

# Portrayal of 19th Century Racial Issues in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

---

Ćosić, Vlatka

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2014

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:948338>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2025-01-24**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Preddiplomski studij Engleskog jezika i književnosti i Mađarskog jezika i  
književnosti

Vlatka Ćosić

**Portrayal of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Racial Issues in *The Adventures of  
Huckleberry Finn***

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2014.

## **Summary**

The paper focuses on 19<sup>th</sup> century racial issues and their portrayal in Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It sheds light on the most important aspects of lives of slaves and on the way Twain represented them in one of his most famous works. The paper deals with types of slavery and lives of slaves from which it moves on to the way slavery was legally regulated. Legal regulation of slavery greatly impacted the way both slaves and free blacks were treated by the dominant white society. Slaveholders used various methods of controlling their slaves, religion being one of those methods. This paper points out that slave owners used religion to justify slavery and that religion influenced identities of slaves. Finally, the paper examines the peculiar relationship between Huck and Jim and how this relationship affected Huck's view of Jim and blacks in general.

**Key words:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain, slavery, society

**Contents**

Introduction.....1

1. Types of Slavery..... 2

2. Legal Regulation of Slavery.....5

3. Treatment of Blacks by White Society.....9

4. Religion of Slaves.....13

5. Huck and Jim.....15

Conclusion.....18

Works Cited.....19

## **Introduction**

In this paper, I will try to illuminate in what ways the 19<sup>th</sup> century racial issues are portrayed in Mark Twain's controversial novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The paper begins by clarifying types of slavery and the way certain types of slaves lived. It shows how Twain described those types, especially the lives of city slaves. The next chapter is about legal regulation of slavery. In it, I will try to explain how different codes affected the lives of blacks and how these codes affected the lives of characters from the book. The following part of my paper deals with the treatment of blacks by the dominant white society. In it, I will try to show that slaves were considered property, even animals, and that good people supported slavery. Good people who supported slavery usually found justification for it in religion. I will try to illuminate how religion affected the lives of slaves and ultimately helped in creating the double-consciousness. Finally, in the last chapter, I will examine the relationship between Huck and Jim. I will show how their friendship grows stronger and how it changes Huck who is under the strong influence of his upbringing.

## 1. Types of Slavery

Slave owners were encouraged to make their slaves believe that there is no life for them without their masters. Owners provided their slaves with food, shelter and clothing, making them completely reliant on their masters. This was an essential part of slave society because master's power relied on his slaves being dependent on him.

Nowadays, when we think of slavery, the picture that arises is the one of field slaves working on big plantations. It is important to note that this was not the only type of slavery; the other type was house slavery. House slavery occurred both on the plantations and in the cities. Lives of slaves differed greatly depending on the type of slavery they had to endure. Among slaves, those living in cities were considered to be "the most fortunate" ones.

In the first two chapters of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain slowly introduces his readers to the lives of slaves in America. The first aspect of slavery presented to the readers is the existence of house slaves living in cities.

City slaves made less than six percent of the entire enslaved population. Apart from being house slaves, they often worked in shipyards, brickyards, cotton presses and warehouses. Many of them were skilled in being tailors, masons, butchers. These jobs were far less physically demanding than jobs performed on the plantations. Apart from having easier jobs than plantation slaves, city slaves had better living conditions as well. They mostly lived in attics or back rooms of their master's house. City slave owners often rented their slaves to other people. This gave slaves the opportunity to move around more freely and even to earn some money. They had the chance to interact with other black people and to broaden their views. Frederick Douglass, a writer, an abolitionist, and a former slave, wrote:

A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation. He is much better fed and clothed, and enjoys privileges altogether unknown to the slave on the plantation. There is a vestige of decency, a sense of shame, that does much to curb and check those outbreaks of atrocious cruelty so commonly enacted upon the plantation. He is a desperate slaveholder, who will shock the humanity of his non-slaveholding neighbors with the cries of his lacerated slave. Few are willing to incur the odium attaching to the reputation of being a cruel master; and above all things, they would not

be known as not giving a slave enough to eat. Every city slaveholder is anxious to have it known of him, that he feeds his slaves well; and it is due to them to say, that most of them do give their slaves enough to eat.

