

In Defence of Huckleberry Finn

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Although we are supposed to be living in a democratic country with free speech and freedom of thought and expression, many pieces of literature may never be enjoyed by many Canadian youth. Through blind ignorance many classic pieces of literature have been taken off school courses and school library shelves. These are books that are intelligent, thought provoking and enriching. Why would people take them away and why we should we try and get them back?

Why is it that many people label what is probably "THE" American novel – "Huckleberry Finn" – as racist? The novel is about a white orphan boy nicknamed Huck and a black slave named Jim who have adventures along the Mississippi in pre-civil war America. Mark Twain's childhood heroes are classic literary characters like Alice, Snow White, Cinderella, Anne of Green Gables, King Arthur, Mowgli, Winnie The Pooh, Peter Rabbit and The Little Mermaid. Why are there groups of people who reject "Huck" in its entirety?

As I mentioned before, the label these people put on the novel is "racist". Well I should hope to a certain extent it is. Any black man or woman in America's deep south didn't even get the right to vote until the 1960's. During the pre-civil war period conditions were dramatically worse. Blacks had no rights at all. They were slaves. This isn't fiction. This isn't an insult. This is a fact.

Jim is in fact a rather revolutionary character who was very much ahead of his time in his thoughts and ideas. His hopes and dreams for equality between the races made Mark Twain's novel an item for people's book burning sessions. It's rather ironic that people burned it for its talk of all men are equal and people ban it today because they claim it is racist.

Many people find the character of Jim insulting. He's uneducated. He's stupid at times. He's also rather submissive. If I know my American history I believe that's the condition most Blacks were in at the time. It was against the law for Blacks to even read, so of course Jim is going to be uneducated. Since Jim is uneducated he wouldn't be too bright either (If a white man was uneducated he'd probably be stupid too). The submissiveness that Jim displays is greatly overshadowed by his spirit of independence and bravery in trying to escape to the North.

"Huckleberry Finn" is an enriching and enlightening novel. It's a piece of American history that's still as relevant today as when it was first published. To deny this novel on the grounds of racism is foolish. Denying black slavery is like denying the Holocaust ever happened. If we ignore and deny history we can't learn from mankind's mistakes. Don't reject one of the greatest novels in American history.