

Huck Finn – Outline

- I. Treatment of Whites/Negroes
 - A. Whites treat blacks poorly
 - B. Slavery not yet abolished
 - C. Slaves sold as property
 - D. Jim's selling, Phelps Plantation, Jim's imprisonment
 - E. Forced to tie Jim up before leaving him
 - F. All men are not created equal.
 - G. Huck – the boat sank, but no one injured. Killed a nigger.

- II. Culture of decadence
 - A. Men standing around in Bricksville
 - B. The whole town came to watch as Boggs died
 - C. Killed animals for entertainment
 - D. Tried to lynch Sherburn not out of justice, but out of boredom and jealousy.
 - E. King/Duke “sank to their level” and did no women/children allowed show

- III. Conformity to Society, People are Gullible
 - A. Miss. Watson wanted to civilize Huck in order to “save him.” Wanted him to blend in with all the other kids, or in other words, lose his individuality
 - B. Phelps's son shooting at his neighbor when he doesn't even know what the feud was all about
 - C. Huck is a non-conformist
 1. Follows his heart, never takes anything anyone says as fact or right
 2. Ran away so he could retain his ideals/ways
 3. Decided to help Jim even though being an abolitionist was despised.

- IV. People are gullible
 - A. The King and the Duke are able to fool so many people out of their money
 - B. Even able to get people to keep quiet after they realize they've been fooled
 - C. King able to fool people at another town that he was a reformed pirate
 - D. Fooled entire town into believing that they were the brothers of Pete Wilks

Huck Finn Essay

The Civil War brought sweeping economic and cultural changes for the rural South. With agriculture being their main source of income, the South utilized slave labor to plow their land and harvest their fields. Their lifestyle was in direct contrast to the industrialized North, and the differences in their culture were shown during the Civil War. Mark Twain, in his masterpiece, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, criticized the Southern culture of white supremacy, decadence, and conformity.

Since slavery had not yet been abolished, it seemed reasonable for whites to treat their slaves as property, free to be sold and bought at the owner's will. Miss Watson often pondered over selling Jim down the river, eventually causing Jim to flee. Although Huck viewed Jim as his friend, most Southerners would jump at the opportunity of returning a runaway slave and collecting the reward. Few, if any, would ever hesitate to think about the slave's well being. In fact, when Huck went ashore with the King and the Duke, they had to tie Jim in order for them to pose as if they were returning a fugitive slave. Even Huck possessed the idea of white supremacy to some degree, for when the Phelps asked him if anyone was hurt in the shipwreck, he answered "No'm. Killed a Nigger."(p.167) Finally, the Phelps imprisoned Jim, yet asked Tom to stay for dinner. Both were strangers, but Tom received significantly better treatment simply because of the color of his skin.

Aside from the treatment of slaves, Twain also denounced the "culture of decadence" in cities such as Bricksville, AK. The men of Bricksville were idle, lazy, and "there couldn't anything wake them up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog-fight – unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him." (p.106) When Colonel Sherburn shot Boggs, the entire town came to watch and even laid

a Bible on his chest. However, no one truly mourned his death, and many even enjoyed seeing it. Afterwards, Buck Harkness led a mob to lynch Sherburn, only to be sent home after Sherburn's emphatic speech. The people were not trying to lynch Sherburn in the name of justice, but rather to eliminate a man more fortunate than they. To further prove the moral degeneration of the people, the King and the Duke's original Shakespearean play drew only a handful of viewers, yet *The Royal Nonesuch*, an obscene show in which women and children were not admitted, drew a large audience.

Besides the "culture of decadence," Twain expressed his disbelief in the gullibility of the people. The King and the Duke were able to cheat so many citizens because the people were making decisions with their emotions instead of their mind. In fact, the King even convinced a large crowd that he was a reformed pirate in need of money. After the first showing of *The Royal Nonesuch*, the audience already knew that they have been cheated, but were convinced to tell their friends that it was a wonderful show. Finally, the King and the Duke were able to fool almost an entire town into believing that they were the brothers of Peter Wilks. The latter further supported Twain's claim that the people of the South were extremely gullible.

Finally, Twain suggested that Southerners were plagued with conformity. At the Grangerfords, Buck fired at Harney Shepherdson, yet does not even know the cause of the feud. He listened only to his parents, who told him that every Shepherdson was his enemy. Miss Watson wanted to "civilize" Huck so he could blend in with the other children. Huck, however, did not want to fit in. In the minds of Miss Watson and many other adults, Huck was a troubled child who needed their help, yet in different light, he rose above the entire town. The people lived their lives by the rules and customs of the

town, yet Huck was the only one with the courage to openly challenge those customs. His individuality could be seen through his decision to help Jim escape, for at the time, the public despised abolitionists. Even at the close of the novel, Huck decided head west, for “Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it.”(p.220)

In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Twain identified several major flaws in Southern culture, including the “culture of decadence,” the gullibility of the people, and the treatment of slaves. Through the experiences of Huck Finn, he was able to provide the reader with a “panorama of American life”(Microsoft Encarta 2000) before the Civil War.