

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the Contemporary English Classroom

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When choosing a narrator for a work, why does an author decide that a child's voice would suit the narrative best? Is it the child's unsullied and unvarnished perspective because of his age? Could it be a child's lack of experience with life in general which help to explain characters' mistakes and plot complications? These are all important questions to ponder while analyzing Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In fact, by placing critics of the novel in a dialogue, we can see both why the work has been and will continue to be controversial and why this work should remain a part of the American literary canon. The connection between the two ideas is that readers who find the novel unacceptable often do so because they do not read it in a sophisticated way that acknowledges Huck's unreliability, instead thinking that he speaks for the novel's values, even in his offhand racist comments. To establish his unreliability is to separate the novel's racial attitudes from those of its narrator.

A *Bildungsroman* set in the pre-slavery days of America, the work follows the travails of a ten year old boy named Huckleberry Finn and his runaway slave friend Jim as they journey down the Mississippi River in search of freedom from a restrictive and hostile society. On their journey down the river, Huckleberry and Jim both come into contact with a wildly colorful and diverse set of characters all arguably representing both the good and bad of American society. Twain selected Huckleberry Finn to be the speaker of this particular narrative due to Huck's unreliability as he is so young, which then allows the author to comment on race and class in this individual work.

One reason why Mark Twain elected Huckleberry Finn to be his narrator in his work is his unreliability resulting from his experiences in life leading up to the beginning of the work. As a general rule, Huck Finn looks out for only himself and is very distrustful of authority figures. Therefore, he is indifferent to his benefactor Widow Douglas's lessons on God and Providence: "...sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about

Providence in a way that would make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see that there was two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him anymore..." (Twain 11). It is here that Twain shows one set of many opposing forces—benevolent versus malevolent Providence, self against society, conscience as opposed to conventional morality—that will cause Huck much confusion throughout the novel. Paul Lynch notes that as a narrator, Huck's dealings with his caregivers and authority figures such as the Widow Douglas cause a battle between his outer voice and inner conversations as a character and person (173). Indeed, it is here at the Widow's that Huck feels a certain lonesomeness that will spur him on to get out on his own from the stifling environs of the Widow's house (Schacht 190). This situation also allows the writer to detail and examine through the eyes of a child feelings about a loving God versus an angry God. These are sentiments that many people sense when they think about any religion, and Twain makes the youth Huck Finn accessible to adult readers in this way by stating a deep truth about religious faith, without realizing that he is doing so; in other words, this is one example of Huck's words meaning more than he knows, or Twain indicating, through Huck's unreliability, adult meanings for adult readers.. Huck also reveals his lower class background through grammatically incorrect sentences and ignorant blunders such as "I could see there *was* two Providences" and "there *warn't* no help." This strongly implies a lack of education and sophistication within Huck Finn, and this seeming ignorance contributes to Huck's unreliability as the narrator of Twain's novel. Huck distills his limited understanding in his decision about the two Providences thus: "...I thought it all out, and reckoned I would belong to the widow's if he wanted me, though I couldn't make out how he was a-going to be any better off then than what

he was before, seeing I was so ignorant, and so kind of low-down and ornery..." (11). Twain certainly shows Huck to be a rascal who reveals his youthful ways of thinking through his directness and willingness to be so honest about his own personal characteristics.

Huck Finn's commentary also gives way many times to fanciful, overly complicated plans of escape and disguising himself to fool people he meets along the journey on the river. Huck thinks his methods of creating his own murder scene and choice of hideout will aid him greatly: "...I made fast to a willow; then I took a bite to eat, and by and by laid down in the canoe to smoke a pipe and lay out a plan. I says to myself, they'll follow the track of that sackful of rocks to the shore and then drag the river for me. And they'll follow that meal track to the lake and go browsing down the creek that leads out of it to find the robbers that killed me and took the things. They won't ever hunt the river for anything but my dead carcass..." (34). This episode reveals Huck as someone who is resourceful and determined who, if left to his own devices, can take care of himself in the face of an abusive and violent father who, between prison stints for public drunkenness, seeks to mold his son Huck into the type of man he should be. That Huck is so resourceful in devising plans against his pap augments his position as an untrustworthy speaker. If Huck can get away from his father like he does, almost no one could stop him from wriggling free of any situation that proves to be uncomfortable for him. Twain lets this moment in the story also speak to the class issues at work in the back of Huck's mind. In an ironic way, the appearance of Pap allows for Huck to make his getaway through his kidnapping and isolating of Huck (Levy 384). The young Finn desperately wants to be his own hero and break away from his domineering father and make his own way and live the life he wants to live on his terms, not someone else's. Stephanie LeMenager brings up the interesting point that Huck's

