

Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn as Anti Racist Novel

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"Man is the only Slave. And he is the only animal who enslaves. He has always been a slave in one form or another, and has always held other slaves in bondage under him in one way or another."

- Mark Twain

Abstract

Mark Twain, the American author and satirist well known for his novels *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, grew up in Missouri, which is a slave state and which later provided the setting for a couple of his novels. Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn are the two most well-known characters among American readers that Mark Twain created. As a matter of fact, they are the most renowned pair in all of American literature. Twain's father worked as a judge by profession, but he also worked in slave-trade sometimes. His uncle, John Quarles, owned 20 slaves; so from quite an early age, Twain grew up witnessing the practice of slave-trade whenever he spent summer vacations at his uncle's house. Many of his readers and critics have argued on his being a racist. Some call him an "Unexcusebale racist" and some say that Twain is no where even close to being a racist. Growing up in the times of slave trade, Twain had witnessed a lot of brutality and violence towards the African slaves. This had often disturbed him as he wrote in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Mark Twain wrote: "The blunting effects of slavery upon the slaveholder's moral perceptions are known and conceded the world over; and a privileged class, an aristocracy, is but a band of slaveholders under another name.(1)" However, in his novel, one can see the use of words such as "Nigger" and the way the black man was treated by people also puts Twain in the box of suspicion. Many critics think that he was just a writer who wrote such ideas for fun and they were not his personal ideas, but the idea of Mark Twain being a Racist or not is still a matter of controversy. This is one of the major reasons why Twain's novels have to be analyzed thoroughly. Whether Twain is a racist or not, this paper is an attempt to answer this question by presenting examples from one of his famous novels *Huckleberry Finn* through analysis of discourse and characters.

Keywords: Racist, African American, Twain, Huck, anti-racist

Introduction

Mark Twain was born as Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30th, 1835 in the small river town of Florida, Missouri, just 200 miles away from Indian Territory. He is the sixth child of John Marshall Clemens and Jane Lampton. Mark Twain spent his childhood in Florida, Missouri till he turned four, when his family moved to Hannibal looking forward to a better living condition. However, by roots Twain was from the South, as both his grandparents belong to Virginia.

The slave-trade community in Hannibal, where Twain had moved with his family, provided a mix of harsh border life and the traditions of the south, a way of life that inclined his later writings, including his famous work *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Only a few black slaves actually lived in Hannibal, where they were mostly held as household servants rather than field workers, but were still under the compulsion of slavery.

In his youth, Twain was a quite playful boy, the model of his famous fictitious character, Tom Sawyer. Though he was weighed down by bad health in his early years, by age nine he had already smoked, led a small gang of pranksters, and had developed a hatred for school. Twain stopped schooling after twelve, because his father died in March of that same year. He worked as an apprentice in a printer's shop and then worked under his brother, Orion, at the Hannibal Journal, where he quickly became inundated in the newspaper trade. Promoted as a sub-editor, Twain took to frontier humor in journalism which was quite famous at the time.

Mark Twain became a river pilot at the age of 24, as he had always wanted to be as a boy. On his way to Nevada, twelve years after the Gold Rush, Twain's primary intentions were to earn lots of money and become rich through mining for silver and gold. After realizing the impossibility of this dream, Twain began to write again.

Mark Twain was a talented writer, speaker and humorist whose own personality stood out through his extraordinary work. As his writing grew popular, he became a public figure and an iconic American. "I am not an American," [Mark Twain] once said, "I am the American." No one would ever think of Mark Twain as unpatriotic. He was the first author to write in the American dialect and he did not hesitate to use his talents as a humorist, journalist, and novelist to attack what he considered un- American - the great immorality of slavery and racism.

Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* received the rewards it deserved. Though the book has been at the center of debate among critics and readers ever since he wrote it in 1884, first accused of vulgarity because

of the language and more recently of racism, it stands as the first American novel to create a fully realized African-American character.

