

**Attempting to Avoid Banishment and Prosecution While Exploring Cultural  
Depictions in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn***

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with  
A Major in Literature at  
The University of North Carolina at Asheville  
Fall 2009

By *BRENDA MURPHY*

---

Thesis Director  
Dr. Blake Hobby

---

Thesis Advisor  
Professor Eileen Crowe

Mark Twain's creation of memorable characters and depictions of southern culture has made *Huckleberry Finn* one of the most taught novels in American literature. The novel is second to Shakespeare for appearances in the classroom because it includes slavery while having a significant role for an African American character (Carey-Webb 23). Although other American authors, such as Ernest Hemingway, claim that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain, called *Huckleberry Finn*," it has been widely censored since its publication (Hentoff 26). Those advocating for the novel's censorship cite reasons such as Huck Finn's example for boys, Jim's appearance as a minstrel character in practical jokes, as well as the novel containing offensive language and racist, hypocritical attitudes (Carey-Webb 22). Despite the criticism, however, throughout *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain uses satirical humor, irony, and practical jokes to create an honest cultural and social commentary on Mississippi River life. While demonstrating his mastery of Southwestern culture and language, Twain shows the character Huck maturing over the course of the novel as he attempts to overcome the racist society in which he lives.

Censorship of *Huckleberry Finn* began soon after publication in 1885. The right wing fundamental religious groups were offended by literature that "discusses or portrays anything remotely resembling witchcraft, the occult, or what they consider deviant behavior" (Noll 61). The Concord Public Library, in Massachusetts, charged that the novel was "trash suitable only for the slums" (Sova 3). In 1902, other libraries in cities such as Denver and Brooklyn banned the book because Huck ignores "civilized behavior" and manners in his dialogue, and does not demonstrate proper standards for adolescent readers. One critic offered an example of coarse wording, "Huck not only

itched but he scratched, and he said sweat when he should have said perspiration” (Sova 3). In response to the early censorship occurring during his lifetime, Mark Twain showed excitement and stated, “They have given us a rattling tip-top puff which will go into every paper in the country” (Hentoff 21). By 1907, it was reported that the novel had been “turned out of some library every year” (Hentoff 21). However, because of *Huckleberry Finn*’s importance within the canon, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it became an irreplaceable title on school reading lists.

Although criticism of *Huckleberry Finn* slowed for a few years, controversy over its use in schools once again brought about the next wave of censorship demands. After the decision in *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954, the NAACP condemned the novel for the “gross affront to the dignity of an entire race of people through the use of the word nigger” (Camfield 98). During the Civil Rights Movement, critics began to argue that African-American students became offended when they heard “nigger,” which occurs over 160 times in the text, read aloud by white teachers and students (Hentoff 22). Teachers supporting censorship believe that Twain’s minstrel-like portrayal of the escaped slave Jim and the negative stereotypical traits assigned to blacks also cause students to be uncomfortable (Henry 26). In 1975, responding to these charges, textbook publishers created a bowdlerized version of *Huckleberry Finn* containing “slave” and “servant” as substitution for “nigger” (Sova 4). The debate over the novel’s place in America’s classrooms continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and is still centered on the feelings caused within African-American adolescent students when *Huckleberry Finn* is taught.

Many of the reasons for *Huckleberry Finn*’s censorship can be explained by examining Mark Twain’s style and the reasons behind the depictions in the novel, which

many find offensive. The controversial elements are all part of Mark Twain's Southwestern humorist style as he participates in the move from romanticism to realism. Romanticism in literature contains more fantastic, adventurous, or heroic representations than actually happen in reality. In realistic fiction, authors instead attempt to describe reality and represent life as it truly occurred (Abrams 303). Michael Hoffman argues in "Huck's Ironic Circle," that Twain uses his form of realism in *Huckleberry Finn* for the most important task of realism, which was to "destroy illusion" (31). Hoffman's essay also states that for the 19<sup>th</sup> century realists, "society is defined by [placing] its emphasis on style and role-playing [;] social behavior is a vast complex of games and unexamined assumptions in which society rewards style more than substance" (36). Readers can better gain an understanding of Twain's society through the Southwestern humorist style that includes a "rough-and-tumble" attitude, in which "racial or other stereotypes were broadly utilized; cruelty was often tolerated or even celebrated" (Leonard and Tenney 4). Twain depicted practical jokes with minstrel-like characters as a result of the Southwestern humorist style.

