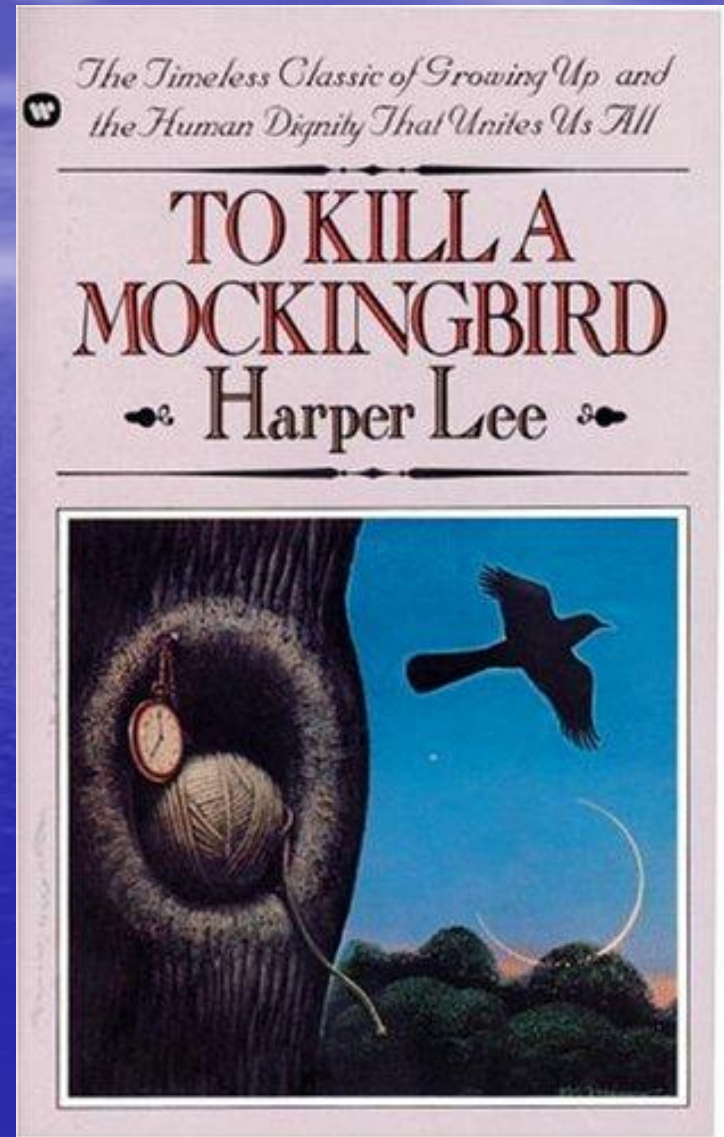


An
Introduction
to Harper
Lee's
*To Kill a
Mockingbird*



Harper Lee

- Born on April 28, 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama
- Youngest of four children
- 1957 – submitted manuscript for her novel; was urged to rewrite it
- Spent over two years reworking it
- 1960 – *To Kill a Mockingbird* (her only novel) published
- 1966 - was one of two persons named by President Johnson to the National Council of Arts



SETTING

Maycomb, ALABAMA 1930's

Maycomb, Alabama, is a fictional town. It is believed Harper Lee used her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, as the inspiration for Maycomb.



Main Characters

- **Scout (Jean Louise Finch)** – six-year-old narrator of story
- **Jem (Jeremy Finch)** – her older brother
- **Atticus Finch** – Jem and Scout's father, a prominent lawyer who defends a black man accused of raping a white woman
- **Arthur (Boo) Radley** – a thirty-three-year-old recluse who lives next door
- **Charles Baker (Dill) Harris** – Jem and Scout's friend who comes to visit his aunt in Maycomb each summer
- **Tom Robinson** – a respectable black man accused of raping a white woman
- **Calpurnia** – the Finches' black cook



Truman Capote
with Harper Lee

Harper Lee was born in Monroeville, Alabama. Her father was a former newspaper editor and proprietor, who had served as a state senator and practiced as a lawyer in Monroeville. Lee studied law at the University of Alabama from 1945 to 1949, and spent a year as an exchange student in Oxford University, Wellington Square. Six months before finishing her studies, she went to New York to pursue a literary career. During the 1950s, she worked as an airline reservation clerk with Eastern Air Lines and British Overseas Airways. In 1959 Lee accompanied Truman Capote to Holcombe, Kansas, as a research assistant for Capote's classic 'non-fiction' novel *In Cold Blood* (1966).