In 1863, he adopted the pen name Mark Twain, derived from a river pilot term describing safe navigating conditions. In 1869 he published his first book of travel letters entitled, *Innocents Abroad* which was criticized and which also discouraged Twain from pursuing a literary career. However, in the years that followed, Twain published different articles, made lecture tours, and moved between San Francisco, New York, and Missouri. The Clemens family quickly fell into debt thereafter. However, when over 67,000 copies of *Innocents Abroad* sold within its first year, the American Publishing Company requested Twain for another book. Later he moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where he composed *Roughing it*, which documented the post-Gold Rush mining era and was published in 1872. Moreover, *Roughing it* was only mildly successful, which added to the family's hardships.

Twain's next novel, *The Gilded Age*, written in association with Charles Dudley Warner, was published in 1873. The novel is about the 1800s era of corruption and exploitation at the expense of public welfare. *The Gilded Age* was Twain's first actual work of fiction which marked him in the literary world as an author rather than a journalist. After the broad success of *The Gilded Age*, Twain began concentrating on writing.

By the time Twain reached age fifty, he was already considered a successful writer and businessman. He got more popular with the publications of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and The Pauper* (1882), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). By 1885, Twain was considered one of the greatest character writers in the literary community.

Mark Twain grew up in Missouri, a slave state as earlier mentioned. His uncle, John Quarles, owned 20 slaves; so Twain witnessed the practice of slavery first-hand whenever he went to his uncle's place in summer vacations. When he was still a young boy, he witnessed the brutal murder of a slave in his home town of Hannibal by the slave's owner, who killed the man with a thrown rock for a very trivial matter. These provided the base to Mark Twain's well known novels later.

When Twain began writing *Huckleberry Finn* he thought he was going to write another Children's book, a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but Twain soon found himself writing a book like no book ever written before. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is about a child who grows up in an environment in which people who think of themselves as supremely civilized supporting a system that is uncivilized, illegitimate and inhumane. He wrote the book at a time when ex-slaves were subjected to economic exploitation, disenfranchisement and racially motivated lynching, and the last third of the novel sheds light upon the many betrayals and indignities African-Americans suffered after the collapse of Reconstruction. *Huckleberry Finn* is a satire not only of slavery, which had been abolished a decade before Twain began writing the novel, but of also of the racism that immersed American society as Twain wrote the book in the late 1870s and early 1880s and which continues to stain America till this day. This theme is as integral to *Huckleberry Finn* as it is irrelevant to *Tom Sawyer*. However, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was and is Mark Twain's mostly read book along with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Both books are children's books but have deep connotations that need to be understood.

Mark Twain had embarked on his own private affirmative action plan as one small step in addressing the problem, paying for the education of several black students. He once addressed a letter to the dean of the Yale Law School in 1885, explaining his decision to pay for one of the first black law students there. Twain wrote, "We have ground the manhood out of them, & the shame is ours, not theirs, & we should pay for it." Twain was not afraid to reject values he had once accepted. His insights shared with us in a body of work is as thought-provoking today as it was when he first wrote it.

Ernest Hemingway famously said "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called 'Huckleberry Finn.' " It doesn't, of course: Modern American literature grows out of a gorgeous multiplicity of traditions from spiritual autobiography to gothic romance. But Hemingway's good line reminds us of the centrality of Twain and his greatest novel to our greatest national theme: race. "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" ---for all that some idiotic school libraries remove it from the shelves because of an offensive but formerly common racial epithet ---is an incandescent indictment of a slave-state ideology that denied blacks dignity, rights and humanity. Along with "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Absalom, Absalom!," "Invisible Man" and "Beloved," "Huck Finn" is one of our mightiest anti-racist texts and Twain a towering anti-racist thinker.

Twain's brilliant commingling of black and white language and lore now seems so right and so obvious that we almost forget that it was the exemplary scholarship of Shelley Fisher Fishkin, editor of the 29-volume Oxford Mark Twain, who showed the way. In her provocative 1993 study "Was Huck Black?" and now "Lighting Out for the Territory," Fishkin demonstrates the rich interweaving of African-American with white culture in 19th-century America and Twain's writing. Instead of the safe, grandfatherly wit with the Albert Einstein hair in the linen suit, Fishkin gives us Twain the radical, a writer who understood the damage slavery had done to an America whose national myth falsely claimed equality.