journey could even be construed as a commentary on manifest destiny: "...in a small way, Huck tests the concept of manifest destiny, the promise that providence will look after those who keep moving farther from where they started, toward yet to be consolidated territory whose apparent openness allowed antebellum boosters like John L. O'Sullivan to speak of the nation's infinite expandability..." (410-411). Huck is in his own social class, and he does not need someone such as Pap to impose his preconceived notions of what kind of person Huckleberry Finn should be. In Huck's mind, he has already found a place to begin brand new: "...I can stop anywhere I want to. Jackson's Island is good enough for me; I know that island pretty well, and nobody ever comes there. And then I can paddle over to town nights, and slink around and pick up things I want. Jackson Island's the place..." (34). This vision is Finn's idea of paradise on Earth at the moment: a place where he can live by himself by his own rules, but also where he can have easy access to civilization's conveniences without it overwhelming him or causing him a great deal of anxiety. Huck is quite content to be on his own, but of the relationships he has he wants them to mean a great deal to him (Bollinger 33). Again, this speaks to his sensibility displayed over and over again of being left alone in an isolated situation and only having to deal with the outside world when it is absolutely and unavoidably necessary.

Even though Huck wants nothing more than to be left alone on his makeshift home of Jackson's Island, the fallout from his decision shows him to be childish and immature. This further endangers the reader's acceptance of Huck's judgment, and helps the audience better understand just what kind of person Huckleberry is. Part of Twain's protagonist's dream is realized when a ship draws near the island one day: "...by and by she come along, and she drifted in so close that they could a'run out the plank and walked ashore. Most everybody was on the boat. Pap, and Judge Thatcher, and Bessie Thatcher, and Joe Harper, and Tom Sawyer, and his old Aunt Polly, and Sid and Mary,

and plenty more. Everybody was talking about the murder..." (38). It is not hard to guess that Huck is very pleased with himself over the outcome of his plan, as his disappearance is now at the forefront of every person's mind who is close to him. A search is staged, but to no avail: "Look sharp, now; the current sets in the closest here, and maybe he's washed ashore and got tangled amongst the brush at the water's edge. I hope so anyway. I didn't hope so..."

(38). This example is just one instance of many that Huck shows that his machinations are just designed to fool and lead people on. He shows his lack of experience and youth in understanding just what he means to the people closest to him: someone to love, someone to be close friends with, or someone to be close to gain an inheritance from.

Remorse starts to settle in on Huck's mind: "...the cannon let off such a blast right before me that it made me deaf with the noise and pretty near blind with the smoke, and I judged I was gone. If they'd 'a' had some bullets in, I reckon they'd 'a' got the corpse they was after. Well, I see I warn't hurt, thanks to goodness..." (38). Indeed, this shows that Huck's plan has spun wildly out of control because he does not realize that the seriousness and depth that his extended family is willing to go to in order to find him would be so vast and persistent. Loneliness begins to overtake him while he stays on the island until a surprise jolts Huck out of his stupor: "...I set there behind a clump of bushes in about six foot of him, and kept my eyes on him steady. It was getting gray daylight now. Pretty soon he gapped and stretched and hove off the blanket, and it was Miss Watson's Jim! I bet I was glad to see him..." (41).

This situation allows Twain to begin exploring the complicated relationship between Huck and Jim. Jim is the catalyst for many of Huck's realizations throughout the novel, and Twain foreshadows a general upending of racial stereotypes by showing a white man genuinely happy to see a black man and not immediately racing to return the slave to his owners.

