

Filial Conformity Leads to Societal Destruction

It was morning. The little boy got out from his bed and dressed. After he had brushed his teeth, combed his hair, and eaten breakfast, the boy went to school. After school ended, he came home and started his homework, finishing it just before dinnertime. By the end of the day, the boy climbed back into bed and fell asleep. Such a routine is common among children living in a society governed by conformity. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain illustrates a society in which adults teach lessons of conformity and routine to all of the children—all but Huckleberry Finn, a boy lacking a stable parental authoritative figure.

Huck Finn learned to live and survive on his own. He skillfully escaped from his father, and alone made his way to Jackson Island. Although Jim, a black adult, had accompanied him through most of his adventures, the runaway slave needed Huck's support in order to survive as well. Jim believed that if he gained his freedom, it would be because of Huck. “ ‘Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de *only* fren' ole Jim's got now.’ ”(p.67) Therefore, Huck, in essence, took care of two people—Jim and himself.

On the other hand, Tom Sawyer was a boy with a family and a typical Southern upbringing. He would always have a bed to sleep in, and an adult to keep him under supervision. Although he seemed to enjoy causing trouble and breaking rules, he was very different from Huck. Huck did not follow the rules of society because he did not belong to that society. Tom would break some rules of society solely for the sake of breaking them. Unlike Tom, Huck used intuition in making his decisions.

Huck's use of intuition was an important trait in a transcendentalist as described by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Huck was a model transcendentalist of his time period, despite the fact that American Transcendentalism was founded several years after *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was written. Huck followed no daily routine; he lived every day as it came. One of Huck's actions distinguished him particularly from most people of the South. In his decision to not turn Jim in, he followed his intuition in spite of the lessons he had been taught about heaven and hell, good and evil. “I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied it a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: ‘All right then, I'll go to hell’—and tore it up.”(p.161-162) The quote from *The Adventures of Huckleberry*

Finn was a perfect example of Transcendentalism—so perfect, that it even resembles a section of Emerson's *Self-Reliance*: "...but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil."(US Lit p.223) Both quotes illustrate a transcendentalist willing to do follow his intuition, even if it means to follow evil.

However, for a stable, well-off family such as the Grangerfords, the children learned not to follow their intuition, but rather, to follow their parents. Buck Grangerford was a boy who conformed perfectly to the Southern culture. He did not need to make any decisions or think for himself. For this reason, Buck did not understand the true meaning of his family's feud against the Shepherdsons. And for that reason, Buck was willing to murder a Shepherdson and to die while fighting a Shepherdson. Huck, however, could not understand how a person would want to kill a man for no apparent reason. " 'Did you want to kill him, Buck?' 'Well, I bet I did.' 'What did he do to you?' 'Him? He never done nothing to me.' 'Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?' 'Why nothing—only it's on account of the feud.' "(p.81)

Another example of a negative authoritative family figure was Huck's father. While Huck lived with his father, his father would abuse him physically and verbally. Huck's father was an extreme case of a controlling parent, determined to be the sole owner of his son's life. "He said he would like to see the widow get me. He said he would watch out, and if they tried to come any such game on him he know of a place six or seven mile off, to stow me in, where they might hunt till they dropped and they couldn't find me."(p.19)

However, part of the problem of the Southern society, and perhaps in any society, is the feeling that parental control is essential. When the judge gave Huck back to his father, he did not doubt the ability of Huck's father as a parent. He instead trusted that all adults could be good and capable parents. "...but it was a new judge that had just come, and he didn't know the old man; so he said courts mustn't interfere and separate families if they could help it; said he'd druther not take a child away from its father."(p.16)

The lack of a stable family had given Huckleberry Finn a view of the world no one else could see. In the midst of conformity and reason in the Southern atmosphere, Huck was seen as a bad influence for his carefree and seemingly crude lifestyle. However, by the end of the story, readers saw that it was in fact the Southern society which was barbaric and artificial. Huck, the epitome of Transcendentalism, gave the readers eyes to the ills of society. The society feeds upon conformity and absence of thought among adults, using the parents as its hands and arms in

order to mold their children just the same. Adults almost always boast their experience from their many years of life to the younger and less experienced, as an excuse to have power over them. But none realize that experience may also bring prejudices, those which will rub off on the youths who naively listen to the advice of their elders. Such a problem does not allow the society to improve from generation to generation, but to be inherited nearly unchanged for several decades.