One of the many valuable and fresh aspects of Fishkin's book is the way she explores the Twain of popular

culture, showing how we "whiten" (and cheapen) his work. On a trip to Hannibal, Mo.'s "historic district," where Twain is a major tourist industry, Fishkin reveals how the community obscures the African-American heritage of the town and even the anti-slavery aspects of Twain's fiction. The transcendent moment in "Huckleberry Finn" comes when Huck decides that Jim, legally a mere piece of property, is, in truth, a human being. Huck refuses to send him back into slavery. "All right, then, I'll go to hell!" he declares, defying friends, race and even God. Yet in Hannibal's pageant, "Reflections of Mark Twain," there is no Jim, no slavery, as Fishkin remarks: "(T)he black presence in Hannibal and in Mark Twain's work was simply erased." And yet, she observes, Hannibal souvenir shops sell Aunt Jemima banks, pickaninny figurines and toy bullwhips.

Twain had a clear picture of how the slaves lived and were treated as he had seen everything personally. He believed that the white people were responsible for all that later shaped the African Americans into and that they had to pay for it. Missouri was one of the fifteen slave states when the American Civil War broke out, so Twain grew up amongst the racism, lynch mobs, hangings, and general inhumane oppression of African Americans.

Mark Twain grew to scorn the injustice of slavery and any such form of senseless violence against humans. He was opposed to vivisection and acted as Vice-President of the American Anti-Imperialist League for nine years. Through his works he illuminates the absurdity of humankind, ironically still at times labeled a racist. Though sometimes caustic, "*Of all the creatures that were made he [man] is the most detestable,*" (*Autobiography* (1924), Vol. II) as a gifted public speaker he was a much sought after lecturer. "*...information appears to stew out of me naturally, like the precious otter of roses out of the otter.*" (from his Preface to *Roughing It*, 1872).

In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain created such a character that represents a sense of freedom within, and from, American society. Huck lives on the margins of society because, as the son of the town drunk, he is pretty much an orphan. He sleeps where he pleases, and he eats when he pleases, provided that he can find a morsel.

Through the authentic depiction of his times he caused much controversy and many of his works have been suppressed, censored or banned because of the way he writes, but even into the Twenty-First Century his works are read the world over by both young and old. He is prolific lecturer and writer that even into his seventy-fourth year, he published more than thirty books, hundreds of essays, speeches, articles, reviews, and short stories, many still in print today.

Mark Twain died on April 21, 1910. In his lifetime, he became a distinguished member of the literati, and was honored by Yale, the University of Missouri, and Oxford with literary degrees. With his death, many volumes of his letters, articles, and fables were published, including: *The Letters of Quintus Curtius Snodgrass* (1946); *Simon Wheeler Detective* (1963); *The Works of Mark Twain: What is Man? And Other Philosophical Writing* (1973); *Mark Twain's Notebooks and Journals* (1975-79). Perhaps more than any other classic American writer, Mark Twain is seen as a phenomenal author, but also as a personality that defined an era.

Huckleberry Finn: An Anti-Racist Novel

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a novel that has provoked controversy for a very long period of time now as stated above in the introduction. Where once its themes of violence and rebellion were criticized and protested the rude language and characters of the novel, in the twentieth century the controversy has evolved into an issue of race. This paper examines the charges of racism against the novel and against the writer who had intended merely to present racial discrimination and power relations through a sarcastic way.

The modern controversy on *Huckleberry Finn* focuses on an exact reading of the text. It is crucial that the reader understands the author's ironic intent since his treatment of race in the novel is presented through irony. Twain creates characters that are captive of their own social milieu. His novel in the light of the now accessible textual and biographical materials reveals his use of anti-racism motifs.

Huckleberry Finn is often considered Twain's greatest masterpiece. It is a result of the combination of his raw humor and startlingly mature material. Twain developed a novel that directly attacked many of the seriously followed traditions the South at the time of its publication. Huck Finn is the main character, and through him, the reader observes and judges the South, its liabilities, and its positive qualities. Huck's companion Jim is an escaped slave, provides Huck with friendship and protection throughout their journey along the Mississippi on their raft. The novel opens with Huck telling his story. Briefly, he describes what he has experienced since, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* which preceded this novel. After Huck and Tom discovered twelve thousand dollars in treasure, Judge Thatcher invested the money for them. Huck was adopted by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, both of whom took pains to raise him properly. Dissatisfied with his new life, and wishing for the simplicity he used to know, Huck runs away and Tom Sawyer searches him out and convinces him to return home by promising to start a band of robbers. All the local young boys join Tom's band, using a hidden cave for their hideout and meeting place. However, many soon grow bored with their so called battles, and the band falls apart.