Another way that Twain reveals Huckleberry's childish impulses is through his disrespect for and condescension to elders. The first example of this comes with Huck and Jim on the island, and Jim says that the body of an unburied dead man "...might come and ha'nt us; he said a man...was more likely to go a-ha'nting around than one that was planted and comfortable. That sounded pretty reasonable, so I didn't say no more; but I couldn't keep from studying over it..." (52). This may sound innocuous enough, but Twain allows a sense of curiosity to pervade this section of his work, which certainly feeds into the notion of children becoming disrespectful of rules and boundaries when their interest is piqued by an avoided question. Twain also uses such folksy language from Jim to highlight the differences between poor whites and poor blacks during this time in history. The fact that Jim uses superstition to justify Huck not finding out an identity of a dead man's body speaks to how many slaves like Jim were incredible superstitious. Finn's ability to know better signals at least some more education than Jim, and yet Huckleberry's inquisitiveness underlines a childlike interest in mystery and adventure in finding out the dead man's name. His education fails him spectacularly when his suspicions lead him to play a practical joke on Jim by placing a dead snake in Jim's bed at night. Huck quickly learns a lesson in pranks: "...he was barefooted, and the snake bit him right on the heel. That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there and curls around it. Jim told me to chop off the snake's head and throw it away, and then skin the body and roast a piece of it. I done it, and he eat it and said it would help cure him. He made me take off the rattles and tie them around his wrist, too...I slid out quiet and throwed the snakes clear away amongst the bushes..." (52-53). Huck's trustworthiness is immediately called into question by this instance in the narrative, and shows someone who is ready and willing to get away from society but not grow away from society. Twain then

uses this example to increasingly show that Huck is still a child at heart and is not always aware of how serious certain situations may be for adults like Jim. As such, it makes one wonder about Huck's good sense in his behavior if he is so agreeable to ruining his companion's trust so soon in spending time with him and then telling the audience this instance as well.

The most important parts of the novel emerge whenever Huck has a crisis of conscience, especially when Jim is involved. There has certainly been enough adventure for Huck and Jim, adventure that is both exciting and morally complicating, because "...in Jim and Huck's passage down the river, in the movement from a quite particular place—Miss Watson's "sivilization"—to a never fully specified place, there is an unsettlement not just in geography but also in how Jim and Huck see each other and the world around them..." (Crocker 59). This unsettlement throws Huck out of his habitual ways of seeing and responding to Jim. By the time Jim is sold down the river by the duke, Twain has interwoven many harbingers of mental peril and turmoil for Huck and his ragtag group of fugitives. Take when Huck looks upon the end result of one of the king and duke's farcical Shakespearean productions: "...well, the men gathered round and sympathized with [the king and the duke], and said all sorts of kind things to them, and carried their carpet-bags up the hill for them, and let them lean on them and cry...well, if I ever struck anything like it, I'm a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race..." (162). This shows that Huck is clearly ready to be rid of these two con artists who take advantage of people and swipe all their money, which is certainly in short supply along the Mississippi River. Such a mixture of adolescent melancholia and disgust brings into focus the cynical if not downright hateful feelings Twain has for human nature as seen through this particular narrative. Phillip V. Allingham writes that "...*Huckleberry Finn* is informed by Twain's nihilist

sentiment that freedom and society can never be other than antithetical...” (Allingham 449). A statement such as that helps to clarify so many details about Twain’s motives and Huck’s viewpoint as a character. It is extremely difficult not to disagree with Allingham’s assertion that is clearly distilled in one important sentence. This only causes further damage with Huck’s bid as a reliable narrator: for the author to be revealed as being unrelentingly negative about American society without giving any thought to the positive side of civilization shows that, through young Huck, Twain has an agenda of making the people of Huck’s world seem grotesque and undesirable. In one of many hamlets along the banks of the river, Huck uses Twain’s biting words to make the residents of the town out to be nothing more than poor, uneducated whites who are the exact opposite of being progressive. Twain is relentless as he has Huck describe the pitiful tableau before him in the town: “... [the village men] generly had on yellow straw hats most as wide as an umbrella, but didn’t wear no coats or waistcoats; they called one another Bill, and Buck, and Hank, and Joe, and Andy, and talked lazy and drawly, and used considerable many cuss-words...” (Twain 139). It is clear that both the protagonist and the author do not hold the men of the town in high regard, and this is a perfect showcasing of Twain’s contempt for many characters within the novel.