This quotation shows that, apart from having better food and clothes, city slaves endured less cruelty and punishments from their masters. Cities were more “civilized” than plantations, so city slave owners treated their slaves better because they strived to appear more “civilized” themselves. It is, of course, only illusion because no kind of slavery can ever be considered civilized.

In the first chapter of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we learn that Miss Watson and Widow Douglas own a couple of slaves. Huck tells us that these “niggers” were called to the house to pray with their masters. This suggests that these slaves did not suffer from ill treatment coming from the sisters. In the second chapter we learn more about the interaction between city slaves. After Huck and Tom played their prank on Jim, Jim was convinced that he was taken by the witches. He developed an elaborate tale of him being kidnapped by the witches and he told this tale to other slaves. Slaves would cross miles to come to listen to Jim’s tale, and they even gave him their possessions so that they could look at the “devil’s charm.” This shows that city slaves had much more freedom to move around and congregate, and even to possess things and earn money than plantation slaves who often did not have these rights. Apart from having some money, city slaves were even engaging in games of chance, as confirmed by Jim: “Wunst I had foteen dollars, but I tuck to specalat’n’, en got busted out” (Twain). Because of all the attention that Jim got, Huck declared him: “most ruined for a servant, because he got stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches” (Twain). This simple sentence manifests that slavery is hard to maintain when a person is not in an utmost humble state of mind, body and spirit.

When it comes to plantation slavery, grand plantations with hundreds of slaves were very rare. Most slaves worked on small farms which usually had 20 to 30 slaves. There were two groups of plantation slaves - house and field slaves. House slaves were of lighter complexion, often mulattoes, and their living conditions were somewhat better than those of field slaves. House slaves had better clothes, worked easier jobs, and were able to get more food. While staying at the Grangerford’s, Huck states that every family member had his own slave: “Each person had their own nigger to wait on them— Buck too. My nigger had a monstrous easy time, because I

warn't used to having anybody do anything for me, but Buck's was on the jump most of the time" (Twain). Here we can also see that house slaves did everything for their masters; from helping them getting dressed to fulfilling their every whim. Although not mentioned directly, we can conclude that the Grangerford family lives on a huge plantation. It is even said that they own a lot of land and more than a hundred slaves. Traces of plantation slavery are next seen on the Phelps farm. This is probably one of the smaller farms and it does not own a lot of slaves. Field slaves are not clearly mentioned, and not a lot of information is given about house slaves either.

Although the novel was written almost twenty years after the Civil War, Twain was still very cautious when it came to writing about slavery. Slavery is the most important theme of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but it is not depicted in its full brutality. Plantation slavery was the cruelest part of slavery, but Twain did not even mention it clearly, he made only references to it. Not writing more about plantation slavery is something a lot of people hold against Mark Twain. It is also the reason why many people think that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not a good choice for teaching students about slavery. I agree that there are far better novels that can be used to teach students about slavery, but in the case of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the very absence of plantation slavery can be educational. This absence tells us that, in the 1880s, America was still not ready to confront its past and all the atrocities of slavery.



## 2. Legal Regulation of Slavery

Power of masters and lives and rights of slaves were regulated by slave codes. These were laws which defined the status of slaves and rights of masters. States could alter the codes, but they were all very similar to one another. It is no wonder that the codes were less drastic in the North and that they became more and more drastic as one moved to the South. Codes regulated that slaves were not to leave the owner's property, own weapons, run away, lift a hand against a white person (even in self-defense), drink alcohol, learn to write and read, work for money, gather in groups...Every offense was harshly punished. Whipping, mutilation and death were common sanctions for those slaves who got caught. Whites could also get punished, although less severely. They were usually punished for selling alcohol to slaves, for helping them escape or, in the case of masters, for not properly punishing their slaves. Whites were usually fined or imprisoned. Slave codes also regulated that black men were not to lay with white women. This was mostly because the codes also regulated that a child should inherit the status of its mother. Black women often gave birth to children conceived with white men (usually their masters and overseers who commonly raped their slave women) and these children were slaves because their mothers were. If a white woman was to give birth to a black man's child, this child had a status of a free person, which did not appeal to the white society of the time.

