

Ashley Chaumette

Professor Garcia

College Writing II

06 February 2020

### Justice and Prejudice

In 1957, Reginald Rose's *12 Angry Men* directed by Sidney Lumet premiered. It tells the story of twelve men apart of a jury to convict a nineteen year old boy in the murder of his father. All of these men come from different backgrounds, careers, and economic statuses. This play illustrates how each man's own personal experience and personal prejudices can dictate how interpret how the world works and who people are. *12 Angry Men* shows us that it's often the people with the most taut sense of justice are the most prejudiced.

As the men sit down to deliberate whether the boy is guilty or not, some of the men show apathy towards the task, others are either overzealous to prove guiltiness or to give the boy a fair chance. But as they all gather, a vote is put down immediately, and all but Juror Eight vote guilty. From there, most of the men are frustrated and just want to move forward for the guilty verdict. But Juror 8 does not want to move forward without 'talking about it first' (Rose, *12 Angry Men* 5; Act 1)."

Some of the men are visibly cold, others nervously oblivious and only Juror 9 nodding slowly in understanding. Soon after, Juror Three and Ten make their case at having the strongest views against the boy than anyone else.

Juror 3 challenges Juror 8 by reviewing the evidence that they all received in court to him, pointing all the details back to the boy. He explains “At ten minutes after twelve on the night of the killing he heard loud noises in the upstairs apartment. He said it sounded like a fight. Then he heard the kid say to his father, "I'm gonna kill you.!" A second later he heard a body falling, and he ran to the door of his apartment, looked out, and saw the kid running down the stairs and out of the house.’ (Rose, *12 Angry Men* 6; Act 1).”

After some back and forth, Juror 8 brings the perspective back that this boy has been abused by his father since he was 5. While explaining that the father “used his fist”, Juror 3 responds with his own experience with his son. Juror 3 says “I've got a kid. When he was eight years old, he ran away from a fight. I saw him. I was so ashamed, I told him right out, "I'm gonna make a man out of you or I'm gonna bust you up into little pieces trying." When he was fifteen he hit me in the face. He's big, you know. I haven't seen him in three years. Rotten kid!” (Rose, *12 Angry Men* 8; Act 1).”

Juror 3’s personal issues with his own son is seen to influence the decision of justice for this young boy. Because he relates to a hard working father being disrespected, later allegedly killed by his son to his own life, he wants someone to pay for the dismay he feels. And for him the person who should pay is this young boy. His whole response to this ordeal is emotional so no amount of empathy or critical thinking can be reached to him. Juror 8 then brings the point up about the knife being easily accessible, the boy being too short to stab his tall father the way he

was stabbed, and the inconsistencies with the an old woman's account since she wore glasses and couldn't have seen that far. None of these will penetrate because of his emotional connection to the boy and his own son.

Juror 10's perspective completely stems from his own prejudice with people from particular backgrounds and economic statuses. His beginning statement says "You're not going to tell us that we're supposed to believe him, knowing what he is. I've lived among 'em all my life. You can't believe a word they say. You know that. (Rose, *12 Angry Men* 5; Act 1)."

Though throughout the play, some of the men call him out for his blatant prejudice, Juror 10 uses it to confirm his truth that the boy is guilty. Along with his experiences, he's 100% confident that the boy is guilty. Because he 'knows what he is', Juror 10 continues his rant by expressing that the boy is lucky he even got a trial at all. This is the understanding that in the past, for people like him, there would be no trial just death as a common understanding that all of 'them' are the same. He digs an even deeper hole for himself when he states that " I don't understand you people. How can you believe this kid is innocent? Look, you know how those people lie. I don't have to tell you. They don't know what the truth is." (Rose, *12 Angry Men* 27; Act 2)." He is then shamed and shut down into a corner in silence.

Throughout this work the idea of justice is seen through the lens of experience and bias. While all of us have our own kind of them all, the final understanding comes alive when the men take on the responsibility through facts, not what they think or feel. As it concludes, the emotion

and bias is put aside and it is decided that through facts and evidence, this boy is not guilty of any sort of crime. So many times in life we have our experiences that shape us, give us a perspective about how to commute through life. But our experiences are just what they are experiences, they don't reveal an absolute truth every time.

#### Works Cited

“*12 Angry Men*. Directed by Sidney Lumet, performances by Henry Fonda, Lee J. Cobb, and Jack Warden, Fox Wilshire Theatre, 1957.”