements.

¹ *bourgeois*: middle-class

² *tenor*: the highest natural male singing voice, or the singer himself

³ *depraved*: misguided; corrupted

⁴ *degenerate*: decline; go to ruin

⁵ *proletarian*: the lowest economic or social class of a community

⁶ *morass*: confusion

⁷ *Hottentots and Zulu Kaffirs*: groups of people who live in Africa

continued

Jesse and Luz

In 1936, American athlete Jesse Owens traveled to Germany to participate in the Summer Olympics. When he got there, he found he was not only to be judged on his athletic ability but also on the color of his skin. Adolf Hitler was Germany's leader at the time, and Jews weren't the only people he felt were inferior. To make matters worse, Owens' biggest competitor was a German named Luz Long. Owens knew that if Long beat him, then Hitler's views would be confirmed in the eyes of thousands.

*However, during the qualifying jumps, Long surprised Owens. In the following excerpt from **Blackthink: My Life as Black Man and White Man**, Owens describes some of his feelings at the time.*

I looked over at where the German ruler had been sitting. No one was in his box. A minute ago he had been there. I could add two and two. Besides, he'd already snubbed me once by refusing the Olympic Committee's request to have me sit in that box.

This was too much. I was mad, hate-mad, and it made me feel wild. I was going to show him. He'd hear about this jump, even if he wouldn't see it!

I felt the energy surging into my legs and tingling in the muscles of my stomach as it never had before. I began my run, first almost in slow motion, then picking up speed, and finally faster and faster until I was moving almost as fast as I did during the hundred-yard dash. Suddenly the takeoff board was in front of me. I hit it, went up, up high—so high I knew I was outdoing Long and every man who ever jumped.

But they didn't measure it. I heard the referee shout "Foul!" in my ears before I even came down.

After fouling twice, Owens became very upset and didn't think he would make it to the finals.

I looked around nervously, panic creeping into every cell of my body. On my right was Hitler's box. Empty. His way of

saying I was a member of an inferior race who would give an inferior performance. In back of that box was a stadium containing more than a hundred thousand people, almost all Germans, all wanting to see me fail. On my right was the broad jump official. Was he fair? Yeah. But a Nazi. If it came to a close call, a hairline win-or-lose decision, deep down didn't he, too, want to see me lose? Worst of all, a few feet away was Luz Long, laughing with a German friend of his, unconcerned, confident, Aryan.¹

They were against me. Every one of them. I was back in Oakville again. I was a nigger.

Surprisingly, it was Luz Long who came to Owens' rescue, perhaps sacrificing his own chance at the gold. Long gave Owens a few pointers on how to avoid fouling, and as a result, Owens was able to win the gold.

During the Olympics, Owens and Long became good friends. Owens learned that the situation brewing in Germany was more complicated than he realized. For though many Germans didn't agree with Hitler's views, they felt compelled to support him for the safety of their families.

Because of this, Luz Long fought with the Germans during World War II. During the war, Owens and Long kept in touch, and their friendship grew stronger. Long was killed during World War II. When the war was over, Owens traveled to Germany and met Long's family, whom he had heard so much about in Luz Long's letters.

¹ Aryan: people the Nazis considered to be of "pure" racial background, mainly blond, light-skinned Germans



Luz Long and Jesse Owens

Bettmann

Voices from Other Works

*Compare these characters and situations with the people and events in
To Kill a Mockingbird.*

"For the moment, put aside your apparent hunger for a good 'nigger stomp' and think....What would the good citizens of Caldwell do anyway to three white boys who had beaten up a Negro and abducted a white girl who they felt had had a friendship with him?" She looked around the group. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing, because these boys would have been acting as is customary in Caldwell, where it is custom, not law, that dictates how people behave toward one another. Nothing, because it is not customary to punish whites for abusing coloreds."

—*Ludie's Song*
by Dirlie Herlihy

[Odd Henderson] would be too proud. For instance, throughout the Depression years, our school distributed free milk and sandwiches to all children whose families were too poor to provide them with a lunch box. But Odd, emaciated as he was, refused to have anything to do with these handouts; he'd wander off by himself and devour a pocketful of peanuts or gnaw a large raw turnip. This kind of pride was characteristic of the Henderson breed: they might steal, gouge the gold out of a dead man's teeth, but they would never accept a gift offered openly, for anything smacking of charity was offensive to them.

—*"The Thanksgiving Visitor"*
by Truman Capote

Bailey was talking so fast he forgot to stutter, he forgot to scratch his head and clean his fingernails with his teeth. He was away in a mystery, locked in the enigma that young Southern Black boys start to unravel, start to *try* to unravel, from seven years old to death. The humorless puzzle of inequality and hate. His experience raised the question of worth and values, of aggressive inferiority and aggressive arrogance. Could Uncle Willie, a Black man, Southern, crippled moreover, hope to answer the question, both asked and unuttered? Would Momma, who knew the ways of the whites and the wiles of the Blacks, try to answer her grandson, whose very life depended on his not truly understanding the enigma? Most assuredly not.

—*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
by Maya Angelou

[Ruth] came into the breakfast room carrying the percolator and refilled the empty cups. Anton rose, pulling out a third chair. "Come join us." I watched Ruth's face for signs of embarrassment, for I was sure no white man had ever before offered her a chair. But if there was any, Ruth has better camouflage than the United States Army.

"Mr. Reiker, don't you worry none about me. I jest enjoys cooking for folks who enjoy eating." There it is! That's one of the things that Ruth does that makes the white ladies say she's uppity. All the other colored folks would have called him Mr. Anton, leaving the poor whites the privilege of calling him Mr. Reiker. But then, if Ruth played the piano I think she'd play only the cracks between the keys. She seems best suited for walking that thinnest of lines between respectfulness and subservience.

—*Summer of My German Soldier*
by Bette Greene

"It's the same," Thomas said. "I knew it would be. I knew it had to be the same." Standing in the vestibule, he felt so glad it hadn't changed.

He recalled a time not too long ago when he and his father had spent a quiet, talking week together, camping in the hills and pines back home. His father had talked and talked. Later, when Thomas tried to recall what his father had said, he couldn't. But now it came to him in snatches.

"...may I talk to you about it, son? Our African church? The Negro church!...I can yield to its separateness when I realize that without it segregated, there would be no story of the Underground Railroad. There could be no sure refuge for the exhausted, runaway slave."

"That's the past," Thomas had told him. "That's no reason for the way it is now."

—*The House of Dies Drear*
by Virginia Hamilton