Twain's well-known fondness for the sometimes cruel minstrel shows inspired his characterizations in *Huckleberry Finn*. In Allen Carey-Webb's article "Racism and *Huckleberry Finn*: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change," minstrel shows are defined as "comic burlesque of African-American mannerisms;" during which white actors darkened their skin with coal for their performances (24). The minstrel shows were common entertainments during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alan Hunt explains in his essay "The Practical Joke in *Huckleberry Finn*" how Mark Twain uses the minstrel-like portrayals to make a satirical commentary on these shows as an element of culture, and also as part of another Southwestern "humorous device," the practical joke (198). Hunt defines

practical jokes as “a folklore form of competitive play activity in which only one of two opposing sides is consciously aware of the fact that a state of play exists” (198).

According to Hunt, Twain was a folklorist who, through studying effects practical jokes had on his own community, learned that, “The action of a practical joke, either physical or verbal, involves the intent, which can be benevolent, initiative, or malevolent” (198).

Twain used his understanding in order to “illuminate *Huckleberry Finn*’s characters and world” (Hunt 197). The portrayal of practical jokes in the novel enables readers to better understand the relationships and attitudes of 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

Twain constantly searched for new ways to express culture realistically in his writing. Throughout his long career, Twain’s works often included “a variety of humorous devices [such as] caricatures, puns, burlesques, and hoaxes” (Lynn 144). According to Hamlin Hill, Twain’s suggested formula for a successful hoax included telling the story straight-faced or with a “dead-pan” expression. The tale must be completely preposterous and have the intent of causing readers to accept it as literal truth. The account must contain clues to its exaggeration and comic intention, however, so that the reader eventually realizes that they have been trapped (Hill 60). Twice in the beginning of his writing career Mark Twain succeeded in fooling a large portion of his audience with hoaxes that were taken for truth (Hill 60). The first time occurred in 1863, with his essay, “Petriified Man.” The success of the hoax caused it to be reprinted as literal truth in at least eight West Coast newspapers (Hill 60). Twain told his audience that a mummified body had been found in the mountains. Every limb and feature of the mummy was perfect, but on closer reading of Twain’s story, the corpse’s hand and nose are described by Twain as, “thumbing its nose at the reader” (Hill 60). Because removing the corpse from its stone grave would be a sacrilege, Twain was actually

ridiculing a decision made by a judge that Twain did not like. The story arises from the sarcasm of the occasion to become a satire of scientific marvels which were, according to Twain, flooding newspapers at the time (Hill 60). The second article, also written in 1863, had a much more lasting impact on his audience. The essay "A Bloody Massacre near Carson," tells of a man named Philip Hopkins who dashed into Carson on horseback with his throat cut from ear to ear. In his hand was a "reeking scalp from which warm, smoking blood was still dripping" (Hill 60). Upon viewing Mr. Hopkins, the Sheriff dashed to the Hopkins house and discovered the scalped corpse of Mrs. Hopkins along with their six children. One child had been stabbed in the back and sides as she tried to get away. The remaining members were found dead with their brains scattered around on the floor. Apparently, Mr. Hopkins became deranged after failed investments in mining and a water company (Hill 60). Because it was unclear where the satire began in the story, Twain received criticism from readers who, believing the story, tried to pay respects to the imaginary surviving family. The public criticism caused Twain to print a "take it all back" statement the following day (Hill 61). These early essays demonstrate not only Twain's interest in tall tales, hoaxes, and practical jokes, but also his use of satirical humor throughout his writing career.

When Twain begins *Huckleberry Finn* with Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer conducting a practical joke at Jim's expense, not only does he remain loyal to his writing style, but he also demonstrates folklore contained within African-American oral traditions. After Jim wakes to find the two boys had tied him to a tree while he was asleep, he can offer no explanation other than "witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it" (Twain 9). Other slaves look up to Jim on account

of the joke: “Jim was most ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches” (Twain 10). Jim’s fellow slaves’ acceptance of his explanation involving witches helps Twain show societal stereotypical beliefs, such as the idea of superstition as truth. Shelly Fishkin’s novel *Was Huck Black*, gives proof that African-American traditions influenced Twain’s writings because folklorists have collected numerous African-American folktales involving slaves being “ridden by witches” (83). According to Fishkin, slave owners would use the slaves’ oral traditions to frighten them into submission and discourage night travel. The slave masters would begin rumors that told of “terrifying supernatural beings, or witches, who roamed the plantation at night” (84). Although Huck laughs at Jim’s expense several times throughout *Huckleberry Finn* and this first practical joke seems light-hearted, Huck comes to realize over the course of the novel that joking can hurt people, both physically and emotionally.

