

Mark twain and theme of racism in the adventures of huckleberry finn essay

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Mark Twain and Theme of Racism in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Mark Twain's 'The Adventures Huckleberry Finn' is one of the most illustrious works of American literature, and has occupied the central place in school and university curriculum all over the world. Huckleberry Finn is second to only Shakespeare's work in the regularity with which it appears in the academic scene. "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is often considered Twain's greatest masterpiece. Combining his raw humor and startlingly mature material, Twain developed a novel that directly attacked many of the traditions the South held dear at the time of its publication" (Short Summary. Grade Saver. Free Online Study Guide).

The story, which is told from the perspective of a 14 year old fugitive, deals with themes like sensational boyhood adventure, pointed social lampoon and farcical low comedy. It depicts the strong relationship between a white boy and a runaway slave, regardless of a social order which is strongly against inter racial relationship and communication. In this story Huck, a homeless boy, whose better impulses prevail over both selfishness and the negative forces of the time. Huck is under the protection of a widow who tries to educate him and sends him to the school. But he dislikes it. "Huck represents natural life through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways, and desire to escape from civilization. He was raised without any rules or discipline and has a strong resistance to anything that might "civilize" him.

This conflict is introduced in the first chapter through the efforts of the Widow Douglas: she tries to force Huck to wear new clothes, give up smoking, and learn the Bible" (Major Themes. Grade Saver. Free Online

Study Guide). Meanwhile his father, a ferocious racist who boasts of his own illiteracy, abducts him. Huck is managed to escape from there and meets a runaway slave, Jim. Huck faces a dilemma whether to protect Jim or hand him over to his master.

He overcomes his own self interest and society's belief in the 19th century that God authorizes slavery and decides to protect him. Though he decides to protect the runaway slave, he feels that he will go to hell. Nevertheless, he rises above his self interest and upbringings and decides to value necessary human bonds of trust beyond his own selfishness.

Throughout the story the author portrays a variety of human violence, corruption and pretension but the protagonist, Huckleberry Finn rises to the occasion and maintains his integrity throughout the novel. Critiques have pointed out several instances in the novel are typically characteristics of racism. The novel has generated lots of controversies in United States " In certain Southern states, the novel was banned due to its extensive criticism of the hypocrisy of slavery. Others have argued that the novel is racist due to the many appearances of the word " nigger." (About the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Grade Saver. Free Online Study Guide). Slaves are look like fools in several occasions in the novel. Critique argue that it was written with an intention to humiliate black population of America.

For example, when Jim, a fugitive slave meets Huck, Jim kneels down and prays to Huck not to sent him back or hurt him. It is alleged that the author

uses this to show that whenever a white person and black slave sees each other, the latter should bow down before the former because the author thinks that the white person is a better one. Moreover, some of words which the author uses are intended to insult black people. He often uses the word ' Nigger'. For colored people , it is a horrible word to hear because ' a nigger' is lower than dirt. Mark Twain uses the word as often as he can. He describes Jim as a ' good nigger'. Critique point out that Mark Twain do not want to portray Jim, as a colored person with a white man's heart.

He just wants to depict Jim as a slave who is a good nigger. Another instance from the story where racism is portrayed is when Jim and Huck wonder why Frenchman talk funny. Everybody knows it is due to their accent and Mark Twain uses the occasion to make fun of the way the French man talk, Huck informs Jim that English is not the only language spoken around the world. Rather than accepting the new information Jim tells Huck there is no possible way in which there can be another language.

Mark Twain uses the occasion to portray how foolish and illiterate Jim is. Critique argue that he specially chooses Jim for this because he is a runaway slave or in other words he uses the occasion to depict all the colored people are foolish and illiterate. Later in the story. Huck and Jim come in contact with two person who call themselves King and Duke. Their main job is to move up and down the Mississippi river looking for towns to perform for and cheat people out of their money.

Duke and King decide to go to a town and trick the people with their play. They call their play the 'Royal Nonesuch'. They divide the play into three parts. That is Romeo and Juliet, King Richard's sword flight and Hamlet's Immoral Soliloquy. Mark Twain's detractors say that he brings Shakespeare's some of the best known play into his works because he can make fun of them.

Duke and Dauphin are the only characters in all their plays and it is almost certain that the play may not be good at all. Moreover, they performed only a part of it because they know only a few parts of it. Critique allege that it is a definite attempt to make Shakespeare's play look foolish. Mark Twain tries to destroy the reputation of Shakespeare's plays because he may be considered better than Shakespeare.