Soon thereafter, Huck discovers footprints in the snow and recognizes them as his Pap's. Huck realizes Pap, who Huck hasn't seen in a very long time, has returned to claim the money Huck found, and he quickly runs to

Judge Thatcher to "sell" his share of the money for a "consideration" of a dollar. Pap catches Huck after leaving Judge Thatcher, forces him to hand over the dollar, and threatens to beat Huck if he ever goes to school again. Upon Pap's return, Judge Thatcher and the Widow try to gain court custody of Huck, but a new judge in town refuses to separate Huck from his father. Pap steals Huck away from the Widow's house and takes him to a log cabin. At first Huck enjoys the cabin life, but after receiving frequent beatings, he decides to escape. When Pap goes into town, Huck seizes the opportunity. He sees his way out of the log cabin, kills a pig, spreads the blood as if it were his own, takes a canoe, and floats downstream to Jackson's Island. Once there, he sets up camp and hides out.

A few days after arriving on the island, Huck stumbles upon a still campfire. Although slightly frightened, Huck decides to seek out his fellow inhabitant. The next day, he discovers Miss Watson's slave, Jim, is living on the island. After overhearing the Widow's plan to sell him to a slave trader, Jim ran away. Jim, along with the rest of the townspeople, thought Huck was dead and is frightened upon seeing him. Soon, both share their escape stories and are happy to have a companion.

While Huck and Jim live on the island, the river rises significantly. At one point, an entire house floats past them as they stand near the shore. Huck and Jim climb aboard to see what they can salvage and find a dead man lying in the corner of the house. Jim goes over to inspect the body and realizes it is Pap, Huck's father. Jim keeps this information a secret. Soon afterwards, Huck returns to the town disguised as a girl in order to gather some news. While talking with a woman, he learns that both Jim and Pap are suspects in his murder. The woman then tells Huck that she believes Jim is hiding out on Jackson's Island. Upon hearing her suspicions, Huck immediately returns to Jim and together they flee the island to avoid discovery. At times Huck wonders whether he is right to help Jim,

"It hadn't ever come to me before, what this thing was I was doing. But now it did; and it staid with me, and scorched me more and more. I tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame, because I didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn's no use, conscience up and says, every time, "But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody" (92).

Using a large raft, they float downstream during the nights and hide along the shore during the days. In the middle of a strong thunderstorm, they see a steamboat that has crashed, and Huck convinces Jim to land on the boat. Together, they climb aboard and discover there are three thieves on the wreck, two of whom are debating whether to kill the third. Huck overhears this conversation, and he and Jim try to escape, only to find that their raft has come undone. They manage to find the robbers' skiff and immediately take off. Within a short time, they see the wrecked steamship floating downstream, far enough below the water-line to have drowned everyone on board. Subsequently, they reclaim their original raft, and continue down the river with both the raft and the canoe.

As Jim and Huck continue floating downstream, they become close friends. Their goal is to reach Cairo, where they can take a steamship up the Ohio River and into the Free states which they later don't because of the dense fog that comes their way. Huck finds the shore and is immediately surrounded by dogs. After escaping, he goes to live with a family called the Grangerford's where he is treated well and discovers that Jim is hiding in a nearby swamp. Everything is peaceful until an old family feud between the Grangerford's and the Shepherdson's is revived. Within one day all the men in the Grangerford family are killed, including Huck's new best friend, Buck. Amid the chaos, Huck runs back to Jim, and together they start downriver again. Further downstream, Huck rescues two boys known as the Duke and the King who later take control of the raft and start to travel downstream, making money by cheating people in the various towns along the river.

