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Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn (Third Edition) (Norton Critical Editions)



Synopsis

This perennially popular Norton Critical Edition reprints for the first time the definitive Iowa-California text of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, complete with all original illustrations by Edward Windsor Kemble and John Harley. The text is accompanied by explanatory annotations. "Contexts and Sources" provides readers with a rich selection of documents related to the historical background, language, composition, sale, reception, and newly discovered first half of the manuscript of Mark Twain's greatest work. Included are letters on the writing of the novel, excerpts from the author's autobiography, samples of bad poetry that inspired his satire (including an effort by young Sam Clemens himself), a section on the censorship of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by schools and libraries over a hundred-year period, and commentary by David Carkeet on dialects of the book and by Earl F. Briden on its "racist" illustrations. In addition, this section reprints the full texts of both "Sociable Jimmy," upon which is based the controversial theory that Huck speaks in a "black voice," and "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It," the first significant attempt by Mark Twain to capture the speech of an African American in print. "Criticism" of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is divided into "Early Responses" (including the first negative review) and "Modern Views" by Victor A. Doyno, T. S. Eliot, Jane Smiley, David L. Smith, Shelley Fisher Fishkin (the "black voice" thesis), James R. Kincaid (a rebuttal of Fishkin), and David R. Sewell. Also included is Toni Morrison's moving personal "Introduction" to the troubling experience of reading and re-reading Mark Twain's masterpiece. • A Chronology and Selected Bibliography • are also included.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Okay, we all know the plot, so there's no sense in rehashing it; but this book has generated a great deal of heat and very little light lately, it's been banned in some school districts and attacked as racist garbage, so this review will address the question: Is "Huckleberry Finn", in fact, a racist book? The charge of racism stems from the liberal use of the N word in describing Jim. Some black parents and students have charged that the book is humiliating and demeaning to African-Americans and therefore is unfit to be taught in school. If there has been a racist backlash in the classroom, I think it is the fault of the readers rather than the book. "Huckleberry Finn" is set in Missouri in the 1830's and it is true to its time. The narrator is a 13 year old, semi-literate boy who refers to blacks by the N-word because he has never heard them called anything else. He's been brought up to see blacks as slaves, as property, as something less than human. He gets to know Jim on their flight to freedom (Jim escaping slavery and Huck escaping his drunken, abusive father), and is transformed. Huck realizes that Jim is just as human as he is, a loving father who misses his children, a warm, sensitive, generous, compassionate individual. Huck's epiphany arrives when he has to make a decision whether or not to rescue Jim when he is captured and held for return to slavery. In the culture he was born into, stealing a slave is the lowest of crimes and the perpetrator is condemned to eternal damnation. By his decision to risk hell to save Jim, he saves his own soul. Huck has risen above his upbringing to see Jim as a friend, a man, and a fellow human being. Another charge of racism is based on Twain's supposed stereotyping of Jim.

Mark Twain's 1885 novel, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," has had a long history, during which it has been and still is both reviled and celebrated. Essentially the story of the picaresque travels and adventures of a young Missouri boy and his friend Jim, a runaway slave, in 1840's America. Taking cues from books like "Don Quixote" and Jonathan Swift's works, and a fraught relationship to Sir Walter Scott's historical romances and those of his protege, James Fenimore Cooper, Twain constructs a masterful first person narrative, through the eyes of 14 year old Huckleberry and a profound and hilarious satire on American culture. "Huckleberry Finn" begins in tension - Huckleberry's fortune and wardship with the well-meaning widow Douglas has him in a bind. The widow wants to 'sivilize' him, taking him out of the happy go lucky, easy going lifestyle he loves, while his fortune of six thousand dollars has him living in perpetual anxiety of his father, a violent drunkard whose absence only makes Huck more anxious about his return. When Huck's pap does return, sure enough, Huck is remanded, more or less, to Pap's custody, and kept prisoner in a secluded cabin. Though he is no longer being 'sivilized,' his time with Pap becomes more and more

tense and lonely, driving Huck to stage his own death and run away from Pap and from civilization. Early in his escape, on a small island in the Mississippi River, he meets Jim, a slave from his town of St. Petersburg, who has run away, planning to raise money in the north to buy his family out of slavery. Together, Jim and Huck form a friendship that will take them up and down and all around the Mississippi River. "Huckleberry Finn" deals with a great many social issues, and none more interestingly than with conventional morality.

Back during my school days this was still not a book that was considered to be politically incorrect and so I was supposed to read it. As was far too often the case, I got by on little more than watching the movie version and never bothered to read this masterpiece. A few months ago I picked up a copy to put in my library for my grandson to use when he got old enough to go to school.

Unfortunately this has been classified as a children's book and so I had little intention of reading it when I bought it. After discussing a book about President Grant and Mark Twain with a friend I decided that I should read this book and I soon found out just how much of an adventure I had been missing. Twain's well deserved reputation as a storyteller is on clear display in this book from cover to cover. The reader is drawn into the lives of the characters to the point of being really disturbed when something bad happens to them. Sure, they steal and they lie but you will love them in spite of everything. The story basically follows the adventures of young Huckleberry Finn and a runaway slave named Jim. Finn is trying to escape his father and the efforts of the townspeople to civilize him while Jim is trying to escape slavery. More to the point, Jim is trying to escape being sold down the river, which was always a worry for slaves in the upper south. There is a strong moral point to this book as Huck slowly learns to love Jim as a friend and not think of his skin color. Early on Huck is worried about helping a runaway slave and isn't sure what to do. Having been raised in Missouri, Huck has been taught that helping a slave run away is one of the worst sins imaginable and that African-Americans are pretty much worthless except as slaves.

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