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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

THE ISSUE OF RACE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF MARK TWAIN'S 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY NOVEL *THE ADVENTURES OF  
HUCKLEBERRY FINN* AND KATHRYN STOCKETT'S CONTEMPORARY WORK  
*THE HELP*

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(minor)

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice, 5. prosince 2022

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I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D. for his guidance with by diploma thesis and for providing me with his valuable advice and input with regards to my paper.

## **Anotace**

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na rasovou problematiku zobrazenou v americké literatuře. Porovnává díla *Dobrodružství Huckleberryho Finna* (1884) od Marka Twaina a *Černobílý svět* (2009) od Kathryn Stockett a popisuje, jak oba romány nahlíží na roli Afroameričanů ve společnosti. Jelikož jsou díla zasazena do dvou nejvýznamnějších období v dějinách Spojených států amerických ve vztahu k rasové problematice, a to sice do období otroctví a rasové segregace, práce se také zabývá historickým kontextem, který je klíčový pro analýzu obou děl. Cílem práce je upozornit na podobnosti a odlišnosti románů týkajících se této problematiky. Autentičnost děl, zacházení s Afroameričany a pojetí jejich integrace do společnosti, kritika děl a další témata jsou rozebírána v rámci analýz.

Klíčová slova: *Dobrodružství Huckleberryho Finna*, *Černobílý svět*, otroctví, rasová segregace, rasová problematika, diskriminace, Afroameričané

## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis focuses on the issue of race in American literature. It draws a comparison between Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett and determines how both novels view the role of African Americans in society. Since these works depict two of the most significant periods in the history of the United States concerning the racial issue, namely the eras of slavery and racial segregation, the work also provides historical context of both periods, which is crucial for the analysis. The thesis aims to highlight the similarities and differences of the novels regarding this issue. The authenticity of these works, the treatment of African Americans and the concept of their integration into society, criticism, and other topics are discussed as part of the analyses.

**Keywords:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Help*, slavery, racial segregation, the issue of race, discrimination, African Americans

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## Introduction

Every day, whether in the news, on the internet, on social media, or in literature, we encounter problems related to skin color. This issue is, however, most discussed in relation to the United States, especially with the racial discrimination against Afro-Americans. With the global widespread of the profound Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, America has captured the attention of the world. There is probably no one who would not be familiar with the dark side of American history, and a part of today's population believes that the deep-seated prejudices against Blacks and racism in general are a result of the enslavement of African Americans in the past. There is no doubt that American slavery has a stake in the shape of today's United States. Although one would think that society has freed itself from its former beliefs, one would argue that present America still lives in the shadow of the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>- century events. Since I have always been interested in the given issue, I figured I would like to immerse myself more into it. As a student of literature, I, of course, decided to focus my thesis on the portrayal of race in American literature. We can find so many praiseworthy African American authors in American literature. Whether we are talking about the origins of slavery, when the so-called slave narratives were brought to life which allowed us to witness the cruel treatment of slaves, the authors such as Frederick Douglass (the author of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*) or Harriet A. Jacobs (the author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*) played a significant role in the emergence of the African American literature. After society shifted its focus towards the Afro-American voice, we have seen the publications of the works such as *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, or *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. All of these talented authors have shown us what it is like to be African American. In my diploma

thesis, I decided to approach the topic matter from a different point of view. What would it be like to look at African American life through the eyes of a white individual? Stories shape our identity, and as Garcia et al. point out “the dominant narrative lens through which Americans are instructed to view race relations has always been a white one.”<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that there are many literary works written by African Americans that contributed their value to the understanding of U.S. culture and history. Unfortunately, they have been rarely given as much credit as White authors since white perspectives dominate black representations. Despite the success of a few highly praised Afro-American authors of contemporary American literature such as Alice Walker or Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, the mainstream media are and has always been dominated by White authors and their stories of black life.<sup>2</sup> And that is how the idea of focusing my thesis on White authors depicting the issue of race was brought to life. For my analyses I have chosen the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the contemporary work *The Help*. The thesis aims to determine how both novels view the role of African Americans in society and compare them based on the issue of race portrayed in both works. Despite these novels being written more than a century apart, we can observe many similarities in both of them regarding this issue.