Further downriver, the two con men come to learn about a large inheritance amount meant for three recently orphaned girls and they pretend to be the girls' British uncles who become so happy to see their "uncles" that they do not realize they are being cheated. Meanwhile, the girls treat Huck so nicely that he vows to protect them from the con men's scheme. The King and the Duke fake their roles so well that there is no way to determine the truth. Finally, one of the real uncles says his brother Peter had a tattoo on his chest and challenges the King to identify it. In order to determine the truth, the town's people decide to unearth the body. Upon digging up the grave, the people discover the missing money Huck hid in the coffin. In the ensuing chaos, Huck runs straight back to the raft and he and Jim push off into the river. The Duke and King also escape and catch up to rejoin the raft.

Farther down the river, the King and Duke sell Jim and Huck decides to rescue Jim again. Luckily, the house is owned by none other than Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally. Huck pretends to be Tom then his younger brother, Sid Sawyer. Together, he and Huck contrive a plan to help Jim escape. After a great deal of planning, the boys convince the town that a group of thieves is planning to steal Jim. That night, they collect Jim and start to run away. The local farmers follow them, shooting as they run after them. Huck, Jim, and Tom manage to escape, but Tom is shot in the leg. Huck returns to town to fetch a doctor, whom he sends to Tom and Jim's hiding place. The doctor returns with Tom on a stretcher and Jim in chains. Jim is treated badly until the doctor describes how Jim helped him take care of the boy. When Tom awakens, he demands that they let Jim go free.

At this point, Aunt Polly appears, having traveled all the way down the river. Aunt Polly tells them that Jim

is indeed a free man, because the Widow had passed away and freed him in her will. After this revelation, Jim tells Huck to stop worrying about his Pap and reveals that the dead man in the floating house was Huck's father. Aunt Sally offers to adopt Huck, but he refuses because he thinks that he had tried that sort of lifestyle before, and it didn't suit him. Huck concludes the novel stating he would never have undertaken the task of writing out his story in a book, had he known it would take so long to complete.

The opening sentence of the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* shows that Huck Finn is the narrator and he tells his story in his own words, in his own language and dialect, and from his own point of view. Huck sounds as a young, uneducated boy from Missouri, using the first person narrative point of view. We can figure this out by the way he speaks with grammatical mistakes and all.

Although the whole children's adventure thing tends to reappear as a plot motif in *Huck Finn*, especially in the sections that include Tom, their major intention is to criticize Twain's contemporary society than to merely evoke tender memories in the readers' minds. This statement also clarifies that it does not matter whether readers have read Twain's earlier book or not. *Huck Finn* is Huck's story, and he will tell it from his natural, unsophisticated perspective.

When determining who should narrate the novel, Twain first considered the popular character, Tom Sawyer. Tom, after all, had garnered an enormous following from his own tale, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. But Twain felt that the kind of romantic personality Tom represents would not be correct for the novel's narration, and so he chose Tom's counterpart, Huckleberry Finn who is the most important figure in *Huck Finn*. He is considered as the most important and recognizable figures in American literature because of his literal, pragmatic approach to his surroundings and his inner struggle with his conscience. His observations are not judgmental; Huck observes the environment and gives the reader realistic descriptions of the Mississippi River and the culture that governs the towns that dot its shoreline from Missouri south.

It is important to note, that Huck himself never laughs at the incongruities he describes. For example, Huck simply accepts, at face value, the abstract social and religious tenets pressed upon him by Miss Watson until his experiences cause him to make decisions in which his learned values and his natural feelings come in conflict. When Huck is unable to conform to the rules, he accepts that it is his own fault, not the rule that is bad. Abstractly, he does not recognize the contradiction of "loving thy neighbor" and enforcing slavery at the same time. He observes the racist and anti-government rage of his ignorant father but does not tend to condemn him because it is the "accepted" view in the world he lives. Huck simply reports what he sees, and the straight narration allows Twain to depict a realistic view of common ignorance, slavery, and the inhumanity that follows.

As with several of the frontier literary characters that came before him, Huck possesses the ability to adapt to almost any situation through deceit. He is playful but practical, inventive but logical, compassionate but realistic, and these traits allow him to survive the abuse and violence he receives from others. To persevere in these situations, Huck lies, cheats, steals, and defrauds his way down the river. These traits are part of the reason that *Huck Finn* was viewed as a book not acceptable for children, yet they are also traits that allow Huck to survive his surroundings and, in the conclusion, make the right decision.

