

"All men are created equal" is one of the declarations that American culture is built on. This declaration means that all men no matter of race, religion, or creed are equals in the eyes of society, as well as the law. This was not always true in history, especially not in Shakespeare's day and age. During this time, society had levels of classification where men were considered "superior" to other men. Shakespeare gives us a taste of this hierarchical culture through his play *The Tempest*. He shows us how "superior" men perceived themselves in contrast to lesser beings due to their race, financial status, and gender. We also are shown those who had reason to feel superior yet treated others equally and with the respect due to them.

*The Tempest* reflects Shakespeare's society through the relationship between characters, especially between Prospero and Caliban. Caliban, who was the previous king of the island, is taught how to be "civilized" by Prospero and his daughter Miranda. Then he is forced to be their servant. Caliban explains "Thou strok'st me and make much of me; wouldst give me Water with berries in 't; and teach me how to name the bigger light, how the less, That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee, And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,... For I am all the subjects you have, which first was mine own king." (I,ii,334-354). We see he is treated as a lesser being because he is not of the same race as Prospero and Miranda. Prospero describes him as "A freckled whelp hag-born - not honour'd with a human shape." (I,ii,282-283) Clearly, the people of different races were treated as inferior human beings in Shakespeare's time. In this culture, because someone is different, they are less of a human than you.

Financial status also plays a major role in social classifications. During the time of *The Tempest*, Dukes and Earls, who were among the nobles, were considered to be superior even to other members of their own race. The nobles had servants and commoners who worked for them. Shakespeare shows us an example of this with the relationship between his characters of Sebastian and Antonio and of the Boatswain and the sailors. Sebastian yells at the sailors "A pox o' your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog!" (I,i,40-41), implying that they are inferior and are there to serve him. Antonio also shows he believes himself superior by stating to the Boatswain "Hang, cur! Hang, you whoresom, insolent, noise-maker. We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art." (I,i,43-45) These men were of the same skin color, hair texture, and eye color, but were treated inferior due to their financial status and "inferior" blood line.

Women had also fallen victim to this hierarchical society. During this era women were considered to be objects and were treated as property. Shakespeare presents this in the treatment of Claribel, daughter of Alonso, and Miranda by their fathers. Claribel was married off to the King of Tunis, an African nation, merely for the gain of Alonso, the Duke of Milan, and his Lords. Their feelings are clear in Sebastian's words "Twas a sweet marriage, and we prosper well in our return." (II,i,69). And for Miranda, Prospero show how he considers his only daughter as he states "Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition Worthily purcas'd, take my daughter..." (IV,i,13-14) She is obviously considered his property. Women did not have rights at this time and were merely used as pawns in trade with other men of stature to gain whatever it was they wished.

Not all men in the position to consider themselves superior thought themselves to be. Even though some men had the financial status or noble blood, they treated others equally and genuinely thought them equal. Ferdinand, although being the Prince of Naples, treats Miranda, who he thinks a mere maid, as an equal human being deserving nothing less than his affection and kindness. This is proven true in his conversation with Miranda where he tells her "O, if a virgin, And your affection not gone forth, I'll make you the Queen of Naples." (I,ii,450-452). He loves her and would have her as his wife and Queen even though he thinks her a mere maid. Gonzalo also shows us his heart when he sees Ariel enter with the Boatswain and sailors. He refers to them as "here is more of us" (V,i,15) showing he considers the Boatswain and sailors his equal. In these two characters,

Shakespeare is saying that not all men are egotistical and perceive themselves above others.

From being treated inferior, people start to believe themselves inferior. From being unjustly treated, Caliban thinks himself inferior to Prospero's race. When Stephano and Trinculo arrived on the island, Caliban considered them superior beings even though they were mere servants themselves. They also thought themselves superior to Caliban because he was of a different race even though Caliban does prove to have a greater intellect than both Stephano and Trinculo. We see their sense of superiority by how they refer to Caliban "Servant-Monster, drink to me"(III,ii,3). Caliban also shows us his acceptance of this treatment in his response "How do thy honour? Let me lick thy shoe..."(III,ii,22-23) and "Thou shalt be lord of it, and I'll serve thee"(III,ii,56). We see by this that Caliban truly believes himself inferior even though his own intellect surpasses that of Stephano and Trinculo.

In today's society, treatment of inferiority is against the law and supposedly non-existent openly in society. We all know, however, that this hierarchial mind set still lurks around every corner in today's culture. It may not go as far as forcing someone to be your servant, but it lives in the form of discrimination and segregation. Because of many years of inferior treatment, many people feel they either can not succeed or that it will be more difficult for them than those of the "right" race or financial bracket. It is not that the people today feel inferior, its that they feel they will not get a fair chance. It's commonly believed that the people of "inferior" races or monetary status will get picked over for jobs or other discriminatory acts will be performed against them.

The two cultures are quite different, but they also have some slight similarities. Our culture is over three-hundred years older than that of Shakespeare, which should make our society more mature in its actions and attitude. We should have learned that all men truly are equal and should be treated accordingly. But all three-hundred years has taught us was how to be more discreet in our actions and feelings by giving them pretty names or keeping them out of the public eye. These two cultures may appear very different but actually are a lot closer than most of society would have us believe.