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## What I'm Reading: Harper Lee's 2 Novels

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# What I'm Reading: Harper Lee's 2 Novels

**L**ast fall, shortly after it was published, I read Harper Lee's *Go Set a*

*Watchman*, and this summer I reread her classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The controversy around *Watchman* intrigued me. I saw the differences in the books mainly as the change between the perspectives of the young Scout and the adult Scout (aka Jean Louise). Unlike some, I saw the *Watchman* as an honest book reflecting the complicated reality of white America in the Jim Crow era.

I am using these books to frame discussions about divisiveness in America with a reading group of our top scholarship students. I am talking with them about how we are regrettably still far from a postracial society. One of the causes of division in the earlier days, as is shown in both books, was society-endorsed segregation. Today the causes are less clear.

What is needed on campuses are discussions about respect. We need to endorse choosing compassion over violence, and kindness over rancor. Discussing *Watchman* is a good vehicle to examine race in the current day. My message to my students is that what is needed is love, just as Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that."

*Jerome A. Gilbert is president of Marshall University, in West Virginia.*

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