Because Huck believes that the laws of society are just, he condemns himself as a traitor and a villain for acting against them and helping Jim escape. More important, Huck believes that he will lose his chance at Providence by helping a slave. When Huck declares, "All right, then, I'll go to hell," he refuses his place in society and heaven, and the magnitude of his decision is what solidifies his role as a heroic figure.

In his book, *The Art of Mark Twain*, William Gibson describes the character of the slave, Jim as having the quality of a "Negro spiritual, or of a revival hymn about Beulah land." (107) He also gives an account of what Jim has been planning to achieve by running away from his master, which is freedom for himself and his family. He keeps talking about how he will save all his earnings when he is free and buy his wife; and they will then work to buy their two children; and if their master will not sell them they will even get an Abolitionist to steal the children from them.

Readers condemn *Huckleberry Finn* as a racist novel because of the language used in the novel to describe Jim and the other slaves. However, the repetition of the word Nigger or any other word against the African American slaves does not indicate this at all. In the early childhood days of Twain, he had witnessed the trade of slaves by his uncle and other people. He had also witnessed violence against these slaves and the way they were mistreated by their masters for trivial doings. The purpose of using such hard language is also for representing what actually was the situation. When Huck helps Jim, there comes a time where he realizes that he is considered to be guilty according to law and also a sinner who may not be permitted in Heaven. However, Huck does not care and he still helps Jim. Gibson explains Huck's attitude in his *The Art of Mark Twain*,

Violating and commandment "Thou shalt not steal" and the Fugitive Slave Law as well makes Huck's blood run cold, and his conscience drives him to take the canoe with the intent to "tell him" Jim to the first person he meets ashore. But he feels sick at the idea. . . (107)

Huck, Jim, and the society as a whole are trapped within the confines of the existing slave system and the other entrapments of culture, most notably language. Upon conducting a textual analysis of *Huckleberry Finn*

and *Pudd' nhead Wilson*, we can see that it indicates a consistency in Twain's treatment of race, and both of these works suggest that social fictions create unalterable realities. The power of social fictions and the fear of isolation and social racism are recurring themes which illuminate the problem of race and morality, thus revealing the complexity of the racial situation in America.

In one part of the novel, Jim wonders how people around the world can speak different languages when all people are the same. And when all people are same how come some are enslaved and some are not.

“Well, it’s a blame ridicklous way, en I doan’ want to hear no mo’ ’bout it. Dey ain’ no sense in it”.

“Looky here, jim; does a cat talk like we do?”(40)

In another part of the novel, Huck finds it difficult to apologize to a black man but he eventually does it. However Huck still has racist ideas although he is less racist than the other white men. The writer here may suggest that even the best of the whites had racist ideas and it was generally because the concept was a general one among the people that black people are less than the whites and they are only slaves, bought and sold like cattle.

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 a knowed it would make him feel that way.(78)

When Jim tells Huck that he wants to steal his children, Huck starts thinking if he hasn’t done wrong by helping Jim escape.

It froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn’t ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying, “Give a nigger an inch and he’ll take an ell.” Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children – children that belonged to a man I didn’t even know; a man that hadn’t ever done me no harm. (16.8)

Huck contradicted himself by first saying ‘his’ children and then saying that they ‘belonged’ to another man, probably the one who owned them as slaves. The writer would have intended to say that this was the case with the white people and the black. They were treated as animals and not as humans who had rights to claim. The novel discusses many crucial issues as such and Twain’s attempt to highlight the curse of slave-trade and the violence against them was a realistic one where he precisely described the white man’s way of looking at the African Americans. This should not be mistaken for him being a racist as the characters in the novel and especially Jim and the friendship between Jim and Huck prove entirely the opposite.

Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer

Tom Sawyer, the well known character of Twain’s other book and Huck Finn are the two of the most renowned characters among American and international readers worldwide that Mark Twain created. In fact, one could say that they are the most famous pair in all of American literature. Tom and Huck are completely different from each other in nearly every way, however one can see them as the two faces of the same coin. In fact, they are glacial opposites in basic living situations and in the ways in which they view the world, but one cannot know Huck Finn without knowing Tom Sawyer and one cannot read the first novel and not read the other.