Huck’s next practical joke hurts Jim physically, and also works as an opportunity for Twain to depict other 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural practices involving superstitious beliefs. There was a stereotypical assumption that all slaves practiced pagan rituals and believed in witchcraft: “niggers is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire” (Twain 90). Huck decides to test Jim’s beliefs by placing a rattlesnake in Jim’s bed, and “the snake bit him right on the heel” (Twain 51). Luckily Jim did not die from the bite, but he uses this incident to illustrate their bad luck, and show Huck the truth in superstitions. In *The Jim Dilemma*, Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua addresses the stereotypes of superstition in slave life. She believes modern readers should: “consider the importance that folklore, myth, and superstition held in the nineteenth-century in all cultures” (90). According to Chadwick-Joshua, the white south was no exception with its

own share of myth and superstitions, some of which continue into today as “grandmotherly nuggets of warnings, remedies, or homespun beliefs” (90). Huck demonstrates how these beliefs were also a part of his own cultural upbringing: “I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of hair with a thread to keep the witches away” (Twain 7). Huck’s questioning of Jim’s superstitions portrays the hypocrisy in white society already well-integrated in Huck’s thinking.

Huck’s next attempt at joking with Jim leads to Huck’s realization that jokes can threaten friendships by causing emotional harm. On a foggy night during their journey, they become separated and lost in the fog. When they eventually reunite, Huck attempts to convince Jim that the event was a dream. After Jim’s explanation, Huck realizes that his lie had caused their friendship to suffer: “my heart wuz mos’ broke becase you wuz los” (Twain 80). Huck steps away to think about their friendship and Jim’s feelings, confiding to the reader that, “It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger – but I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn’t do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn’t done that one if I’d knowed it would make him feel that way” (Twain 81). Huck’s apology comes from his realization of Jim as a person, not just a slave. Huck is able to recognize that because of their shared humanity Jim can also have his feelings hurt. Part of the reason Huck continually played jokes at Jim’s expense was because Huck did not know how to treat his friends. His prior experiences with Tom Sawyer had taught him that friends play jokes on one another. He continues to act toward Jim as he had treated him in the beginning of the novel. In order for them to be friends, Huck has to realize how he has injured Jim (Kastely 415). Through Huck’s apology and recognition of Jim’s humanity, he matures

and realizes practical jokes are not always funny, especially when the laughs come at the expense of a friend.

Huck and Jim are only able to become friends when they both escape from the lives they were leading. Huck's desire for escape is a theme that begins from the first pages of *Huckleberry Finn*: "all I wanted was to go somewhere; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular" (Twain 6). Huck lives with the Widow Douglas, who is attempting to educate Huck and mold him into a moral, "civilized" individual (Twain 5). Daniel Traber's essay "Hegemony and the Politics of Twain's Protagonist/Narrator Division in *Huckleberry Finn*" argues that Twain was questioning what it meant to be civilized when he wrote *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain wrote in his novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* that, "Training – training is everything; training is all there is to a person [...] we have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are all transmitted to us, trained into us" (qtd. in Traber 24-25). Traber further suggests that Twain was trying to come to terms with his own "societal training" through Huck, who is escaping his training and the society shaping this training. Huck's desire for escape comes from wanting to be where people were not telling him what to do or how to think; he "simply wants to be left alone" (Traber 28). Huck views the Widow's "training" attempts as "rough" because the Widow was "dismal regular and decent [...] in all her ways" (Twain 5). Huck also notices the hypocrisy of adult ideas when the Widow forbids him from smoking because it was a "mean practice and wasn't clean". However, the Widow allows snuff, as Huck notices, "of course because she done it herself" (Twain 6). Huck's need to escape from the Widow is ended prematurely when his father kidnaps him, causing another situation from which Huck needs to escape.