In the first two decades after the American War of Independence (1775-1783), the number of free blacks in the United States rose dramatically because the northern states abolished slavery. The ideals of the war had a great impact on many slaveholders in the Upper South who freed their slaves. The proportion of free blacks in the Upper South rose from 1% in 1790 to 13% in 1810. When it comes to the Deep South, their demand for slaves only increased.

After the American War of Independence and the great rise in number of free blacks, laws needed to be changed. Slave codes could not apply to free blacks, so black codes were established. Black codes were quite similar to slave codes. In many laws, word "slave" was just replaced with the word "Negro." The most important function of black codes was not to punish free blacks, but to restrict their movement. With the increase in number of free blacks in the South, slave owners became frightened. They believed that free blacks threatened the social stability because their presence fostered discontent between slaves. Slave owners also believed that free blacks were likely to start rebellions and help slaves to escape slavery. They were not

far from truth when it comes to this. Many free blacks did start rebellions and were essential to the Abolitionists.

The best example of the black codes in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* comes from Huck's father. He angrily retells his encounter with a free black man. The man was a mulatto, "most as white as a white man" (Twain), and he was nicely dressed. Pap tells that the man was a college professor who could speak many languages. This indicated that he was, most probably, a son of a wealthy white man who paid for his son's education. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was not so uncommon for rich whites to provide their mulatto children with good education. Next, Pap tells Huck that this mulatto, who came from Ohio, had the right to vote in his country. After the American War of Independence, some northern states gave blacks right to vote. This right was not largely supported by whites, and some of those states revoked it. What angered Pap the most was the fact that there was no way to legally enslave the mulatto:

I says to the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold?—that's what I want to know. And what do you reckon they said? Why, they said he couldn't be sold till he'd been in the State six months, and he hadn't been there that long yet. There, now—that's a specimen. They call that a govment that can't sell a free nigger till he's been in the State six months. (Twain)

Many Southerners shared Pap's anger and annoyance with black codes and rights of free blacks. They were accustomed to treating all black men as slaves, so they were largely in favor of slave codes. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is filled with examples of slave codes. These examples mostly focus on Jim and his escape from slavery. Jim escaped because he heard that Miss Watson was going to sell him for 800 dollars. He tells the story of his escape to Huck: "You see, ef I kep' on tryin' to git away afoot, de dogs 'ud track me; ef I stole a skift to cross over, dey'd miss dat skift, you see, en dey'd know 'bout whah I'd lan' on de yuther side, en whah to pick up my track" (Twain). We can see that whites hunted down runaway slaves like they were animals. Moreover, they used dogs to hunt the slaves down - animals hunted "animals."

Runaway slaves had to be very careful not to get caught because masters had the right to recover their escaped slaves. This right was given to the masters by the Fugitive Slave Act. Slaves had to pay a lot of attention to where they were going. Borders between countries were easily missed, so a slave could, instead in a "free" state, end up in a slave owning one: "There warn't nothing to

do now but to look out sharp for the town, and not pass it without seeing it. He said he'd be mighty sure to see it, because he'd be a free man the minute he seen it, but if he missed it he'd be in a slave country again and no more show for freedom" (Twain). This only shows how thin the line between slavery and freedom was. In order to make their chances of escaping to freedom higher, slaves had help from the Abolitionists. Abolitionists were people, both black and white, who opposed slavery and helped slaves to escape slavery. Secret routes and safe houses used by the Abolitionists to help slaves escape were called the Underground Railroad. Southerners thought that being an Abolitionist was something corrupted and shameful. This can be seen in Huck's fear that he will be considered an Abolitionist because he is helping Jim: "People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum..." (Twain). Slaves who did not managed to escape, who got caught, were severely punished (which was allowed and encouraged by the slave codes). Huck retells what happened when Jim got caught:

The men was very huffy, and some of them wanted to hang Jim for an example to all the other niggers around there, so they wouldn't be trying to run away like Jim done, and making such a raft of trouble, and keeping a whole family scared most to death for days and nights. But the others said, don't do it, it wouldn't answer at all; he ain't our nigger, and his owner would turn up and make us pay for him, sure. So that cooled them down a little, because the people that's always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hain't done just right is always the very ones that ain't the most anxious to pay for him when they've got their satisfaction out of him. (Twain)

This quotation shows how brutal the treatment of escaped slaves was. Apart from hanging slaves to serve as an example to other slaves, many whites actually enjoyed this brutality, and this is the reason why they were so eager to hang Jim. It is not human compassion that stopped them from hanging Jim, but unwillingness to refund his master for the loss of his property.

One of the cruelest regulations of the slave codes was the right of masters to separate families by selling their members. Brothers and sisters were almost always sold to different masters, which was cruel, but not as cruel as separating mothers from their children. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the two frauds do sell a mother away from her children, and it causes a great distress even in the white community: "The thing made a big stir in the town, too, and a good many come out flatfooted and said it was scandalous to separate the mother and the children that way" (Twain). It is interesting to note that, although everyone knew that this kind of separation

was cruel, no one did anything to stop it. It was the same as with the white people who condemned slavery, but remained silent. It is often in human's nature to ignore injustice that happens to other people; to not meddle in something that does not concern one directly.

When it comes to Jim's family, he had a plan to get them back as a free man:

He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free State he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them. (Twain)

It was not uncommon for a freeman, after getting his freedom, to try to buy his family. If this was even to happen, it often took a long time for a former slaver to earn enough money to even buy a single slave. By that time, the enslaved spouse or child was often sold somewhere else. If this happened, the freeman could have a very hard time trying to locate his spouse/child, and it often resulted in families never being reunited.

### 3. Treatment of Blacks by the White Society

American author and historian Howard Zinn states that “We have no way of testing the behavior of whites and blacks toward one another under favorable conditions—with no history of subordination, no money incentive for exploitation and enslavement, no desperation for survival requiring forced labor.” This shows us how complicated and unfair the relationship between blacks and whites had been from its very beginning. Since the very beginning of slavery, blacks were seen as an inferior race, as nothing more than animals, as property. John Jacobs, a former slave, asserts that “Slaves are recognized as property by the law and can own nothing except by the consent of their masters.”

When brought to America, blacks from Africa needed to be “broken,” they needed to be taught to be slaves: “The slaves were taught discipline, were impressed again and again with the idea of their own inferiority to ‘know their place,’ to see blackness as a sign of subordination, to be awed by the power of the master, to merge their interest with the master's, destroying their own individual needs” (Zinn). This treatment had a dehumanizing effect on both blacks and whites, as neither slaves nor masters could go through slavery with their humanity intact.

Although it does not depict the full brutality of slavery, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* gives an authentic feel of how blacks were seen as property. In the South, racism and slavery were so deep-rooted that most people did not even know any other way to look at a black person. Huck does not look at Jim as his property, but as a property of Miss Watson. One of the few instances when he does name Jim as his property, even only by pretense, is when one of the frauds travelling with them sells Jim:

HUCK: I wouldn't shake my nigger, would I?—the only nigger I had in the world, and the only property.

THE DUKE: We never thought of that. Fact is, I reckon we'd come to consider him our nigger; yes, we did consider him so—goodness knows we had trouble enough for him.  
(Twain)

This quote also shows that white men were eager to claim slaves as their own, even if by law they did not belong to them.

