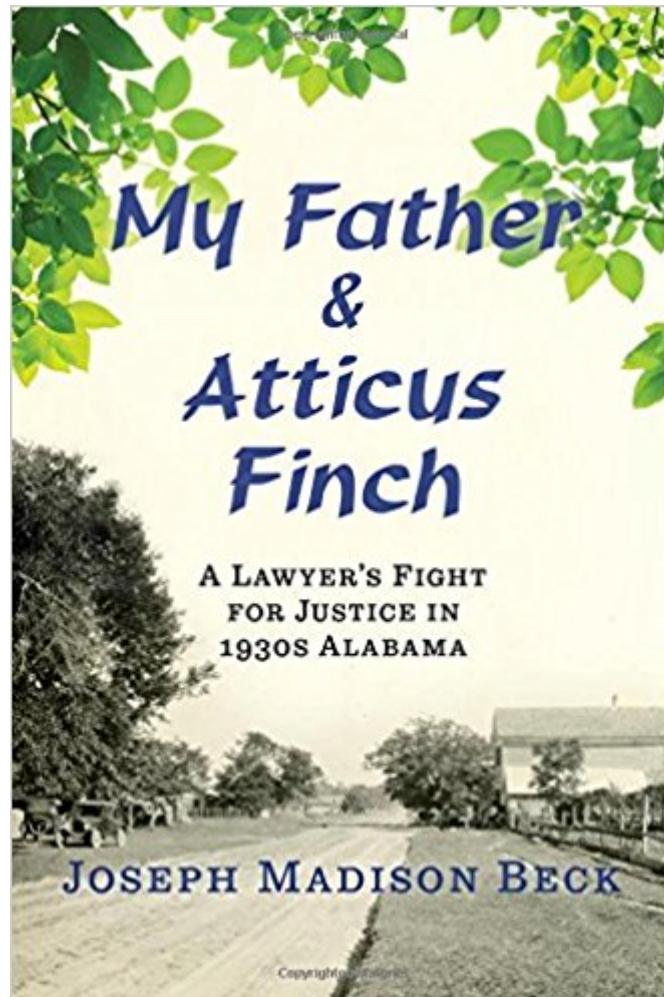


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My Father And Atticus Finch: A Lawyer's Fight For Justice In 1930s Alabama



Synopsis

The story of Foster Beck, the author's late father, whose defense of a black man accused of rape in 1930s Alabama foreshadowed the trial at the heart of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As a child, Joseph Beck heard the stories when other lawyers came up with excuses, his father courageously defended a black man charged with raping a white woman. Now a lawyer himself, Beck reconstructs his father's role in *State of Alabama vs. Charles White, Alias*, a trial that was much publicized when Harper Lee was twelve years old. On the day of Foster Beck's client's arrest, the leading local newspaper reported, under a page-one headline, that "a wandering negro fortune teller giving the name Charles White" had "volunteered a detailed confession of the attack" of a local white girl. However, Foster Beck concluded that the confession was coerced. The same article claimed that "the negro accomplished his dastardly purpose," but as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there was evidence at the trial to the contrary. Throughout the proceedings, the defendant had to be escorted from the courthouse to a distant prison for safekeeping, and the courthouse itself was surrounded by a detachment of sixteen Alabama highway patrolmen. The saga captivated the community with its dramatic testimonies and emotional outcome. It would take an immense toll on those involved, including Foster Beck, who worried that his reputation had cast a shadow over his lively, intelligent, and supportive fiancée, Bertha, who had her own social battles to fight. This riveting memoir, steeped in time and place, seeks to understand how race relations, class, and the memory of southern defeat in the Civil War produced such a haunting distortion of justice, and how it may figure into our literary imagination. 5 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD has been and remains one of the most revered novels of the 20th century. 2015 saw the release of a new Harper Lee book, GO SET A WATCHMAN, that was published to much hype, anticipation, disappointment and debate. It also marked the passing of the legendary author, whose life after the publication of MOCKINGBIRD was unique in many aspects. Avoiding the public literary limelight, she spent the majority of her life in her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, with her sister, Alice. In recent years, several unauthorized biographies of her life were released, and a semi-authorized one, THE MOCKINGBIRD NEXT DOOR by Marja Mills, was published to some controversy when Lee disavowed it. MOCKINGBIRD, in part, centered on the trial of Tom Robinson, a black man charged with rape. Atticus Finch, the attorney father portrayed in the book, is called upon to represent Robinson. Despite clear evidence of his innocence, Robinson is convicted and shortly thereafter dies while attempting to escape from authorities. Attorney Joseph Madison Beck's MY FATHER AND ATTICUS FINCH is a memoir about his own father, Foster Campbell Beck, who in the 1930s defended a black man accused of rape in a small Alabama community. Beck went so far as to write Lee because his research found a number of similarities between the case tried by his father and the fictional case presented in the pages of MOCKINGBIRD. Lee wrote Beck and acknowledged the "obvious parallels," but told him she could not recall her father's case and that her book was "fiction." The history of the South in 1930s Alabama clearly tells us that there were few, if any, African-American attorneys practicing law.

A white attorney represents a black man who is charged with raping a white woman in a small Alabama town in the 1930s. The defendant maintains that he is innocent. Millions of people the world over recognize the fictional white attorney as Atticus Finch in Lee Harper's novel TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD; or if they haven't read the book, they probably see the handsome Gregory Peck in those tortoise shell glasses from the movie adaptation for which he won an Oscar. Now Joseph Madison Beck comes forth with a splendid nonfiction account in MY FATHER & ATTICUS FINCH: A LAWYER'S FIGHT FOR JUSTICE IN 1930S ALABAMA of his father Foster Campbell Beck's valiant representation of Charles White, who is also charged with rape and vows he is innocent, in Troy, Alabama in 1938. With the skill of a good writer of fiction, Mr. Beck paints a vivid picture of south Alabama in the 1930s: the better class of white people, the black people, and

the âœrough element,â• as he describes the whites who were anxious for blood and lynching, so much so that Mr. White, for his protection, was escorted to a jail in another city after each day of the trial. Against this background are Foster Beck and the young woman he later married, Bertha Stewart. Mr. Beck, coerced into taking the case of Mr. White by a friendly judge, knew from the beginning the risk he was taking, that his young law practice would probably be adversely affected. He believed that ours was a government of laws, not men, of the right of a defendant to have adequate representation and moreover that his client was innocent. Ms. Stewart, a much beloved teacher of English, was facing her own moral dilemma: the school superintendent wanted her to change a studentâ™s grade. Mr. Beck had heard his family talk for years about this trial.

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