One character eludes Twain’s scorched-earth philosophy when it comes to characters in his novel is Huck’s companion: the runaway slave Jim. Since the book is set in antebellum times, Huck holds a typical racist attitude towards slaves and is cruel and heartless towards Jim many times throughout the narrative. Huck’s destructive views of Jim based on the slave’s black skin begin to change as the two characters float down the river seeking to escape society and know freedom. Guilt and shame often overtake Huck after he is mean or disrespectful to Jim, especially when Jim delivers a plaintive sentence that stops Huck in his tracks and makes him call Jim “a mighty good nigger”

(155). It is especially true when Jim tells Huck a story about his daughter: "...she never done it, jis' stood dah, kiner smilin' up at me. It make me mad; en I says ag'in, mighty loud, I says: 'Doan' you hear me? Shet de do'!...I fetch her a slap side de head dat sont her a-sprawlin'...*she never budge!* Oh, Huck, I bust out a-cryin' en grab her up in my arms..." (155-156). A section like this one allows Twain to make Jim seem the most human and righteous of any character introduced in the novel. It is excerpts like these that should silence those who say that Jim is a caricatured creation born out of Twain's racist pen. Indeed, it is instances like these that show Jim to be complex and multi-faceted as a character and not some stock slave person as Huck would have the reader believe. This argument is echoed and expounded upon by Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua in her book *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*. In her introduction, Chadwick-Joshua makes the point that Jim contains heroic qualities that quite possibly make him the most innocent character in the book: "...his sense of honor, ethics, loyalty, indomitable faith in the nuclear family (a faith that extends into guardianship of Huck Finn), masterful ability to manipulate language, grasp of the deep meaning of friendship, clear perception of himself as a man, unintimidating wisdom, desire to be self-reliant, and conscious awareness of taking risks. These traits are the marks of a hero..." (Chadwick-Joshua xii). The fact that Huck seems to not understand these terrific human qualities calls into question his perception of people and his judgment of situations, which demonstrates the extent to which, despite his disdain for many conventional ideas and his desire for independence, he is still in thrall to society's values and opinions. It is very hard to get him to wise up about Jim, not because the evidence is not in front of his face but because he is being asked to make a paradigm shift that is not easy for adults much less a young boy seeking to make it in the world without guidance. While it is true that Huck is only a child while undergoing this journey, the fact that he misses out on such

important characteristics seems to not bode well for him in the future. The author also notes that people seem to be making the same mistakes that Huck made then today, as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is often met with outrage with people who misunderstand and misconstrue Jim's portrayal as a character and Twain's intentions as an author. People often see Jim as a step back in race relations, not a step forward in a history that has been fraught with passion and violence (xiii). Chadwick-Joshua rightly argues that Twain's novel should be taught in schools as it allows the subject of race to be debated and for people to still learn from the mistakes of Huck's time, and not to think that saving a friend and father figure from captivity will earn someone a place in hell, as Huck memorably does.

It is this capriciousness Huck reveals time and time again that reverberates today amongst the conversations and debates of many academic scholars and thinkers. Since its publication in 1884, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has always kept its place in the hearts of readers. This was some time before the novel became popular with teachers and educational professionals who enshrined it in the grand Western canon of literature that is primarily taught in high school. With continued popularity comes continued exposure and discussion in the classroom, and so Twain's narrative has earned its fair share of supporters and detractors who all have strong and detailed attitudes about whether or not the students of today and tomorrow should still be experiencing and discussing the novel in the modern schooling environment. The argument from those who disapprove of Twain's novel being learned by students is often based in racial matters. The word "nigger" is uttered quite often throughout the text, and since the novel is set in the days before slaves were freed, many scenes show the black slave Jim being belittled and made to feel less than human. In this day and age when civil rights for African-Americans have been won through hard work

and perseverance, many people see the reading of Twain's work as a step backward for racial equality and humanity in general. Academic scholars who support the continued exposure of students to *Huckleberry Finn* take the converse of those arguments, stating that because Twain uses racial images and sorrowful situations in his narrative, students can learn from history's mistakes and use the scenes from the book that offend modern sensibilities as a model for how not to treat individuals and to continue to strive for the eradication of racism in society.