Apart from being treated as property, blacks were often thought to have negative, corrupted characters. Huck's father, a character who represents all negative human characteristics, sees

blacks as “prowling, thieving, infernal” (Twain). It was not uncommon for slaves to try to steal something, in most cases food, from their masters, but this is completely understandable if we take the way they lived into account.

Because whites believed that slaves were as black on the inside as they were on the outside, it is no wonder that Jim was so easily accused of murdering Huck. When the whole town of St. Petersburg considered Huck to be dead, there was no evidence that pointed to the murderer. Still, after Jim escaped from slavery shortly after Huck’s alleged murder, everyone was quick to conclude that Jim murdered Huck. Not only that the citizens were eager to pin the murder on an innocent slave, they were even willing to hunt Jim down without any evidence of him committing the crime:

Well, next day they found out the nigger was gone; they found out he hadn’t ben seen sence ten o’clock the night the murder was done. So then they put it on him, you see; and while they was full of it, next day, back comes old Finn, and went boo-hooing to Judge Thatcher to get money to hunt for the nigger all over Illinois with. (Twain)

This quotation is supported by Douglass’ statement that, for a slave, “to be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished.” It is important to note that slaves were punished for any misdoing and for any crime (including the ones they did not even commit), but, in many states, whites would easily escape punishments for their crimes. In many states, in which slavery was deep-rooted, killing a slaves was not even considered a crime: “I speak advisedly when I say this, - that killing a slave, or any coloured person, in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts rot the community” (Douglass).

It would be absurd to consider the whole white southern society bad. Many of these people were essentially good, but they still supported slavery. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the story of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* takes place, generations of Southerners were born and raised in the slave owning society. For them, slavery was normal and justified because they were raised to consider it that way. However, the evidence that whites were not born with the slave owning state of mind comes from Frederick Douglass. When younger, he would talk with the white boys about slavery, and their answers would confirm that an untainted heart sees slavery as wrong, unjust:

I would sometimes say to them, while seated on a curbstone or a cellar door, “I wish I could be free, as you will be when you get to be men.” ‘You will be free, you know, as soon as you are twenty-one, and can go where you like, but I am a slave for life. Have I not as good a right to be free as you have?’ Words like these, I observed, always troubled them; and I had no small satisfaction in drawing out from them, as I occasionally did, that fresh and bitter condemnation of slavery which ever springs from natures unseared and unperverted. (Douglass)

In more than a couple of occasions, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we encounter genuinely good people who support slavery. The best example for this kind of person is Miss Watson, Jim’s mistress. She took Huck, who was practically an uncivilized orphan, in and she took good care of him. From her treatment of Huck, we as readers realize that Miss Watson is a good person, but this realization is tainted by the fact that she owns slaves. She is very “civilized” and deeply religious, as most of the slave owners of the time were. Although slave owning and Christianity should be in stark contrast, whites actually used religion and the Bible to justify slavery. Pious slave owners thought of themselves as good Samaritans because they were helping poor slaves who would without their help be lost, unable to live. In return for “taking care” of them, slave owners expected gratitude from their slaves. For slave to run away from his master was considered a grave sin and very humiliating. In the book, it is best shown when Huck considers telling Miss Watson where Jim is:

...she’d be mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her, and so she’d sell him straight down the river again; and if she didn’t, everybody naturally despises an ungrateful nigger, and they’d make Jim feel it all the time, and so he’d feel ornery and disgraced. (Twain)

This statement is, of course, completely absurd. It raises a question of how much pride can a person have if he/she is a slave. A slave cannot take pride in being a slave. Escaping slavery cannot be disgraceful because nothing is more disgraceful than slavery itself.

The next example, from the book, of a good person supporting slavery is the scene with Mrs. Loftus. In order to gather information about his own “murder” and Jim’s escape, Huck establishes contact with Mrs. Loftus. She and her husband are hoping to capture Jim, a runaway slave, in order to collect the prize for his capture which is three hundred dollars. She even refers to her husband’s chase for Jim as “hunt,” as if Jim is an animal that needs to be hunted down.