While Tom and Huck are both orphans, however, Tom lives in a civilized household with an aunt who cares him, who understands his boyish pranks and bears them, who is tolerant with his youthful jaunts and whims, and who is deeply concerned about his welfare. In contrast, Huck Finn is alone, has no home, and his father is the town drunkard who completely ignores his son and, in his drunken rages, beats him violently. Thus, Huck has no one to take care of him. It is a sad commentary indeed that, at the end of the novel, Mr. Jones is the first adult ever to welcome Huck inside a private home. While Tom sleeps in a comfortable bed at night, Huck might be found sleeping in someone's barn, in a cardboard box, or his favorite sleeping place, in an empty hogsheads barrel.

In contrast to Tom, Huck is an outcast from society. Rather than conform, Huck thrives on his freedom from such restraints as society imposes. He cannot abide by the strictures of living in a regular household where there is no smoking and no cussing and where he must wear proper clothes, keep decent hours, and conform to proper manners, especially table manners. Whereas Tom's life is bound by society, by rules, and by acceptable behavior, Huck's life is one of freedom; he can come and go as he pleases. However, both share a common attribute when it comes to racism. In the novel, Huck saves Jim although Jim is a slave who is black skinned. However at times, Huck feels guilty that he is doing a great mistake by helping a slave. His views are seen by the reader as all the other slave merchants and slave keepers who do not consider Jim as a human being, but an animal who does not have any rights on himself or his wife or kids. The way Tom thinks about Injun Joe is also the same.

Injun Joe is presented in the novel as a villain, some might find it strange why the character of Injun Joe is

not that of a white man, but of a native. This might be considered by some readers as racism and Twain a racist, but these characters and their behavior are indicators that Twain wants to present to the world how actually these slaves' lives were like and how they were treated.

This difference between Tom and Huck is seen on Jackson's Island. The first day on the island is one of the glorious days in their lives, one lived to the fullest. But at night time, Tom and Joe, who have basically the same upbringing, have guilty consciences over stealing food for the outing, and even though they say their bedtime prayers--something Huck doesn't bother with--their consciences will not let them get to sleep. In contrast, Huck Finn has no pangs of conscience. He feels no qualms about having lifted (stolen) or borrowed certain items; he feels no compunction to live by the rules of society that has made him the outcast that he is. In fact, Huck has had a marvelous day because he is getting more to eat than he usually gets in the village.

Mark Twain's times bought more tickets to Tom Shows than copies of his books, but his books were among the era's most popular and widely known representations of slavery. When they looked through the words and pictures in those books as windows onto the world of American slavery, they could see what slavery actually looked like. In her *The Southern Magazine* review of the first two installments of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, for instance, another Southern writer, the novelist Martha McCulloch Williams, says that Mark Twain's work was a caricature of the slave-owners: "To mind, the only man worth either saving or damning in all the South country is the black man." On the other hand, in January 1889 Mark Twain actually substituted for Thomas Nelson Page at a benefit lecture in Baltimore, which suggests that to some in the audience both men shared, these two Southern-born and -raised writers whose best-known fictions depicted slavery, weren't ideologically incompatible.

There are times in the novel when Twain seems to say what he feels about the whole slavery issue and the cruelty with which they were treated,

Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another. 253-4

Both the novels and many other books written by Mark Twain had witty dialogues and cleverly presented pictures of slaves and how they were treated like animals. The characters represented the people of those times when slave trade was a usual thing and people owned and sold very simply. They did not care whether these slaves had families and what happened to their families. Twain touched upon all these things in his books and presented an honest picture.

Conclusion

Although Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* two decades after the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the civil war, America—and especially the south—was still struggling with racism and the aftereffects of slavery. By the early 1880's, reconstruction, the plan to put the United States back together after the war and integrate freed slaves into society, had hit shaky ground, although it had not failed outright. As Twain worked on his novel, race relations, which seemed to be on a positive path in the years following the civil war, once again became strained. The imposition of Jim Crow laws, designed to limit the power of blacks in the south in a variety of indirect ways, brought the beginning of a new insidious effort to oppress.