One would be hard pressed to find a more enthusiastic critic of the teaching of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in schools than John H. Wallace. James S. Leonard and Thomas A. Tenney note in *Satire or Evasion?: Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn* that Wallace's essay "The Case Against *Huck Finn*" has proven to be a cornerstone of many a challenge and censorship attempt of Twain's novel in school (13). To wit, take Wallace's opening volley: "...*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, is the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written..." (17). This certainly shows that Wallace does not mince his words and is clearly taking opportunities to make his opinion known from the outset. The writer then goes on to display a bit of history regarding the black experience with regards to Twain's novel: "...for the past forty years, black families have trekked to schools in numerous districts throughout the country to say, 'This book is not good for our children,' only to be turned away by insensitive and often unwittingly racist teachers and administrators who respond, 'This book is a classic.' Classic or not, it should not be allowed to continue to cause our children embarrassment about their heritage..." (16). Wallace clearly feels a sense of shame and humiliation from surveying the history of African-Americans up to the time of publication of his essay, and those particular emotions can be powerful motivators for trying to enact social change and justice when something offensive is encountered. It is certainly an interesting rhetorical device that Wallace uses

when he characterizes all school educators and professionals as being racist; the writer is certainly doing all he can to persuade his audiences that his crusade for integrity is struggling mightily against forces who want to see him fail.

Wallace wants nothing more than to see Twain's novel completely eradicated from school curriculum as it amounts to "...mental cruelty, harassment, and outright racial intimidation to force black students to sit in the classroom with their white peers and read *Huckleberry Finn*..." (17). It is not hard to see that the removal of Twain's novel would, in Wallace's mind, open the gateways to racial harmony and unity and solve many behavioral problems that the novel undoubtedly instigated.

Wallace certainly seems passionate about Twain's use of the word "nigger" in the work. One does not have to think too intently to deduce who Wallace is referring to when he says that "...a few white authors, thriving on making blacks objects of ridicule and scorn by having blacks use this word as they, the white authors, were writing and speaking for blacks in a dialect they perceived to be peculiar to black people, may have given the impression that blacks accepted the term. Nothing could be further from the truth..." (17). Wallace argues that Twain sought to portray black slaves through Jim as being simpletons and uneducated through using their particular dialect.

Obviously, according to Wallace, Twain means to be disrespectful by using what Twain thinks to be Jim's natural way of speaking and not having him speak the same way his white associates do in the novel. This contempt would be noticed by the black high school student who is reading Twain's novel, and would cause devastating emotional turmoil and a loss of trust in their teacher (18). As a solution for such a distressing outcome, Wallace believes that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should only be taught at the college level as "...the caustic, abrasive language is less likely to offend students at that age group because they tend to be mature enough to understand and discuss

issues without feeling intimidated by the instructor, fellow students, or racism...” (23). It is generally accepted that learners who are involved with post-secondary studies are more mature individuals than in their high school years, so it is certainly plausible that black university students would be able to understand Twain’s work without suffering undue distress due to the racial elements in the narrative. If a high school teacher simply must teach the novel, then Wallace suggests his own version of the novel: “...the story is the same, but the words ‘nigger’ and ‘hell’ are eradicated. It no longer depicts blacks as inhuman, dishonest, or unintelligent, and it contains a glossary of Twainisms. Most adolescents will enjoy laughing at Jim and Huck in this adaptation...” (24). Wallace will seemingly go to whatever lengths are necessary to ensure that the black children of America will be protected from the physical and mental violence rooted in racism that plagued past generations of African-Americans. The idea that viewing Huck’s adventures as nothing more than a comedy is very much a new way to look at Twain’s novel, and Wallace evidently wants this to be the only way that the work is ever taught in this present day and time.

There is definitely more than one voice that has risen in opposition to *Huckleberry Finn* being covered in an educational setting for young children. As a black writer and parent, Julius Lester is has a unique vantage point to the impact that Twain’s novel can have on young lives. In his essay “Morality and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,” Lester writes of two trips that he took to Twain’s hometown of Hannibal, Missouri and how an overwhelmingly white population refused to give Lester a room to stay in while he visited Twain’s childhood home. Due to this negative racial experience, Lester goes on to report that

I am grateful that among the many indignities inflicted on me in childhood, I escaped *Huckleberry Finn*. As a black parent, however, I sympathize with those who want the book banned, or at least

removed from required reading lists in schools. While I am opposed to book banning, I know that my children's education will be enhanced by not reading *Huckleberry Finn*. It is, in John Gardner's phrase, a 'well-meant, noble sounding error' that 'devalue[s] the world'... (200)