After Huck tells her that he had escaped from a mean farmer, she is quick to offer to help him. This shows us that in her mind, like in the minds of most Southerners, there is a clean difference between molested whites and molested slaves. By being willing to help a molested white boy, Mrs. Loftus shows that she is a good person, but by being more than happy to capture a molested runaway slave, her good character becomes tainted. It becomes clear that slavery induces double standards in people who are basically good, bringing their goodness into question.

One of the most important scenes showing the attitude of whites toward blacks is the scene when Huck, pretending to be Tom, retells the made up story of his journey to Aunt Sally. Aunt Sally is Tom's aunt. She is one of those good pious people who support slavery. She takes Huck in, believing that he is her nephew Tom: "Aunt Sally is a type, an equal mixture of Christian goodwill, blind bigotry, and doting affection, glad to receive the boy whom she takes to be her nephew" (Quirk 139). Because Aunt Sally expected "Tom" to arrive earlier, Huck makes up a story about how there was some malfunction, which caused an explosion, on the boat:

HUCK: It warn't the grounding—that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder-head."

AUNT SALLY: Good gracious! anybody hurt?

HUCK: No'm. Killed a nigger.

AUNT SALLY: Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt. (Twain)

This exchange shows how worthless were the lives of black people in the eyes of white people. It also shows how white slave owners did not even perceive blacks as people. Aunt Sally simply brushes off the fact that a person died, just because that person happened to be black. This statement is not the only factor that brings Aunt Sally's goodness into question. Apart from being slave owners, Aunt Sally and her husband held Jim in custody because they believed he was a runaway slave.

In the end, we find out that Jim is a free man: "Old Miss Watson died two months ago, and she was ashamed she ever was going to sell him down the river, and said so; and she set him free in her will" (Twain). Miss Watson's repentance for wanting to sell Jim makes her better in reader's eyes, but it is important to note that she felt remorse for wanting to sell her slave, not for owning him in the first place. Still, by freeing Jim, Miss Watson showed that she is better than the rest of the slave owning characters in the book.



#### 4. Religion of Slaves

Howard Zinn asserts that “The blacks had been torn from their land and culture, forced into a situation where the heritage of language, dress, custom, family relations, was bit by bit obliterated except for remnants that blacks could hold on to by sheer, extraordinary persistence.” This quotation gives an insight into what happened to blacks when they came to America. Slaves were completely ripped off their identity. They tried to hold on to it as much as possible, but with the each following generation, their African heritage faded. Eventually it blended with European culture, creating a hybrid between the two.

When it comes to religion, African blacks practiced many different kinds- from monotheistic to polytheistic religions. After coming to America, they were usually forced to abandon their religions and accept Christianity. Slave owners found justification of slavery in Christianity and the Bible itself. They were also encouraged to use religion to help them control slaves:

Religion was used for control. A book consulted by many planters was the Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book, which gave these instructions to overseers: “You will find that an hour devoted every Sabbath morning to their moral and religious instruction would prove a great aid to you in bringing about a better state of things amongst the Negroes.” (Zinn)

While whites used the Bible to support slavery, slaves found solace and strength for resistance in it. They often held secret meetings (in which communal singing took root) in which they retold the story of Moses leading his people out of Egyptian slavery. It is no wonder that slaves identified themselves with this story. It gave them hope that someday they will too escape their enslavement. After the abolition of slavery, W.E.B. Du Bois, an American historian, activist and author, wrote: “To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the Canaan was always dim and far away.” From this quote, it is clear that, after the abolition, blacks still struggled to escape the heritage of slavery, to find their promised land.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the first encounter with religion of slaves happens quite fast. At the very beginning Huck narrates how Miss Watson’s slaves came to the house to pray with them. Although it shows a nicer treatment of slaves, it can be also interpreted as control of the way slaves prayed and imposition of “white” type of Christianity. This control and imposition might be deemed, by the masters, as necessary because slaves still held on to

remnants of their former religions. In the book, these remnants can be seen in parts when Jim's superstitions come to surface, like when he claimed that he was kidnapped by witches.

