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## 11 MARK TWAIN'S *HUCKLEBERRY FINN* AS A CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION

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Samuel Langhorne Clemens, otherwise known as Mark Twain, is one of the most representative American writers. As a river boat pilot, Mark Twain wrote of his best and bitter experience, in his numerous novels especially *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and its sequel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Even his non-fictional works speak of his greatness. Mark Twain once visited India. He was born in Florida, Missouri in 1835. His family then had moved there from Tennessee. Later the family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, near St. Louis. Mark Twain set many of his novels in this region. For example,

Hannibal was dusty and quiet with large forests nearby which Mark Twain knew as a child and which he uses in *Huck Finn* when Pap kidnaps Huck and hides out in the great forest. The steamboats which passed daily were the fascination of the town and became the subject matter of Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*. The town of Hannibal is immortalized as St. Petersburg in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Mark Twain's father was a lawyer by profession. He was a stern disciplinarian. His mother was a witty, comedian. She loved lower life. The author had a happy childhood. Later Mark Twain became a printer in Hannibal. Once he thought of migrating to South America. Then he became a riverboat pilot. He became familiar with the towns on the river Mississippi.

When the Civil War broke, Mark Twain's allegiance tended to be somewhat southern due to his southern heritage, but his brother Orion Clemens convinced him to go West on an expedition, a trip which became the subject matter of a later work, *Roughing It*. Even though some of his letters and accounts of traveling had been published, Mark Twain actually launched his literary career with the short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," published in 1865. This story brought him national attention, and he devoted the major portion of the rest of his life to literary endeavors. He died in 1910.

In the present novel, Huck (leberry) Finn decides to tell his own story since the reader has already heard about him through a novel called *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. As the son of the town drunkard, Huck has had difficulty living with the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson, since both want to civilize him. He prefers the easy and free manner of living wild. When his father discovers that Huck has some money, Huck is kidnapped and held prisoner in a shack across the river. His father beats him so brutally that Huck decides that he must escape or else his father will kill him some day. He creates a plan whereby it will appear that he has been murdered and then he goes to Jackson's Island to hide.

On the island he discovers Jim, Miss Watson's runaway slave, and Huck promises to keep Jim's secret. Huck discovers that some men are coming to the island to search for Jim, and the two escape by floating down the Mississippi River on a raft they had earlier discovered. They plan to go to the Ohio River and travel north into free states. On the river, they feel free and easy as they travel during the night and hide during the day. One night, in a storm, they float past Cairo and, since the raft can't go upstream, they search for a canoe. Before they find one, a steamship runs into the raft.

Huck climbs ashore and finds himself being challenged by the Grangerford men who are having a feud with the Shepherd-sons. Huck tells them that he is George Jackson and that he fell overboard off a steamboat. He stays with them until he witnesses the deaths of many people in an outbreak of the feud. In the meantime, Jim has been discovered and they return to the raft and escape from the feuding. Down the river, two scoundrels make their way to the raft and call themselves a duke and a king. At one town along

the river, the king and the duke put on a trumped-up show and gull the townspeople out of a large sum of money. Continuing down the river, the king and the duke discover that a Peter Wilks has just died and left a large sum of money to two brothers in England who are expected any day. The king and the duke imitate the brothers in order to rob the Wilks family of its inheritance. Huck, however, is sympathetic to one of the nieces and foils their plan. As they escape and head down the river, the king and the duke are desperate for money, so they sell Jim to Silas Phelps for ransom money.

Huck hides the raft and goes to the Phelps farm where he is immediately mistaken for Tom Sawyer, who is supposed to arrive the same day. Huck goes out to meet Tom and they decide that Huck will remain Tom, and Tom will pretend to be his brother Sid. After many fantastic and ridiculous plans are put into effect to free Jim, at the moment of escape Tom is shot in the leg and Jim has to give up his chance for freedom to help nurse Tom. After the episode, however, it is discovered that Jim was already freed by his owner, Miss Watson, just before she died. Huck decides to head out for new territory because he does not like civilized society.

**References:**

1. Twain, Mark. *Huckleberry Finn*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1998. Print.
2. Roberts, James. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Lincoln: Cliffs, 1971. Print.