As a parent, Lester is motivated to provide for his children and make sure that they are as safe and secure as possible. The injustices that Lester writes of due to the color of his skin are naturally something that he wants his children to avoid if at all possible. Since he experienced racism in Twain's hometown, the writer has come to associate racism with Twain's writing. Since it is highly probable that his children will experience Twain's novel at some point in their schooling career, it can be inferred that Lester wants to alert and sympathize with other like-minded black parents who lived through the civil rights era and do not want their children to live through the inequalities of the past. Whereas John Wallace takes issue with the repeated appearance of the word "nigger" in Twain's narrative, Lester is clearly more concerned with the portrayal of Jim through Huck's eyes. Surely Lester is roundly disparaging Twain when the critic writes that "...Jim does not exist with an integrity of his own. He is a childlike person who, in attitude and character, is more like one of the boys in Tom Sawyer's gang than a grown man with a wife and children, an important fact we do not learn until much later..." (201-202). Here, Lester seems to be discounting and discarding all talk of Jim being a more complex person that educators want him to be. Indeed, he argues that there is simply no proof that he can tell that suggests that Jim is more than a one dimensional character meant to crystallize people's racial stereotypes of African-Americans.

Another important critic to consider when examining the removal of Twain's work from the classroom is Forrest G. Robinson. In his essay, "The Characterization of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*," Robinson decries the Jim that

Twain presents to the audience by the conclusion of the novel. This writer goes even further than Lester in that Robinson believes that Jim does alter himself by the end of the work while Lester believes that Jim stays the same person over the course of the book. Nonetheless, Robinson still describes Huck's companion as "...a mere fragment of his former self, a two-dimensional parody, a racial stereotype in the minstrel tradition, and one symptom among many others of Mark Twain's failure of moral vision and artistic integrity in the complex evasion that closes the action..." (361). These are all very serious accusations that Robinson makes against Twain in his dealings with Jim. Many biographers, such as Robert Jackson, have noted that while writing his novel that Twain encountered a serious crimp in creativity and could not write beyond a certain point in Huck and Jim's voyage (61). Twain could have made Jim change so that the author could move the plot of the narrative along and complete the story, but Robinson does not seem to want to give Twain the benefit of the doubt. One could surmise that Robinson would rather have Jim be a strong character throughout the narrative rather than someone who regresses to a feeble state by the conclusion of the book. The idea of Jim playing the weak subservient slave to Huck and Tom's whims also makes Robinson uneasy, as he notes "...while Jim is forced for his survival into the role of a happy, harmless 'darky,' this necessary retreat yields short range dividends only at the heavy price of confirming the stereotype that his white oppressors first enforce and then prey upon..." (389). Indeed, this clarifies Robinson's main objective in protesting how Jim is depicted by the end of the novel: a black man with broken confidence, relying on alleged friends who would rather toy around with him than set him free from his predicament. From this viewpoint, it is all too easy to see how examples like these buttress the arguments of members of academia like John Wallace and Julius Lester who roundly insist on the removal of Twain's novel from the public school location.

After examining writers who are clearly not in favor of *Huckleberry Finn* in the English classroom, it is important to focus on the voices that combat that point-of-view and advocate for children to read and talk about Twain's narrative. One such writer is David L. Smith, who puts forth his supportive views in his essay "Huck, Jim and Racial Discourse." Smith would clearly disagree with Wallace's use of the book as a source of inconsequential comedy in a student's learning space, as he feels that Twain is underlining a much larger intention in writing his novel: "...ultimately, *Huckleberry Finn* renders a harsh judgment on American society. Freedom from slavery, the novel implies, is not freedom from gratuitous cruelty; and racism, like romanticism, is finally just an elaborate justification which the adult counterparts of Tom Sawyer use to facilitate their exploitation and abuse of other human beings..." (115). While it is true that Jim undergoes harsh treatment at the hands of nearly every white person he encounters in the novel, Smith makes the good point that Twain is being far more critical of the white race in his book and wants his readers to learn from the mistakes that his white characters make throughout the narrative. As such, it really undercuts Wallace to have Smith say that instead of Twain making black people seem foolish it is actually white people and white America in general who earn the ire of Twain's pen. This is solidified by Smith's statement that "...this is the point of Huck's final remark rejecting the prospect of civilization. To become civilized is not just to become like Aunt Sally. More immediately, it is to become like Tom Sawyer..." (115). Tom Sawyer is quite possibly the character to earn the biggest brunt of Twain's writing by the end of the novel, as it is Tom who ends up looking the worst of all the characters in how he treats Jim as just a pawn in the one of many games he plays throughout his life as a character of Twain's universe. Tom could easily stand for the immature

ugliness that so many white Americans perpetrated against those that were racially different from them. Smith certainly thinks that Twain does not let Tom off easily, and therefore neither should the reader.