By blending the remnants of their old religions with Christianity, slaves created a new type of Christianity. This new Christianity was just a part of the new identity of blacks which came to exist from the clash of cultures. The creation of this new identity was very troublesome and confusing for slaves. Generations born in America did not know any other land, but, because of whites, they did not feel like they fully belong in America. They often felt as if two persons lived in one body: "One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois). To be able to explain this "peculiar sensation" of feeling one's twoness, Du Bois coined a term *double-consciousness*. He extensively wrote about this subject, trying to make his readers understand how dreadful the feeling of double-consciousness, of being torn apart between two identities, must have been.

## 5. Huck and Jim

The relationship between Huck and Jim is a peculiar one. Huck's upbringing and Jim's status as a slave make two of them unlikely friends. While living with Miss Watson, Huck and Jim never established some kind of deeper relationship. Huck was just a white boy, Jim was just a slave. When, after his escape and days of being alone, Huck encounters Jim on Jackson's Island, he expresses genuine happiness: "I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn't lonesome now" (Twain). Here we can see that Huck still has not fully developed slaver's state of mind; he is just happy to have company, no matter if it is black or white.

At the beginning of their journey together, Huck and Jim encounter a dead man's body. Jim does not let Huck to see dead man's face because it is Huck's father. By shielding Huck from pain, both physical and emotional, Jim proves to be a good person and a true, caring friend. In the next couple of chapters, Huck's puerile behavior and his thirst for adventures brings their lives into danger. Jim constantly advises Huck against doing foolish things, but Huck does not listen to him. It is clear that Jim, a grown up, represents no authority to Huck. Instead, Huck is the leader; he does whatever he wants and Jim just follows him and tries to prevent something bad happening to Huck. It does not mean anything that Jim is a lot older than Huck, Huck is white and it is the color of his skin that gives him power over Jim. Although Jim considers Huck to be his friend, he still lives in constant fear of being handed in. When in opportunity to hand Jim in, Huck uses lies to protect Jim. In those situations, there is a great internal conflict between Huck's upbringing and his friendship with Jim:

They went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong... Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on: s'pose you'd a done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad—I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? (Twain)

When it comes to Jim, Huck's heart prevails over his upbringing. Huck concludes that he would rather "go to hell" than give up his friend Jim. Huck spends the entire length of their journey convinced that him helping Jim is something to be ashamed of, a grave sin. The proof for this is the fact that Huck was honestly appalled when Tom decided to help him free Jim:

Well, one thing was dead sure, and that was that Tom Sawyer was in earnest, and was actuly going to help steal that nigger out of slavery. That was the thing that was too many for me. Here was a boy that was respectable and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I couldn't understand it no way at all. It was outrageous, and I knowed I ought to just up and tell him so; and so be his true friend, and let him quit the thing right where he was and save himself. (Twain)

This quotation is noteworthy because it speaks volumes about slavery and people who supported it. In it, we can see the full absurdity and perverted values of slavery and slave owning society. It truly is absurd that Southerners believed that no respectable, educated, good person would ever condemn slavery, yet along help a slave escape it.

