

Jackson's "The Lottery"

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The Lottery parallels our own society in many ways. Even in this brave new world, we live by ritual and tradition handed down to us through the dark ages, never questioning its validity or authority, even as we watch the deterioration of our own lives and world.

Our reality is made of the same types of people living in the small town described in this story. Whether we are talking about work, our community, a social organization we might belong to, a church, etc. someone is always, allegorically speaking, sacrificed or "stoned" to death to keep the rest in line, to maintain the established traditions, cultural norms, and hierarchical control.

The village's most powerful man, Mr. Summers, owns the village's largest business, a coal company, (which is a metaphor for black-balling certain social "deviants"). He is also the major employer and consequently a capitalist, since he has, as Jackson points out, more "time and energy to devote to civic activities" than others. Although he is a man of leisure, leisure is not allowed in this town. Everything is centered around work, productivity, and profits, just as the Capitalist ideology prescribes. Summers' very name suggests that he has become a man of leisure through his wealth, and we find those are the types, in any society, to have more time on their hands to actively pursue the maintenance of cultural traditions and mores. No one else has time to uphold such things.

Next in line is Mr. Graves, the village's second most powerful government official, (its postmaster.) Beneath Mr. Graves is Mr. Martin, who has the economically advantageous position of being the grocer in a village of three hundred.

These three most powerful men who control the town, economically as well as politically, also happen to administer the lottery. Mr. Summers is its official, sworn in yearly by Mr. Graves. Mr. Graves helps Mr. Summers make up the lottery slips. And Mr. Martin steadies the lottery box as the slips are stirred. In the off season, the lottery box is stored either at their places of business or their residences: "It had spent one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in the post-office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there". That means they do not value this iconic piece, any more than anyone else in this town, but use it as a tool when the time comes to maintain their power, their wealth, and their traditional positions.

This reminds me of all the "Christians" I sometimes meet in church who are no more "Christian" than the killer whales, but they love hiding behind their "Christ" and they love the idea someone has to die to save their "souls" and they never hesitate to use Jesus to punish those they are ready to "stone" for being rebellious against the traditions they have established, to maintain their power and control.

It is not a coincidence that whoever controls the town, also controls the lottery. It is no accident that the lottery takes place in the village square "between the post-office and the bank"--two buildings which represent government and finance, the institutions from which Summers, Graves, (good choice for a name) and Martin derive their power.

It's all about work, hurrying to finish up the stoning so they can get back to work! Leisure is not in line with capitalist ideology, and poor Tessie, the rebel, is marked for not only challenging traditions, (i.e. forgetting what day it was, for being late, for questioning the fairness of the process, and for subconsciously blaming her husband for her fate) but somewhat mockingly challenges the town authority when she asks Mr. Summers, "you wouldn't want me to leave my dishes in the sink, would you Joe?"

The word Joe is significant, as in any Joe, or as in Joe Blow, who could be so ridiculously powerful as to control an entire town, when he's really nobody's elected representative, but has given himself the authority to be the town Hitler.

These people never even considered moving out of this town, (i.e. moving to make a change). They are deeply imbedded in realities of their own making. They never even considered that someone dies every year for no reason, anyway, why not make the death worth it, by calling for change!

Sounds familiar? War goes on everywhere, year after year. Millions of people die defending false ideologies, and ridiculous religions. Yet no one ever questions the non-sense of it all.

The fact that children assemble first and gather the stones for the event tells us how deep socialization processes run. We expect the next generation to carry out our work and our values, and carry out they do, even when we don't expect it!