I have chosen *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain – by his own name Samuel Langhorne Clemens – as the first work for the analysis since it portrays the life of a runaway slave through a White individual’s eyes. What we can observe in this novel, is quite an extraordinary phenomenon as a little White boy creates a bond with a runaway slave in the antebellum South. What Twain was trying to show us with the story was what can happen when two individuals of different skin color distance

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom’s Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.



themselves from society and disregard social rules. His work gained even more popularity because the story is told from the point of view of a young boy trying to create his own opinion of slavery. No to mention, the controversy surrounding *Huckleberry Finn*. Since Twain's literary production includes other famous works such as *The Gilded Age* (1873), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and the posthumously published novel *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916), he is often called "the father of American literature". Apart from being well-known for his humorous writing style, vernacular language and setting his greatest work around the Mississippi River, his novels also contain a lot of criticism against the society which can be, arguably, mostly observed in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

As Twain's work depicts the racial situation in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for my second analysis, I have chosen *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett. This contemporary author sets her work, depicting the life of Afro-American maids, in the 1960s, which means the era of racial segregation in the Jim Crow South. The role of African American maid in a white household has been already explored by many famous American writers before. Whether we are talking about the character of nurturing Calpurnia in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee or the enslaved house maid Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell who is firmly associated with the "black mammy" stereotype, an Afro-American maid played a significant role from the antebellum South to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As being born and raised in Jackson, Stockett managed to portray the racially conflicted Mississippi through the eyes of black maids. The civil rights movement represented one of the most significant milestones for African Americans in history, which brought enormous fame to *The Help* after its publication.

Many factors played a role in the selection of the works. Firstly, both novels portray the situation concerning racial inequality in the South of the United States. Secondly, both works reflect the political, cultural or social context of the given period. Thirdly, both authors encountered (whether fleetingly or more) the issue first-hand. Mark Twain grew up in the presence of slaves, and Kathryn Stockett's family was hiring Afro-American maids when she was little. Among the similarities, we can include such a small detail as the fact that both authors set their work approximately forty years before its publication which is of almost minimal significance, but in my opinion, an interesting detail. Both works have also received much criticism.

This thesis provides a detailed analysis of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Help* (2009), and each chapter examines a single important aspect of the issue portrayed in both novels. It intends to assess their authenticity, the treatment of African Americans, the concept of their integration in the society, and compare how they view the idea of coexistence of both races given the time period. The thesis, thus, also includes a decent amount of historical context to the subject matter and assesses its relevance to American history. The controversy surrounding *Huck Finn* lasts for almost a century and a half, and each year there are more studies on whether or not the work should be taught in schools, as a large part of the population finds it offensive. It is not my goal to question them, on the other hand, I intend to stress some of the ideas, and support or refute them based on my analysis. Stockett's debut novel has been only recently published, therefore, I strongly believe that my analysis will enrich the research that has been done so far. In no way do I want to vent to the world the idea that as a white European, I have a say into the subject matter. My goal is to merely provide insight into the racial problem that has been prevalent in America for centuries, based on the famous American literary works dealing with the issue of race. I would also like to point out that

words such as “African American” and “Black” serve as synonyms in this thesis, and their interchangeability only precludes the repetition of words.

# 1 Mark Twain – *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

## 1.1 The Introduction of Slavery in the United States

The term *slavery* is frequently associated with the southern states of the United States in pre-Civil-war America. Despite the fact that this form of labor has become famous in the United States, its origins go far back in history. Slavery operated in Egypt, ancient Rome and Greece, which indicates that it emerged approximately around 7000 BC.<sup>3</sup> The second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century represented the most crucial period for the introduction of slavery in the United States. According to Franklin and Moss this period “may be considered the years of preparation in the history of the slave trade.”<sup>4</sup> Although today we commemorate the discovery of America by Columbus, many people dismiss this idea because it was the 1492 embrace of America that gave rise to the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>5</sup> Africans were first forced to work on plantations in the Caribbean primarily on Cuba, Jamaica, Hawaii, Barbados and other islands.<sup>6</sup> This was an area called the West Indies. In the early days, it was mainly tobacco cultivation, progressively, raw materials such as sugar cane began to be added. Even then, conditions for slaves were appalling, and many of them died in the new land.<sup>7</sup> Alderman writes that “ten thousand black slaves a year were being shipped from West Africa to the West Indies”<sup>8</sup> by 1540.

As the European nations needed labor to maintain their power due to their colonial expansions, slave trafficking was gaining strength. The transatlantic slave trade lasted for

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<sup>3</sup> Bales, Kevin, et al. “Perpetual Chains: Slavery throughout History and Today.” *Modern Slavery: A Beginner’s Guide*, Oneworld Publications, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Alderman, Clifford Lindsey. *Rum, Slaves and Molasses: The Story of New England’s Triangular Trade*. Crowell-Collier Press, 1972, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-45.