The challenges to *Huck Finn* as racist in its representation of slavery and African Americans have prompted a keen scholarly interest in trying to establish exactly what Mark Twain's ideas on those subjects were. All accounts agree that his ideas changed drastically over time. Although he grew up in Missouri, he never joined the Confederacy, it was a world in which slavery was taken for granted by most whites, fortified by all public institutions, including the churches, and attacked out loud by no one; Twain's own parents owned slaves. The Langdon family his wife belonged to, on the other hand, was actively abolitionist, and by the time he married into it at the start of his career the United States had put an end to slavery. As an owner/editor of the *Buffalo Express* in 1869 he wrote and printed an unsigned editorial protesting the recent execution of a black man in Memphis; in 1881 he wrote President-elect Garfield a letter on behalf of Frederick Douglass; in 1885, in acknowledgment of the rights of former slaves to reparation for the wrongs that white America had done them, he arranged to help support an African American named Warner T. McGuinn through Yale law school.

The word "slave" appears twice in Mark Twain's first fiction about the world of his childhood, in the Preface and in a footnote. In the text of the novel itself we meet Jim, identified only as Aunt Polly's "small colored boy," and hear about the unnamed "negro" who has just taught Tom a new way to whistle, about the "[w]hite, mulatto and negro boys and girls" who congregate at the town pump, and about "Uncle Jake," "Ben Roger's . . . pap's nigger." But slavery is barely mentioned. When the narrator talks about "captivity and fetters," he's referring to Tom having to go to school, and he uses the slogan of the Anti-Slavery movement -- "Am I not a man and a brother, without distinction of color" -- to make a joke about the way Tom's face looks after his sister Mary has washed it. More than Polly's fence gets white-washed in the story, but evading the presence of slavery is one of the most powerful means by which Mark Twain's story creates such an inviting past for his readers'

nostalgia to inhabit

When Mark Twain next goes back to St. Petersburg, slavery plays a much larger role in the story he tells, but how *Huck Finn* represents slaves and slavery remains a very controversial question. Throughout the novel Huck (as someone who's been raised in a slave-holding society) believes slavery is right; though he likes Jim and is willing to "go to hell" to "steal Jim out of slavery," he expresses more sympathy for Miss Watson as the "poor old woman" who owns Jim than for Jim himself. By 1885, slavery had been abolished for two decades, so nearly every contemporary reader would see Huck's belief in its eternal rightness ironically, as an example of another kind of "slavery" -- the way a child's mind is captive to the values of the society she or he is born into.

However even after slavery has been abolished, there remains the problem of understanding what it was like, what its legacy is, what it says about the nation's culture. And what remains ambiguous about the novel is the way it presents slavery: the idea of slavery that its words and pictures leave in the minds of its readers.

The new racism of the South, less institutionalized and monumental, was also more difficult to combat. Slavery could be outlawed, but when white southerners enacted racist laws or policies under a professed motive of self-defense against newly freed blacks, far fewer people, Northern or Southern, saw the act as immoral and rushed to combat it.

In his times, the words and pictures in Mark Twain's books were read and seen in a very different cultural context than ours. To appreciate the way his work re-presents slavery it helps to see the kinds of images Americans were familiar with from other popular sources. Mark Twain's two fullest treatments of ante bellum slavery -- were published, i.e. the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s.

Although Twain wrote the novel after slavery was abolished, he set it several decades earlier when slavery was actually a fact of life. However, even in Twain's times, things had not necessarily gotten much better for blacks in the South. In this light we might read Twain's depiction of slavery as an allegorical representation of the condition of the blacks in America even after the abolition of slavery. Just as slavery places the noble and moral Jim under the control of the white society no matter how degraded the white society might be. The insidious racism that arose near the end of the reconstruction also oppressed black men for illogical and hypocritical reasons. In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain exposed the hypocrisy of slavery and by doing so he demonstrates how racism distorts the oppressors as much as it does those who are oppressed. The result is a world of moral confusion in which seemingly good people such as Miss Watson and Sally Phelps express no concern about the injustice of slavery or the cruelty of separating Jim from his family.

Mark Twain's works have always been humorous but also witty and they have always shown a sign of seriousness wherever the issue was racism and slave trade. He has always done justice to the African slaves who were treated like cattle whereas everyone else thought it was right to treat them so. Who else could have represented slavery and racism better than Twain in his books, as he had lived the whole slave trade era.

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