By placing Huck back in his father's clutches, Twain is able to use Pap's characterization to demonstrate the "training" Huck received in hearing racist tirades toward slaves. Huck hears things such as Pap's rant upon learning that free blacks have the right to vote: "They said he could *vote*, when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to...when they told me there was a state in this country where they'd let that nigger vote" (Twain 28). Pap's use of "that nigger" and doubt of black men's freedom partially create Huck's racist foundation and belief of slaves as less than human. Richard Barksdale's essay, "History, Slavery, and Thematic Irony in *Huckleberry Finn*" explains that Pap's racist rant is a part of Twain's attempt to display satirical humor in *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck's family was "poor white trash" who had nothing but "hatred and disrespect for blacks." Because Pap was condemned as a "social outcast" by "respectable society," he was looking for an "inferior group on which to vent his social spleen" (Barksdale 54). During *Huckleberry Finn*'s time period the only group of people considered lower than Pap in America's social hierarchy, were slaves. Barksdale argues that after 1865 this lower social group openly ridiculed the "black freedmen" (54). Barksdale also suggests that Twain was demonstrating satirical humor with Pap's argument: "I was just about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too drunk to get there" (Twain 28). Not only will he probably be too drunk to vote on election, but he questions the decisions of the government he will not be taking part in: "Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment" (Twain 28). When Huck feels he can no longer be around his father's racist and abusive example, he fakes his own death and escapes from his father.

After Huck meets and begins travelling with Jim, he begins the process of questioning what it means to be a free human being. Jim is also escaping; however, he is

running from his owner, Miss Watson, after her threats to “sell [him] down to Orleans” (Twain 42). The separation from his family and harsher slave conditions were not a life condition that Jim could live with. Huck decides to help Jim reach the town of Cairo along the Mississippi River, where Jim will be a free man and eventually free the rest of his family from the condition of slavery. Jim views Pap’s dead body shortly after beginning their journey and does not tell Huck what he sees. If Jim had told Huck, he may have returned home because one of his reasons for escaping was fear of his father. Rather than tell Huck, Jim takes on the role of fatherly protector: “I had the middle watch, you know, but I was pretty sleepy by that time, so Jim he said he would stand the first half of it for me; he was always mighty good, that way, Jim was” (Twain 117). Jim’s motivation for being fatherly may have been a manipulation of Huck’s desire for a father figure and an awareness of Pap’s death. According to Traber, because of Jim’s protective actions Huck is able to overcome his “ideology of white supremacy” (39). However, because he needed Huck in order to move easily through society as he escaped, Jim’s character has often been criticized for manipulating Huck. This manipulation is reflected in the role as Huck’s fatherly protector, as well as the occurrences of Jim taking advantage of Huck’s friendship.

Huck and Jim’s friendship is tested along their journey when they come across two white men who are stopping boats to check for runaway slaves. As Huck paddles toward the men alone, he wrestles with the decision of turning Jim in to the authorities, or continuing to help him on his journey towards freedom. Jim continues to call out to Huck as he makes his way toward the men: “Pooty soon I’ll be a-shout’n for joy, en I’ll say, it’s all on accounts o’ Huck; I’s a free man, en I couldn’t ever ben free ef it hadn’ ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won’t ever forgit you, Huck; you’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever

had; en you's de only fren' ole Jim's got now" (Twain 83). Jim's words work to remind Huck of their friendship and the caring actions Jim had shown to Huck throughout their journey. Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua argues in *The Jim Dilemma*, that double-voicing needs to be taken into consideration when examining Jim's dialogue. She defines double-voicing as, "the slave's feigned forgetfulness, ignorance of an issue, surprise, sadness, or even humor where there really is none. The southern white hears one thing while the slaves hear something different" (47). Jim is feigning sadness toward the end his friendship with Huck. He continues to call out and remind Huck of this friendship, when really he is pleading with Huck's conscience to not turn him over to the authorities. Double-voicing is also known as "signifying" or "satire in an African-American vein, the indirect, *double-voiced* variety of satire" (Fishkin 55). Shelley Fishkin's book *Was Huck Black?* addresses double-voicing as another part of African-American culture Twain depicted accurately in *Huckleberry Finn* (133). Fishkin believes that many critics make a mistake in believing all of Twain's material comes from minstrel routines and is "demeaning to blacks". To only believe this ignores the fact that Mark Twain had access to other sources such as African-American oral traditions (82). Regardless of the source of Twain's depictions, Jim's "signifying" or "double-voicing" influenced Huck's decisions in helping him achieve freedom and Huck does not turn Jim over to the men. Instead, Huck lies when he tells them his father is sick on the boat with smallpox, and they continue on their journey towards freedom.

