

To Kill a Mockingbird essay
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Both the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and the poem “My Arkansas” by Maya Angelou express the rancor and animosity that plagued the ante-bellum South in the early 1900s. The length and styles of the two pieces are very different; however they both convey a similar feeling that the South has still not fully healed (1a).

Violence, particularly between blacks and whites, was commonplace in the 1930s, when *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place. In the novel, the Ewell family is very angry with Atticus Finch for defending Tom Robinson, a black man who Mr. Ewell accused of raping his daughter. After the trial, in which Tom Robinson was found guilty despite significant evidence of his innocence, “Mr. Ewell approached him [Atticus], cursed him, spat on him, and threatened to kill him” (page 217). Later on, Mr. Ewell even tried to hurt Atticus’s children, Jem and Jean Louise. Jean Louise later described, on pages 269 and 270, that Mr. Ewell “grabbed me an’ mashed my costume...think I ducked on the ground...heard a tusslin’ under the tree sort of” and that after fighting with Jem “Mr. Ewell [tried] to squeeze me to death, I reckon...then somebody yanked Mr. Ewell down.” The children both survived the encounter, but Jem’s arm was badly hurt. This shows how much anger was still present at the time. Mr. Ewell had so much hatred towards blacks that he would even attempt murder on the children of a white who respected blacks.

Similarly, Maya Angelou’s poem describes the hostility between blacks and whites. It says: “There is a deep brooding/in Arkansas./Old crimes like moss pend/from poplar trees./The sullen earth/is much too red for comfort.” This poem is much more metaphorical but has the same idea as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The moss represents the hatred and violence of the time, that still hangs on and remains, despite a force trying to drag it down and eliminate it (the force

of gravity in terms of the moss and civil rights advocates in terms of the hatred).¹ The red earth represents the blood spilled as a result of the enmity present between blacks and whites.

Both the poem and the book hint at changes that are to come. Atticus, on page 221, says that all of the discrimination towards blacks is “adding up and one of these days, we’re going to pay the bill for it”. He explains that the suppression of blacks will end and that equality for everyone will someday be a reality. Atticus also implies that there will be consequences for the suppression of blacks, which the whites will pay for.

“My Arkansas” also seems to imply conditions for blacks will improve in the South. It says: “Sunrise seems to hesitate/...Old hates and/ate-bellum lace are rent/but not discarded./Today is yet to come...”. This passage metaphorically describes the hatred still present. The sunrise and daytime represent decreased enmity and violence. The sun has started to rise, because the blacks have been freed and have more rights, but it has not risen to its full height in the sky, because of the poverty and discrimination that blacks had to endure. Hatred and racism still exist today, but the sun has risen a bit more since the early part of the 20th century. The word “yet” provides hope that someday, daytime will come.

Both of these pieces of writing convey the feelings of unease and hatred between blacks and whites in the South; they both use various techniques to display the violence and discrimination at the time, and they both suggest that conditions will change for the better (1b). Atticus says on page 205, “Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal...” and for this reason, we must work to make sure that all people are treated fairly and justly.

¹ Brian on 5 Aug. 2014: Of course, a more straightforward interpretation is that this passage conjures images of lynched blacks hanging from trees.