Still from 1962 movie,
starring Gregory Peck as
Atticus Finch.

To Kill a Mockingbird was Lee's first novel. Atticus Finch, a lawyer and a father, defends a black man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping a poor white girl, Mayella Ewell. The setting and several of the characters are drawn from life - Finch was the maiden name of Lee's mother, Lee's father was a lawyer, and the character of Dill was drawn from Capote, Lee's childhood friend. The trial itself has parallels to the infamous "Scottboro Trial," in which the charge was rape. In both, too, the defendants were African-American men and the accusers white women.



President George W. Bush awards the Presidential Medal of Freedom to author Harper Lee during a ceremony Monday, Nov. 5, 2007, in the East Room. "To Kill a Mockingbird has influenced the character of our country for the better. It's been a gift to the entire world. As a model of good writing and humane sensibility, this book will be read and studied forever," said the President about Harper Lee's work. (White House photo by Eric Draper.)

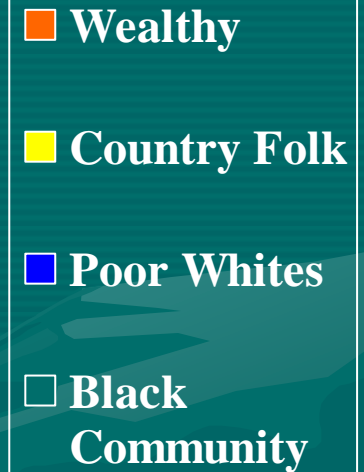
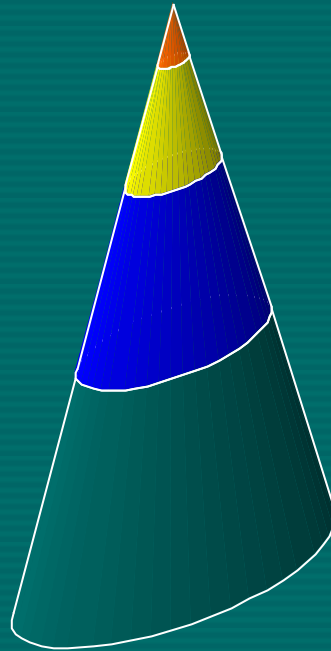


The **Presidential Medal of Freedom** is a decoration bestowed by the President of the United States and is, along with the equivalent Congressional Gold Medal, bestowed by an act of U.S. Congress, the highest civilian award in the U.S. It recognizes those individuals who have made "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors."

After you read **To Kill a Mockingbird**, decide why President Bush chose Harper Lee to receive this award.

Social Class in the Novel

This is probably similar to how class structure existed during the 1930's in the South. The wealthy, although fewest in number, were most powerful. The blacks, although great in number, were lowest on the class ladder, and thus, had the least privileges.



Examples of each social class:

Wealthy - Finches

Country Folk - Cunninghams

Poor Whites – Ewells

Black Community – Tom Robinson

Living in a World of Discrimination

Jim Crow Laws:

Jim Crow was not a person, yet affected the lives of millions of people. Named after a popular 19th-century minstrel song that stereotyped African Americans, "Jim Crow" came to personify the system of government-sanctioned racial oppression and segregation in the United States.



A cafe near the tobacco market. (Signs: Separate doors for "White" and for "Colored.") North Carolina, 1940