Huck's wrestles throughout *Huckleberry Finn* with the decision to continue helping Jim achieve freedom. It is the most ironic situation in the novel because Huck is already unknowingly doing the right thing in freeing Jim. After careful reflection, the boy decides that Jim's character and protective actions have made him unable to

“harden [himself] against [Jim]” (Twain 194). Huck decides freedom is better for Jim than slavery. He shows his realization when he can no longer pray for guidance in his decision making: “I knowed it was a lie – and He knowed it. You can’t pray a lie – I found that out” (Twain 194). Huck tears up the letter he had been writing to tell Jim’s owner of her lost slave’s location and decides to continue helping Jim escape. He still worries that his decision will send him to hell, but decides to choose his friendship with Jim over salvation from God when he states: “All right then, I’ll go to hell” (Twain 195). With the exception of Huck Finn, nobody in his society believes freedom would be the best condition for any slave; they would not understand why he was helping Jim.

Jonathan Bennett tells us in his essay “The Conscience of *Huckleberry Finn*” that in Huck’s society “slave-owning is just one kind of ownership and is not subject to critical pressure” (125). Huck views himself as a thief because he has somebody else’s property (Jim) in his possession. Although Huck matures over the course of the novel, he never has the thought that slavery should be rejected on moral grounds. He never comes to the realization that what he is doing is not theft because “a person cannot be owned and therefore cannot be stolen” (Bennett 131). Huck does not ever question slavery as an institution; he is really only working to free Jim, not to overcome or change anyone else’s opinion of slavery.

Huck often worries about the lowering of his character in the townspeople’s opinion when they discover he has been helping Jim. In the essay, “Another View of *Huckleberry Finn*,” David Burg explains that Huck does not “delude himself into believing that he acts on the basis of higher moral values than his society advocates;” rather, his choice is an attempt to establish his own “view of reality and secure his own redemption” (302). Jonathan Bennett’s article defines morality and conscience issues in

*Huckleberry Finn*. He examines how these themes apply to Huck's choices throughout the novel. Bennett defines morality as "a set of principles of action which a person sincerely assents to, the problem of acting well or rightly or in obedience to conscience is the problem of conforming to those principles (124). After stating that Huck's decisions are bad morality, Bennett explains that in Huck's earliest years he was not taught any principles, and the only ones he encountered were those of rural Missouri (124). Bennett tells us that in this society, "slave-owning is just one kind of ownership and is not subject to critical pressure" (125). The moral values advocated by 19<sup>th</sup> century society developed in Huck's because he was raised to view them as acceptable beliefs. Twain explores society's influence in Huck's training in the middle section of *Huckleberry Finn*.

The middle chapters of the novel involve Twain removing Jim from the scene. Rather than diminishing the importance of Jim's character, this narrative shift shows Huck's ability to make correct moral choices without any outside controlling influence. Through his contact with other whites, Huck realizes that others have not had the same experiences as him to change their attitudes towards the treatment of slaves. When involved in conversations with other whites, Huck still demonstrates the deep integration of racist language. One such occasion is Huck's discussion with a white woman about a steamboat accident when she asks, "Good gracious! Anybody hurt?" and Huck replies, "No'm. Killed a nigger" (Twain 201). These words are a contradiction of Huck's new belief of African-Americans as people. J.H. Miller's article "First person Narrative in *David Copperfield* and *Huckleberry Finn*" examines Mark Twain's use of the first person narrative in *Huckleberry Finn*. As Miller explains, by placing Huck as the narrator of the story, Twain was better able to show Huck "caught in the speech

patterns of his society.” As long as Huck remains within this society, he will continue to be trapped in its language, therefore, his responses must still be defined by the “community’s terms” (Miller 29). Similar to Jim, Huck must use his own form of double-voicing if he wants to continue unhindered on their journey.