Moreover, when people read Mark Twain's book and see how easily Shakespeare's world renowned plays can be mocked at, they might think that Mark Twain is much better than Shakespeare. Mark Twain in his 32 chapter talks about a boating accident. Huck's ant Sally enquires if anyone is injured. Huck replies, "No'm killed a nigger". Aunt Sally then says "Well its lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt." Twain, Mark.

E text. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Chapter 32. Grade Saver.

Free Online Study Guide). E text Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn chapter 32). The white people in the novel do not seem to care about the black people at all. When aunt Sally says it is lucky that no one gets hurt; it

implies that black people are not considered as human beings. Probably white people in the novel consider the slaves as animals.

Moreover, Huck and Jim become close friends during their journey down the Mississippi river. But it doesn't change Huck's approach towards blacks. When his aunt Sally enquires whether anyone injured or not. He replies "No'm, killed a nigger". It clearly shows that he has not changed his attitude towards black people and not started giving respect to any colored people.

Though Huck and Jim together for a while and Huck gets along time with Jim, but when it comes to another black person, Huck's feeling are same as any other white man. So, it is very clear that author doesn't want to change how white people feel about blacks though the main theme of story deals with the strong relationship between a white man and a runaway slave. In the entire story, whenever the fugitive slave, Jim speaks, it is very difficult to understand. Because Jim's dialect is very poor. Jim uses slang and broken up language. This is to make Jim look like foolish and very illiterate.

Mark Twain reiterates the point that blacks are not as smart as white people by making his black characters look unintelligent and illiterate. Recently, there is lots of discussions regarding racist ideas expressed by Mark Twain in Huckleberry Finn . Some of the schools went to the Extent of removing it from the school curriculum. A detailed study of the novel makes it very clear that it is not leaned towards racism at all. Actually, he attacks racism by ridiculing the every day life of the white people and shows that they have reason at to think that they are better than colored people.

This ridiculing of white people is effectively seen in the depiction of King and Duke. Their look gives a pessimistic feeling right from the start. The second thing that these men are used to make fun of society. For example, the first man talks about that he is the duke of Bridgewater and the other one makes up a story that he was the lawful king of France.

Mark Twain clearly depicts his revulsion for white society's greed through King and Duke. They try to sell Jim for just \$40 dollar, forgetting all Jim and Huck had done for them. Another incident which portrays the greed of Duke and King is their attempt to dupe daughters of Late Peter Wilks by pretending that they were Peter Wilks lost brothers. Their action according to Mark Twain " was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race".

Moreover, Many people believe the representation of black people especially the fugitive slave, Jim, as racist. They allege that his writings has a leaning towards racism. Before we make a judgment it is imperative that we should disconnect the ideas of Mark Twain from the ideas of his characters in his novel. Moreover, at times it is necessary to ' read between the lines' than taking the novel at face value to capture fundamental themes in the novel. On a superficial level, the novel might appear to be racist, because at the very beginning itself , the runaway slave, Jim has given a very negative description. He is depicted as childlike, superstitious, and illiterate.

But we should not forget that there is some truth in it, though it appears racist. Huck's father is a vicious racist and he has been brought up awfully racist individuals and because of their influence Huck seems to have

ingrained some thoughts of racism into his mind. Moreover, millions of slaves in southern parts of America are not given any formal education and they are constantly maltreated and abused. Mark twain depicts, using Jim, a realistic state of things of that time rather than racism. The author's desire for historical accuracy should not be misconstrued. There are several occasions in the novel in which, the author raises his objections to slavery and racism. For example, in chapter six, Huck's father zealously opposes the government for granting voting rights to an educated black professor. Mark twain clearly depicts the irrationality in his behavior.

In chapter 15, the author gives all together different characterization of Jim. The runaway slave is depicted as a father like figure for Huck. He becomes very worried when he loses his friend in the fog. This clearly shows the strong relationship developed between the master and his property. An author who has a leaning towards racism will find it difficult to portray such a scene. Moreover, when Huck first meets Jim on the island, he rises above his self-interest and societies mandates and takes a drastic decision i. e.

not to send Jim back to slavery. Though Huck has taken a monumental decision, he has to deal with two opposing forces i. e. the forces of friendship and the forces of society. Through, Huck's internal struggle, the author is able to depict his views on the irrationality of slavery and the need for following one's personal conscience before the laws of society. At the end of the story, Jim, the runaway slave is not somebody's property but a free man. Through this novel, mark Twain is able to portray the viciousness of society and makes the reader to challenge it. Work Cited.

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