

To Kill A Lawyer-Hero: Atticus Finch In The Law School Classroom

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This article addresses the well-known lawyer character from Harper Lee's novel and subsequent film, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For years, legal scholars have rhapsodized about Atticus Finch as the ultimate 'lawyer-hero' and role model for aspiring attorneys, with little dissent. When Lee's literary executor published an early draft version of the novel entitled *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015, many readers were shocked to encounter an Atticus Finch who was an apologist for segregation and the leader of a White Citizens Council chapter. This article reflects on evolving views of Finch as lawyer-hero, examining how he plays in the contemporary law school classroom. This article argues that, regardless of *Go Set a Watchman*, law professors should be teaching Atticus Finch critically given the unacknowledged white privilege embedded in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Yet how can we critique Finch and still nurture students' interest in and admiration of social justice lawyering, embodied for some in the mythic lawyer-hero? This article proposes techniques to dismantle the heroic construct surrounding Atticus Finch, shifting the focus from fictional images of the socially-engaged lawyer to students' own professional aspirations.

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