Another writer who agrees with David Smith is Kenny J. Williams, who also affirms the idea that Twain's novel still should hold a place in many an educator's heart when teaching children. His paper "Mark Twain's Racial Ambiguity" reveals Jim to be a more complex character than writers like Julius Lester would have one believe. Indeed, Williams thinks that Jim is ultimately much stronger and courageous than normally thought: "...no matter how foolish Jim may appear, and despite the number of times he is called 'nigger,' in the final analysis he cannot be burlesqued. But the fact that he is not absolutely part of that happy lot of plantation slaves who people American literature is lost on those who reduce the novel to an exercise in name calling..." (234). It is here that Williams takes on those like Wallace and Lester who bemoan the treatment of Jim and would much rather see him take on the establishment as it were in the novel. However, Williams believes that Jim does take on those that strive to keep him down by staying with Huck until the end of the narrative and risking his freedom and life so that Huck could stay on his journey through the conclusion of the book. Williams issues his strongest language yet against those who would remove the book from the educational domain by stating that "...to ban the novel is to condemn the messenger for the message..." (237). This line of thinking is undoubtedly the strongest defense that anyone could have for keeping the work in the classroom where quite a few academics believe it should belong. To keep the novel in students' hands is to allow them to talk out and learn about their insecurities about race and history in America and with proper guidance come to a better understanding of how to treat people different from oneself with respect and to not take them for granted.

David Burg notes that "...*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is, in fact, a revolutionary novel. It dispels the conventional morality and the conventional wisdom of its own time and ours..." (299). There is a reason why Twain's novel continues to be taught in classrooms all over the world and why students rightly are required and encouraged to read it from so many educators. It is impossible to calculate how much impact the novel has had on so students' and peoples' lives due to the subjects and themes it explores. The value of recording history for future generations allows those people to see how events occurred in the past and how mistakes such as slavery happened so that people later on can remember and not perpetuate these troubling instances of human behavior. Since Twain's novel is such a valuable historical document, this is quite possibly the greatest motivator for educators to continue including this particular narrative in their curriculum. Commentators expounding upon the negative aspects of the book would do well to consider this point before charging forward with their latest diatribe. There can be no denying that the antebellum system of slavery in America is a blight on the central American tenet of freedom and justice for all, and Twain's novel is clearly set in a time in the United States' history when slaves existed. With the right approach by the teacher in the classroom, a careful reading and discussing of the work could be therapeutic for those students who feel strongly about American racial history. Universal pairs of themes like freedom and slavery, autonomy and conformity, realism and romance, and reality and fiction are all ripe for discussion in the classroom (Sawicki 692). As such, it is hard not to argue with the concept that *Huckleberry Finn* is "...indelibly a part of American culture..." (Colwell 70). The treatment and characterization of the slave Jim can decidedly open up the floor to conversations about how to treat people in general, and how the situation that Jim finds himself in with regards to his independence should never be repeated. John Wallace and Julius Lester are clearly troubled by the

legacy of Twain's novel, but there is clearly still a place for it in the modern day English classroom if great care and sensitivity is used when teaching the novel to today's students. This is echoed by Jonathan Arac when he says that "...As Americans, we need to be proud of our masterpieces, and we must therefore make them say what we want said. As Americans, we also are fiercely independent, and we must therefore make Twain say what was unsayable in his time and even in our time needs to be guardedly presented under the cloak of a classic..." (772).

In the beginning pages of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, there is a notice printed declaring that "...persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot..." (Twain ix). Also, Forrest Robinson notes in his essay "The Silences in *Huckleberry Finn*" that there are controversial elements in the narrative such as hypocrisy, violence, and slavery which all color the book's legacy in many ways (50). Nevertheless, the protagonist Huckleberry Finn proves to be such an entertaining and thought-provoking character that it is all too easy to disregard such a facetious warning. Indeed, Mark Twain uses Huckleberry Finn as his unreliable narrator to highlight differences of race and class during the antebellum period along the Mississippi River. This unreliability has caused much back-and-forth amongst scholars who either argue for the removal or reinstatement of the novel in the public school classroom. While the novel remains controversial, it serves a vital part of a high school English curriculum, as it promotes a deeper understanding of racism in America and provides many teachable moments about race relations between different peoples from all walks of life.

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