

Atticus Finch Summation to the Jury from *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

This paragraph can be omitted in the interest of time. [To begin with, this case should have never come to trial. The state has not produced one iota of medical evidence that the crime Tom Robinson is charged with ever took place. It has relied instead on the testimony of two witnesses whose evidence has not only been called into serious question on cross examination but has been flatly contradicted by the defendant. Now there is circumstantial evidence to indicate that Mayella Ewell was beaten, savagely by someone who led almost exclusively with his left. And Tom Robinson now sits before you having taken oath with the only good hand he possesses, his right.]

I have nothing but pity in my heart for the chief witness for the state. She is the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance, but pity does not extend so far as to put a man's life at stake, which she has done in an effort to get rid of her own guilt. Now I say guilt gentlemen, because it was guilt that motivated her. She's committed no crime. She has merely broken a rigid and time honored code of our society. A code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst. Is unfit to live with. She must destroy the evidence of her offense. But what was the evidence of her offense? Tom Robinson. A human being. She must put Tom Robinson away from her. Tom Robinson was to her a daily reminder of what she did. Now what did she do? She tempted a Negro. She was white and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable. She kissed a black man. Not an old uncle but a strong young Negro man. No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards.

The witnesses for the state, with the exception of the sheriff of Macon County, have presented themselves to this court and the cynical confidence that the plaintiff's testimony would not be doubted. Confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption, the evil assumption, that all Negroes lie, all Negroes are basically immoral beings, all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women. An assumption that one associates with minds of their caliber and which is itself gentlemen a lie which I do not need to point out to you. And so a quiet humble respectable negro who has had the unmitigated temerity to feel sorry for a white woman has had to put his word against two white peoples. The defendant is not guilty but someone in this courtroom is.

Now gentlemen in the country, our courts are the great levelers. In our courts all men are created equal. I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and our jury system. That's no ideal to me that is a living working reality. Now I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence that you have heard and come to a decision and restore this man to his family. In the name of God do your duty. In the name of God believe Tom Robinson.