

ENGLISH: *TWELVE ANGRY MEN*

'The setting of Twelve Angry Men acts as a microcosm, reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of America in the 1950's

1950's America was a time of great ideological tension. With justice and the integrity of the very foundation of society under threat by the McCarthyism and the 'red peril' of communism at the center of society's fears, playwright Reginald Rose has been able to encapsulate and highlight not only these problems within American society, but also provide a detailed illustration of some of the strengths in his play 'Twelve Angry Men'. The set, a 'large, drab, bare [jury] room in need of painting' symbolizes the distinct attitudes and state of American society and Rose utilizes this jury room, and the deliberations that occur within, as a microcosm for the wider American society. Rose depicts the inherent flaws of society in the form of bias and prejudice and demonstrates how such shortcomings can threaten the integrity of the democratic judicial system. Through this the audience is able to perceive the potential threat that such prejudices may provide to society in general, consequently encouraging them to reflect on their own personal prejudices and weaknesses. Contrast to this however, is Juror 8. Through Juror 8 Rose is able to depict not only an idyllic juror, but also an idyllic American citizen. Rose advocates the qualities of the 8th Juror and provides the audience with a moral and honest standard, which they should attempt to reproduce in themselves. Rose vindicates qualities such as compassion and rational thought as these characteristics are juxtaposed against the more impulsive and tenuous mannerisms of opposing jurors, revealing to the audience the many ways in which prejudice can 'obscure the truth' whilst simultaneously allowing the audience to perceive the strengths which reside in the more virtuous human qualities.

One juror through which Rose is able to illustrate the potential danger of prejudice is Juror 3. Juror 3 is a self-exclaimed 'very excitable' character and the audience sees this excitable nature time and time again as the play progresses. Juror 3 is very boisterous and resolute in his opinion that the defendant is guilty. This is visualized as the 9th Juror changes his vote to 'not guilty', after which Juror 3 forcefully assumes that it was the 5th Juror who had changed his vote; 'I know who it was (He crosses to the 5th Juror) Brother, you're really something!' The audience quickly begins to understand the motives for the 3rd Juror's determination and lack of reasoning as he unintentionally alludes to his strained relationship with his son; 'when he was 16 we had a battle... Rotten kid, you work your heart out...,' revealing the prejudices that reside within Juror 3's analysis, or lack thereof. Evidently drawing parallels between the defendant and his son, Juror 3 is unable to 'separate the fact from the fancy' as the judge instructs and consequently Rose is able to demonstrate to the audience the potential threat on the functionality of the judicial system if jurors are to hold preconceived notions and prejudices. Furthermore the open window through which the New York cityscape is visible represents the fact that this is not only a problem in this jury room alone, but an issue the entire nation is confronting as Rose expands the microcosm of the jury room to wider American society.

Rose has constructed the play in such a way that each of the jurors are not named, their purpose is in fact to represent the diverse values present within American society. Rose depicts the issue of racism and the impact that it may have through the 10th Juror. The 10th Juror is quick to identify the defendant as part of a minority group and justifies the murder due to the fact that 'It's those people! They let the kids run wild' from which he further illustrates his racism and absence of compassion 'maybe it serves 'em right, know what I mean?' Through his colloquial and informal language Rose is able to utilize the 10th Juror as symbolic of the lack of intelligence and ignorance that many Americans possessed at the time and this is typified when the 10th Juror tells the 11th Juror that he 'don't even speak good English'. Rose employs this irony to denigrate the 10th Juror, making him out to be a fool and the audience consequently sees the lack of education that the 10th Juror possesses. Towards the end of the play a storm begins and this coincides with a rise in tension amongst the jury room. Not surprisingly Juror 10 is unable to remain calm as the pressure on the jurors to logically qualify their opinions intensifies and this results in a racist diatribe as he attempts to justify his prejudices surrounding the defendant; 'They're against us, they hate us, they want to

destroy us' This racial outburst leaves many jurors extremely offended and the audience views this as Jurors 5 and 11 retreat to the confines of the washroom and the 4th and 9th Jurors move towards the window. The obvious insult that Juror 10 has caused however is completely ignored as he continues to xenophobically assert that 'If we don't smack them down whenever we can, they're gonna own us, they gonna breed us out of existence!' Through this racist tirade Rose portrays to the audience the terrible nature of such racist and unfounded prejudices, demonstrating the threat that such bigotry may hold on American Society. However in this scene Rose also exemplifies a strength of American society as Juror 2 exclaims 'now you just stop all this' and Juror 4 tells Juror 10 to 'Sit down. And don't open your filthy mouth again.' Through this dialogue Rose depicts his stance on prejudice and expresses the intolerance that members of society should demonstrate towards such acts of racism.

Luckily for the defendant, Juror 8 is prepared 'to talk'. From the offset, Juror 8 displays a certain leniency towards the defendant stating that 'It's not easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to his death.' Personifying intelligence and compassion Juror 8 is initially the only juror prepared to thoroughly examine the evidence at hand and the calm manner in which Juror 8 deliberates with the other jurors encourages the reader to view him as the voice of reason. Rose constructs Juror 8 as a man who never once loses his temper, even when faced with such aggressive and insistent characters such as Jurors 3 and 10. The almost faultless demeanor of Juror 8 is demonstrated in the scene in which the jurors reenact the knifing; 'the 8th and 3rd Juror look steadily at each other... The 3rd Juror suddenly stabs downward, hard... The 8th Juror does not move' this action evokes many jurors into a sense of panic whilst the 8th Juror reassures them that 'Nobody's hurt.' Which further exemplifies the composed nature of Juror 8. Ultimately Rose depicts Juror 8 as an idyllic Juror and American citizen, Juror 8 displays compassion and reason above all else and whilst many of the jurors carry with them their own personal prejudices and bias, Juror 8 is able to distance himself from any that he may have, allowing him to clearly analyze the facts. These qualities are what Rose is truly interested in, as he illustrates to the audience that the strength of American society lies within those citizens who possess similar moral values and behavior as Juror 8.

Throughout the play 'Twelve Angry Men' Reginald Rose is able to provide an in depth critique on the very foundation of American society. Through Jurors 3 and 10 Rose depicts the inescapable flaws of humanity, that being the subjectivity and prejudice that each and every individual will take into an unknown situation. However Rose cleverly juxtaposes the biased nature of these two Jurors to the rational and intelligent traits of Juror 8. This juxtaposition highlights the strengths of American society as Rose demonstrates to the audience that it is in fact possible to distance oneself from one's own prejudices and deliberate in an honest and logical manner. This contrast of strengths and weaknesses is emblematically depicted in the final scene, as Juror 8 'helps him [Juror 3] on with his jacket' The play ends as the rain stops, further symbolizing the fact that justice has been done inside the jury room, and also that the strengths of American society have surpassed the weaknesses.