One of the most heartfelt moments between Huck and Jim happened on the raft after Huck pulled a prank on Jim. Jim's feelings got hurt, and Huck felt genuinely sorry for hurting his friend: "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" (Twain). Apart from making it clear that Huck considers Jim to be his friend, this scene is significant because Huck treated Jim as his equal. By "humbling himself to a nigger" (Twain), Huck got rid of his preconceptions, at least when it comes to Jim. He admitted that a black man has feelings just like anyone else, that he is not an animal. Although it is admirable that Huck came to this conclusion, which was so rare at the time, it was pointed only towards Jim. In his realization, Huck made a big mistake. His mind of a child, under the strong influence of his upbringing, did not realize that all black people share the same characteristics as Jim, that they all have feelings and are not animals. During their journey together, Huck, in a couple of instances, came to a conclusion that Jim was different from what Huck thought slaves should be. One of the first of Huck's comments, where his realization that Jim was more than he thought a black man should be, is when Jim stated that, in a life-threatening situation, he could either get drowned or get saved and returned to Miss Watson (which would result in Jim being sold). After this conclusion, Huck remarked that Jim was "most always right" (Twain) and that he had "an uncommon level head for a nigger" (Twain).

The next scene in which Huck recognizes that Jim is different is when Jim grieves because he misses his family: “He was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn’t ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their’n. It don’t seem natural, but I reckon it’s so” (Twain). Here Huck specifically points out the belief of whites that slaves did not have any kind of deep, caring emotions. To him, it was not natural, but, by living with Jim, he could not come to any other conclusion. This is yet another instance when Huck prevails over his upbringing.

Huck’s friendship with Jim and all that he had learned during their journey comes into question when Huck reunites with Tom. Under Tom’s influence, Huck acts more childish and is more prone to do foolish things. Apart from hiding that Jim is a free man, Tom treats him like an object which becomes obvious from his complicated and dangerous plan to “free” Jim. Huck never even questions Tom and his plan, and he does not even stop to think about the consequences the plan could have on Jim. It becomes obvious not only that Huck is still very immature, but that he can easily forget that Jim is a human being, not some kind of object to be played with.

The final scene in which Huck is convinced that Jim is different from other slaves is when Jim decides to help injured Tom. By helping Tom, Jim sacrificed his freedom because he knew that he would get caught. Huck’s response to Jim’s sacrifice was that he knew Jim was “white inside” (Twain). This statement serves as the last proof that Huck realizes that Jim has the same characteristics as white people do, but he attributes these characteristics only to Jim. Here we can see that Huck did not manage to completely prevail over his upbringing, but that he came to consider Jim as an exceptional black man.

## Conclusion

Slavery is beyond doubt a complicated theme. It is never easy to write about such a cruel theme, and books dealing with it are usually difficult to read. In his masterpiece novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain managed to write about slavery in a different, lighter way. He wrote a novel about the adventures of a boy and a black man, a slave. By not writing directly about slavery, Twain wrote a novel that is both funny and thought-provoking. In a series of absurd situations, he succeeded in portraying many racial issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Twain gave his readers the insight into the lives of city slaves, but he avoided writing about plantation slavery, which is the only shortcoming of the novel. He managed to write about legal regulation of slavery without losing the attention of his readers. Twain even included in the novel the influence of religion on the lives of slaves. He perfectly portrayed the position of slaves in the dominant white society. He made it clear that slaves were seen as property and emotionless savages. By establishing a deeper relationship between Huck and Jim, Twain found a way to show that slaves had all of the human characteristics. By making Jim Huck's friend, Twain gave his readers hope that the human kind will overcome slavery and its legacy.

## Works Cited

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Project Gutenberg. Web. 1 September 2014.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

Douglass, Frederick. *A Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. *The Literature Network*. Web. 1 September 2014. [http://www.online-literature.com/frederick\\_douglass/frederick\\_douglass\\_narrative/](http://www.online-literature.com/frederick_douglass/frederick_douglass_narrative/).

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Project Gutenberg. Web. 1 September 2014. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/202/202-h/202-h.htm>.

Jacobs, John. "A True Tale of Slavery". *Documenting the American South*. Web. 1 September 2014. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jjacobs/jjacobs.html>.

Quirk, Tom. "The Realism of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn". New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Project Gutenberg. Web. 1 September 2014. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/76/76-h/76-h.htm>.

Zinn, Howard. "Drawing the Color Line". *History is a Weapon*. Web. 1 September 2014. <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/zinncolorline.html>.