Huck is able to recognize the fraudulent, hypocritical example of other whites through Twain’s characterization of the Duke and the King, who have been placed in the middle of *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck and Jim encounter the men along the river, and are forced to accompany them on a series of deceptive activities as they travel through towns. Huck stands back on several occasions to view the “two frauds” (Twain 151). He often wonders how the townspeople are stupidly blind to the silly actions of the Duke who “made all sorts of signs with his hands and said, ‘Goo-goo – goo-goo-goo,’ all the time like a baby that can’t talk,” or the King who “blatted along” like a sheep (Twain 151). James Kastely’s essay, “The Ethics of Self-Interest: Narrative Logic in *Huckleberry Finn*,” discusses the Duke and the King regarding Huck’s ability to recognize white hypocrisy (413). Huck comments to the reader on one such occasion: “They begun to work the villages again [...] they done a lecture on temperance; but they didn’t make enough for them to get drunk on” (Twain 190). In Kastely’s opinion, the Duke and King’s prominence in the novel allow Twain continuous opportunities to satirize the falsely sentimental values of the river community (413). During another one of their deceptive acts, the Duke and the King pretend to be benefactors to a will and sell the family’s slaves. Huck grows increasingly upset by their actions of selling the slaves, who were obviously more than property to their owners: “I can’t ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other’s necks and crying” (Twain 167). The selling of the family’s slaves allows Twain to show

Huck making positive decisions regarding African-Americans, other than Jim, and their humanity. Because of his concern over breaking up a family, Huck decides to tell the slaves owners about the fraud being conducted at their expense, and arranges for the slaves' to return home.

Huck's ideas of morality regarding Jim's humanity seem to disintegrate at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* when, similar to the middle, Twain changes the tone of the novel. Huck appears to fall under Tom Sawyer's spell and forget his friendship with Jim when the boys treat him as part of another elaborate joke. Jim's search for freedom comes to an end when the Duke and the King collect a reward after turning him over to the authorities as a runaway slave. Huck and Tom decide to conduct an escape plan to free Jim from his imprisonment in the shed. Twain adds humor to the situation by having the boys free Jim on several occasions to help them with their preparations for freeing him: "he raised up his bed and slid the chain off of the bed-leg, and wrapt it round and round his neck, and we crawled out through our hole and down there, and Jim and me laid into that grindstone and walked her along like nothing" (Twain 235). Because of Jim's freedom on these occasions, critics believe that Huck is depicted as appearing to have fun at Jim's expense. David Burg's argues in his essay, "Another View of *Huckleberry Finn*," that the end of the novel is not a failure as many critics contend. Burg explains that because Huck has always admired Tom Sawyer, he does not "revert [...] to insensibility" by going along with the plan (305). Instead, by accepting Tom's scheme, he is only agreeing because Tom has promised to help him free Jim; readers need to remember that this has been one of Huck's purposes for continuing to remain with Jim along their journey.

The controversy over the novel's ending is also based on Jim's character being lowered into a minstrel-like character as a result of Huck's actions. Any growth shown regarding Huck's opinion of Jim's humanity diminishes as Twain returns him to "buffoonery and grotesque farce" once Tom Sawyer enters back into the story (Simpson 5). In Claude Simpson's introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, he argues that, although Huck's character is "violated" when "all of his growth is ignored," Jim emerges from "something of a stock minstrel wool-head" into a "fully individualized Jim" (5). This characterization continues through the last joke, and Simpson believes Twain portrays Jim as not only achieving "considerable dignity," but as instrumental in "Huck's growth" (5). When Tom Sawyer is shot in the leg during their escape plan, the doctor helping Tom describes the slave Jim as "worth a thousand dollars – and kind treatment, too" as he pleads for Jim's life (Twain 257). Jim could have taken his opportunity to run, but out of worry over Tom, stays to help the doctor and ensure that the boy is going to be all right. Jim's character does not fail in the end of the novel by being portrayed as a minstrel character; instead, he is displayed as a man, filled with humanity as he worries over a boy's leg wound, and not about his own dream of achieving freedom. Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua also states her opinion in *The Jim Dilemma* that "Jim does what he feels is morally right to save Tom although he knows that the doctor will not let him go when he gets Tom help" (130). Despite proving his humanity by saving Tom Sawyer, Jim fails in Huck Finn's eyes. When Jim finally realizes his freedom because Miss Watson freed him in her will, Jim tells Huck about seeing Pap's dead body: "He ain't a comin' back no mo', Huck" (Twain 263). Huck feels betrayed following Jim's confession when he realizes that Jim may

have manipulated him throughout their entire relationship. Huck fails to realize that Jim may have also felt deeply sorry for Huck and kept it from him for this reason.

