

## Atticus Finch: The Man We Need; the Man We Have

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The publication of *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015 was a genuine literary event. Met with excitement, but apprehension and skepticism as well, the transformation of Atticus Finch from unquestioned moral hero, an attorney representing a black man falsely accused of rape in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to a defender of segregation, state's rights, and member of the Maycomb County Citizens Council in *Go Set a Watchman*, created cognitive dissonance for many. Those weaned on the myth of Atticus Finch the hero were stung when he was revealed to be a racist. The enduring popularity of *Mockingbird* and Atticus are due to their idealism: He represents something many want, even need, to see: not just a man, but an attorney; a representative of the law, unwavering in his determination to do the right thing. Clearly superior to *Watchman* in terms of prose, character development, tone, and overall style, *Mockingbird* nonetheless presents largely a fantasy, albeit an important one, providing a template and beacon for those willing to actively resist racial inequality in its myriad forms. The Atticus Finch of *Mockingbird* inspires those who envision social transformation and an end to racial inequality. As a historical document, however, *Mockingbird* is largely a failure. *Watchman* offers a far more realistic portrayal of American race relations, depressing as that may be, both then and now. The Atticus Finch of *Mockingbird* is the kind of man we need; the Atticus Finch of *Watchman* is the kind of man we have; therein lies the sociological, if not artistic, merit of *Go Set a Watchman*: it mirrors both historical and contemporary race relations in The United States.