

# The development of huck's opinion and views on african american slavery and racism...

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Throughout the book, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck struggles to figure out for himself what is right and what is wrong in regards to race and slavery. During his journey with Jim, he discovers that what people have always taught him, might not be the right thing. Throughout his life, he was taught that slaves were property and most people neglected to acknowledge that they are humans that have families, thoughts and feelings. In this time period, it was socially acceptable to view slaves as property as opposed to real people because to many, they did the work that others did not want to do. When Huck learns that Jim has run away, he is faced with the dilemma of turning him in, which is what he was taught as the right thing to do, or if he should help Jim on his journey to freedom. Huck's attitude changes towards Jim and shows the potential to be more accepting of the race as a whole. Some might argue that this is not true and argue that his opinion of African Americans has not changed and his opinion only changed towards Jim because he got to know him better.

Huck was born and raised in the American South during a time that slavery was at an all time high and it seemed like everybody owned slaves. The women that he was being raised by continuously tried to "civilize" him because she'd say his unruly ways were improper for a boy his age; Huck does what he wants, not caring what others think of him. In the beginning of the book, Huck considered slavery to be a regular part of life, never stopping to consider the immorality of the American practices. However, everything changes when Huck stumbles upon Jim on an island where they both seek refuge from something they're each running from. When Huck learns that Jim

has run away from Ms. Watson, one of the women looking after Huck, his conscience immediately kicks in and he thinks that he needs to return Jim to his owner. Yet, once Huck learns that she was going to sell Jim for \$800 and separate him from his family so he could be sent to a plantation in the deep south, Huck decides to help Jim on his journey to freedom (8. 37-38). He thinks about how people would despise him for helping a slave escape, society had always taught him that this would be considered stealing someone's property. Huck decides that breaking rules doesn't bother him and that he's going to help Jim on the journey to freedom. Throughout this journey, he takes precautionary measures to protect himself and Jim like dressing up as a girl to try and get information about whether or not people are searching for Jim. When Huck starts talking with a woman he meets when he is in the town, he finds out valuable information that's vital to Jim's safety. " The n\*\*\*\*\* run off the very night Huck Finn was killed. So there's a reward out for him- three hundred dollars..." (11. 48). If Huck hadn't snuck into town, he wouldn't have known that people were looking for Jim and that there was such a large reward for the person who finds him. While the change is subtle, Huck begins to show changes in his attitude toward Jim. Huck no longer just cares about his own safety, but Jim's as well. If he did not, he would not have risked going into town to get information.

A major turning point in the story is when Huck and Jim are separated in a fog. When they finally reunite, Huck plays a trick on Jim and tells him that it was only a dream and they had never actually been separated. This point in the story is incredibly important to the change in Huck's attitude because

Huck sees that Jim was worried about him when they were separated. Huck only makes up the dream because he doesn't want to deal with the emotions of both himself and Jim after being separated. I don't believe he wants to admit it, but he does care about Jim and just has a hard time showing it because this was such a new idea to him at the time. By lying, he's avoiding voicing his relief that he and Jim have been reunited and that he is safe. However, Jim realizes that Huck lied to him and is visibly hurt by that; Huck immediately feels terrible for having lied to Jim. "It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back. It was almost fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a n\*\*\*\*\*- but I done it..." (15. 73). Huck proceeds to explain how he never would have lied to Jim if he had known it would result in him being hurt. This is the first time that Huck truly sees that slaves have feelings too and they can be much more than just physically hurt by a whip. Up until this point, society had taught Huck that slaves were property, which dehumanizes them and strips them of any trace of emotion. Slowly, Huck comes to the realization that Jim too has feelings and they can be hurt just as easily as his own can. By the end of Huck's adventure with Jim, he has decided that he has had enough civilizing and he does not want to follow the societal rules he had been taught. Huck was able to achieve something that even today people struggle with.

Some people might argue that Huck's attitude did not change towards slaves and he only sympathizes with Jim because he got to know him. Up until chapter thirty one, Huck's guilty conscience is something that bothers him

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because society would be telling him that what he was doing is wrong. He worries that he is doing the morally incorrect thing in many situations because he is no longer casually hanging out with Jim, he is helping him escape from Ms. Watson. “ My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, until at last I says to it, ‘ Let up on me- it ain’t too late yet- I’ll paddle ashore at the first light, and tell.’ I felt easy, and happy, and light as a feather, right off. All my troubles was gone.” (16. 75). Huck had secretly resolved that he would turn in Jim because what he was doing wasn’t what society thought was correct. He knew he would get in a tremendous amount of trouble if someone were to find out what he did. So, Huck started to listen to his conscience and began paddling to shore not shortly after. However, something Jim says about Huck being the only white man to ever keep a promise stops him and he questions what the morally right thing to do is. This shows that Huck has indeed changed his attitude towards Jim and in time could change his attitude towards other people of color. By the end of their adventure, Huck thinks once more about what society thinks is the right thing to do. He writes a letter to Ms. Watson telling her where Jim is and hopes that maybe everything can go back to the way it was before Huck’s great adventure. However, he realizes that it’s not the morally right thing to do and he tears up the letter saying “ All right then, I’ll go to hell” (31. 179). By finally resisting the last bit of a guilty conscience from society, Huck is able to see that all this time he was wrong to think that slaves are just property. Now, after his adventure with Jim, he sees that they are so much more than that. Jim filled the void that Huck’s wayward parents left and gave

him someone to trust and to build a relationship with. Without this adventure, Huck would have probably still been stuck in his racist ways that he was being taught by society.

Huck was able to overcome something that continues to be a struggle today, even though slavery is no longer an issue. Being able to learn the difference between right and wrong for a child of Huck's age is difficult to begin with, let alone with people telling you that slavery is right. He was raised by people who owned slaves, strengthening the influence of their ideas, specifically about how slaves are property and are considered to be lower than whites. By going on this adventure with Jim, Huck learns that slaves have feelings and everything he does has an effect on someone, whether its good or bad. In addition, he comes to the realization that what people teach him might not always be the morally right thing to do. All in all, Huck changes his attitude for the better and prompts a future change in attitude towards more people than just Jim.