Whereas Jim gains the recognition as a gentleman in the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, Tom Sawyer loses this quality in Huck's opinion. As their final practical joke plays out, Huck reaches the conclusion that the wealthy Tom Sawyer, who he has grown up thinking superior to himself, is actually lacking in character. Huck has often made comparisons to Tom throughout the journey down the river, "I felt very good; I judged I had done it pretty neat – I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn't a done it no neater himself. Of course he would a throwed more style into it, but I can't do that very handy, not being brung up to it" (Twain 177). The Southwestern humorist is described by Kenneth Lynn in *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* as "remaining loyal to the Southern myth" (18). This myth includes the image of themselves as Southern gentlemen by which "style was the principle means they defined that image" (Lynn 18). This helps to explain why Huck is constantly concerned with Tom Sawyer's "style" and his worry that he cannot live up to Tom's "gentleman" example. When Tom Sawyer helps Huck free Jim, Huck has a hard time understanding why Tom would want to lower himself: "Tom Sawyer fell, considerable in my estimation...Tom Sawyer a nigger stealer" (Twain 205). When Huck finds out that Jim has been free all along, it becomes clear to him why Tom is sinking so low. The only true gentleman found in the novel and during Huck's journey along the Mississippi, as Russell Baker wrote in the *New York Times* on April 14, 1982, is Jim:

The people they encounter are drunkards, murderers, bullies, swindlers, lynchers, thieves, liars, frauds, child abusers, numbskulls, hypocrites, windbags, and traders of human flesh. All are white. The one man of honor in this phantasmagoria is black Jim, the runaway slave. 'Nigger Jim,' as Twain called

him to emphasize the irony of a society in which the only true gentleman was held beneath contempt. (qtd. in Hentoff 24)

Because Huck feels let down by Tom Sawyer's dishonesty, and Jim's possible manipulation, he decides to "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" (Twain 263). Although Huck originally planned on leaving with Tom and Jim, at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, they become two more people he wishes to escape.

As well as showing Huck Finn's journey toward freedom, *Huckleberry Finn* contains stereotypical ideas of the black condition, as well as racist attitudes and language occurring during the time period. Despite the overwhelming majority of offensive beliefs expressed, Huck is able to overcome his upbringing, and he ultimately comes to the conclusion that slaves are more than property. *Huckleberry Finn* is commonly used in schools because it is one of the only novels in the canon to portray 19<sup>th</sup> century societal beliefs, while containing a significant role for an African-American character. *Huckleberry Finn* is also one of the only novels "told by an adolescent [...] entirely from his perspective, in his language, through his experience" (Hentoff 34). Critics James Leonard and Thomas Tenney argue in *Satire or Evasion* that readers should treat *Huckleberry Finn* as a "period piece" because the language Twain uses within it honest to a time when most blacks were slaves (13). Leonard and Tenney further state that although "nigger" carried negative connotations during the time period, it was not as "painfully divisive for black and white Americans as it is today" (13). The painful past depicted in *Huckleberry Finn* is important in classrooms with mature students who can understand Twain's satire, and can be taught to recognize what the novel can teach about 19<sup>th</sup> century stereotypes and how they still influence society today. It is important to help students consider historical context when reading

*Huckleberry Finn* because as Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua tells us, “without the memory of what a word once meant and what it can continue to mean, we are as a society doomed to repeat earlier mistakes about ourselves, each other, and serious issues, involving us all” (134). Unless students learn what has been overcome, they cannot appreciate the society in which they live.

Mark Twain never intended for the novel to be used in school. In his “Notice” at the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain explains this to readers:

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. (3)

In fact, during Twain’s lifetime when *Huckleberry Finn* was banned in Concord, Massachusetts, he applauded the action on the grounds that the publicity would help sell thirty-five thousand more copies (Cox 107). His warning serves to instruct his audience to read the novel for the story; for the *adventure* of Huck Finn; for the jokes that brought about Huck’s maturity. Mark Twain’s lifetime expression of satirical humor, irony, and practical jokes enhance *Huckleberry Finn*, as well as help to create his important legacy within American literature. Twain employed his understanding of realism and Southwestern humorist style to eloquently describe the sometimes grim social experience that occurred within 19<sup>th</sup> century American society.

## Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. Print.
- Alberti, John. "The Nigger Huck: Race, Identity, and the Teaching of *Huckleberry Finn*." *College English* 57 (1995): 919-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Barksdale, Richard K. "History, Slavery, and Thematic Irony in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Satire of Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1992. 49-61. Print.
- Bennett, Jonathan. "The Conscience of *Huckleberry Finn*." *Philosophy* 49 (1974): 123-34. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1986. Print.
- Burg, David F. "Another View of *Huckleberry Finn*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 29 (1974): 299-319. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Camfield, Gregg. "Sentimental Liberalism and the Problem of Race in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46 (1991): 96-113. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Carey-Webb, Allen. "Racism and *Huckleberry Finn*: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change." *The English Journal* 82 (1993): 22-34. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. Print.

- Cox, James M. "A Hard Book to Take." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1986. 87-108. Print.
- Fishkin, Shelley F. *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices*. New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.
- Hentoff, Nat. *Free Speech For Me - But Not For Thee: How the American Left and Right Relentlessly Censor Each Other*. New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 1992. Print.
- Henry, Peaches. "The Struggle for Tolerance: Race and Censorship in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Satire of Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1992. 25-48. Print.
- Hill, Hamlin. "Samuel Langhorne Clemens." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 12. Detroit: Gale, 1982. 71-94. Print.
- Hoffman, Michael J. "Huck's Ironic Circle." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1986. 31-44. Print.
- Hunt, Alan, and Carol Hunt. "The Practical Joke in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Western Folklore* 51 (1992): 197-202. JSTOR. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Kastely, James L. "The Ethics of Self-Interest: Narrative Logic in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40 (1986): 412-37. JSTOR. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Leonard, James S., Thomas A. Tenney. Introduction. *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1992. 1-11. Print.

- Lynn, Kenneth S. *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*. Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1959. Print.
- Miller, J. H. "First-Person Narration in *David Copperfield* and *Huckleberry Finn*." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1986. 21-30. Print.
- Noll, Elizabeth. "The Ripple Effect of Censorship: Silencing in the Classroom." *The English Journal* 83 (1994): 59-64. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Schulten, Katherine. "Huck Finn: Born to Trouble." *The English Journal* 89 (1999): 55-60. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2009.
- Simpson, Claude M., ed. Introduction. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 1-6. Print.
- Sova, Dawn B. *Banned Books: Literature Suppressed on Social Grounds*. New York, NY: Dawn B. Sova, 1998. 3-5. Print.
- Traber, Daniel S. "Hegemony and the Politics of Twain's Protagonist/Narrator Division in *Huckleberry Finn*." *South Central Review* 17 (2000): 24-46. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 20.
- Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2003. Print.

Attempting to Avoid Banishment and Prosecution While Exploring Cultural Depictions in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn Senior Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with A Major in Literature at The University of North Carolina at Asheville Fall 2009 By BRENDA MURPHY . Thesis Director Dr. Blake Hobby . Many of the reasons for Huckleberry Finn's censorship can be explained by examining Mark Twain's style and the reasons behind the depictions in the novel, which Murphy 4 many find offensive. Twain used his understanding in order to "illuminate Huckleberry Finn's characters and world" (Hunt 197). Twain's use of dialect, which has proved controversial over the years, lends to the overall realism and vividness of Huckleberry Finn. Because it is sometimes difficult to decipher the character's speech while reading, we are almost forced to read aloud: at the very least, to read this novel, one has to be able to "hear" the voices in one's own head. Performance is important in this novel, as Tom Sawyer's follies and the duke and the dauphin's cons demonstrate. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (or, in more recent editions, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn) is a novel by Mark Twain, first published in the United Kingdom in December 1884 and in the United States in February 1885. Commonly named among the Great American Novels, the work is among the first in major American literature to be written throughout in vernacular English, characterized by local color regionalism. It is told in the first person by Huckleberry "Huck" Finn, the narrator of two other Twain