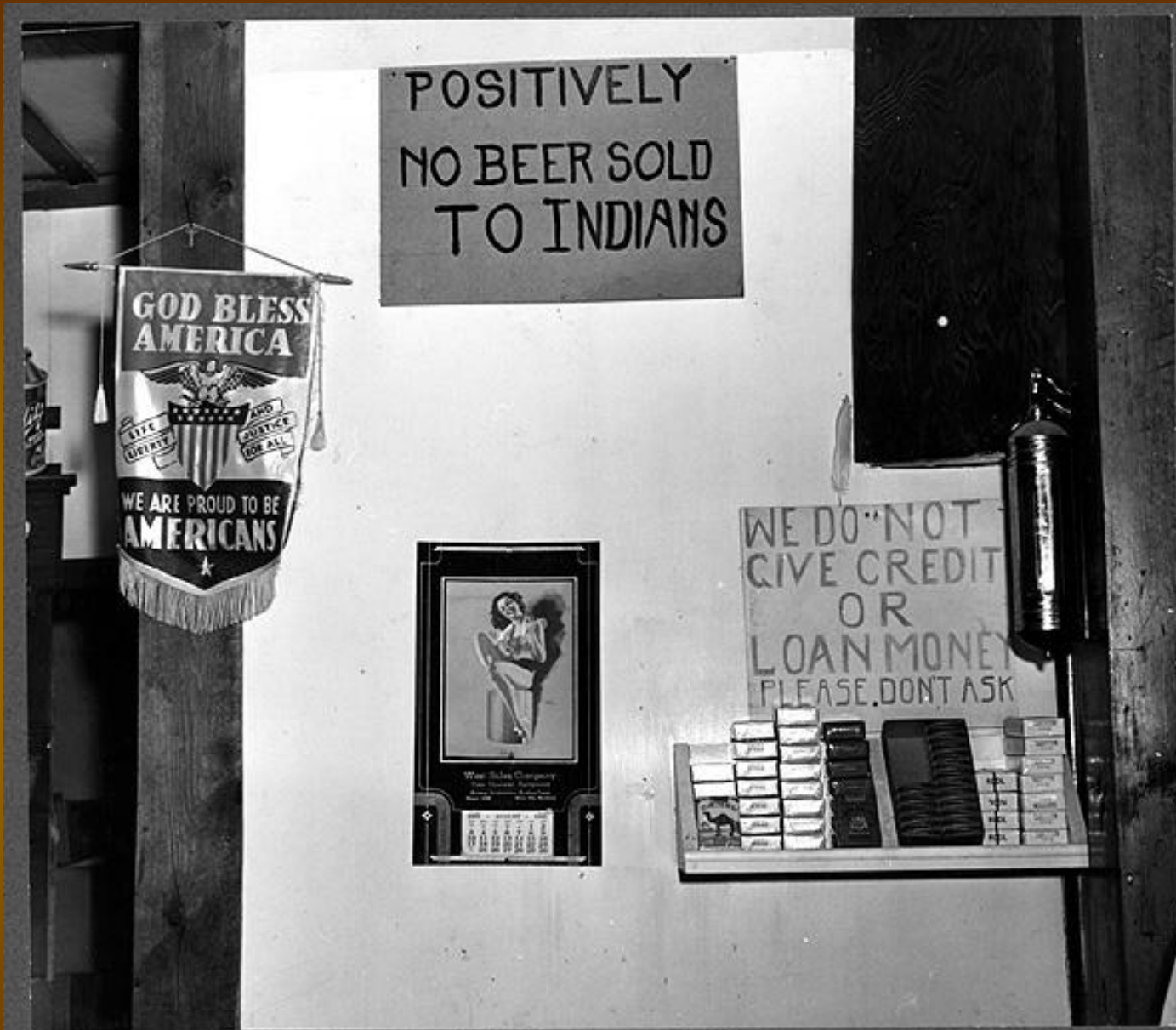
"Every Saturday morning there was a matinee at these movies, and we would pay 15 cents ... but we were separated; we went upstairs, the white kids went downstairs."--Willie Wallace, Eyewitness Narrative, Natchez, MS



Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, July 1939: "Colored" water fountains were fixtures throughout the South during the Jim Crow era. Photo by Russell Lee.



Belle Glade, Florida, 1941: Living quarters and "juke joint" for migratory workers. Local police wanted to make sure that only blacks frequented this tavern and blues music hall. Photo by Marion Post Wolcott.



Birney, Montana. August 1941. Marion Post Wolcott, photographer. "Signs behind the bar."

SCOTTSBORO BOYS



- On March 25, 1931, a skirmish between black and white men broke out on a Southern Railway freight train.

- All but one white man was forced off the train and when it stopped in

Paint Rock, Alabama, the nine blacks were arrested on charges of assault.

- Victoria Price and Ruby Bates (two white girls) were found hiding on the freight train as well. They were all taken to Scottsboro, Alabama. The two girls agreed to testify against the boys on a rape charge.

- The boys were indicted on this trumped up charge and were convicted and sentenced to death, except one thirteen year old, who was sentenced to life in prison.

- One of the women would eventually come forward and deny the rape. After serving years in prison on false charges, all of the Scottsboro boys were paroled, freed or pardoned, except for Haywood Patterson.



Harper Lee said there were several things that influenced her story of Tom Robinson. Besides the Scottsboro Case, when Lee was 10 years old, a white woman near Monroeville accused a black man named Walter Lett of raping her. The story and the trial were covered by her father's newspaper, and Lett was convicted and sentenced to death. After a series of letters appeared claiming Lett had been falsely accused, his sentence was changed to life in prison.



"Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

(TKAM, Miss Maudie, Chapter 10, page 90)