<sup>8</sup> Alderman, Clifford Lindsey. *Rum, Slaves and Molasses: The Story of New England’s Triangular Trade*. Crowell-Collier Press, 1972, p. 18.

over three centuries and it mainly operated between three territories. With Britain becoming more engaged in enslavement, the African West Coast became the main target. Europe presented the starting point of triangular trade as ships with trade products were embarked on to Africa. French brandy and New England rum were in the greatest demand in exchange for slaves.<sup>9</sup> The African captives were transported in horrendous conditions on the ships heading to America, and as the journey took up to three months, many of them died during the sailing.<sup>10</sup> The voyage from the New World back to Britain represented the final leg of the triangular trade. The ships loaded with tobacco, cotton, cocoa, rum and sugar headed back to Europe to be available to the local market. The end of the transatlantic slave trade is associated with the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888. However, even so, during that time, approximately “between eleven and twenty-eight million people had been taken from Africa.”<sup>11</sup>

The first slaves brought to the British colonies were originally called only ‘servants’. The first was twenty Africans who landed with a crew in 1619 at Jamestown. As the settlers saw the success slavery was having in the Caribbean, they figured they needed cheap labor to help populate the New World. At first, the black population grew quite slowly. It was not until 1750 that it exceeded one hundred thousand in Virginia. The settlement also gained momentum in the other colonies. Other colonies with an abundant number of slaves outside of Virginia also included Maryland, North and South Carolina as slaves became crucial to the commercial life of the New England colonies.<sup>12</sup> In 1790, the U.S. population was nearly 4 million, 750,000 of whom were black.<sup>13</sup> The state of

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<sup>9</sup> Alderman, Clifford Lindsey. *Rum, Slaves and Molasses: The Story of New England’s Triangular Trade*. Crowell-Collier Press, 1972, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> Bales, Kevin, et al. “Perpetual Chains: Slavery throughout History and Today.” *Modern Slavery: A Beginner’s Guide*, Oneworld Publications, 2011, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, pp. 56-66.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Virginia had even surpassed its limit and blacks were predominant among its residents. “There were 641,691 slaves in the South Atlantic states and 32,048 free blacks” by the same year.<sup>14</sup>

The rise of slavery was closely related to the Industrial Revolution. Since the planters needed some novelty to revive the market, a young schoolteacher Eli Whitney came up with an invention called the cotton gin. Within a few years, the use of cotton gin became a phenomenon. Many planters moved from growing rice, tobacco or indigo to cotton, and its invention represented a rapid change in the economy of America. Slaves began to be imported to new areas. However, not all slaves were introduced to the plantations. Some Blacks were treated with respect, for example, we can mention an African American poet Phyllis Wheatley, who was brought to America as a young child and taken in by the Wheatley family in Boston. The family allowed her to learn to read the Bible and to take up astronomy, history and geography. The author is considered one of the first African American authors ever.<sup>15</sup>

The turning point came in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Europeans began to learn of a promising new land across the Atlantic Ocean. As more and more Europeans began to move to the Americas, they began to settle new territories and establish new towns. Everyone wanted to make money from the cotton production that was in such great demand. The expansion was also encouraged by the so-called Manifest Destiny, the belief that American settlers were destined to expand the country. This, of course, was related to the shifting of the American Frontier. With a new place to live came new families or even old ones who decided to move further west. These, of course, brought their slaves with them and so slavery spread to other parts of the country. In the 1820s, the states of

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<sup>14</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-94.

Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama were created. The Alabama-Mississippi region also became one of the major states that were inhabited by Blacks. The aforementioned states began to dominate the market and began to roll over other states in cotton production. The huge cotton production caused large profits on the part of the planters and rumors of this profitable business spread, and then the next wave of migration came.<sup>16</sup> With the increased demand for slaves, the slave prices began to rise. According to Franklin and Moss: “Without slavery and the slave trade the westward movement on the Southern frontier would have been unsuccessful. It was the slaves, brought in either by settlers or traders, who transformed the Southern frontier from a wilderness into flourishing cotton and sugarcane farms and plantations.”<sup>17</sup>

With the expansion, new territories began to emerge and the United States began to be divided into the *free states* and the *slave states*. Disputes over who would have the majority led to the purchase of Florida in 1819, the settlement of Missouri and the introduction of slavery there in 1821. Missouri’s entry into the Union was an insurance policy for them to secure political balance. Its next goal was the annexation of Texas, which took place in 1845. By annexing such a vast territory, the Union gained the political power it had so long sought.<sup>18</sup>

Although Abraham Lincoln is the most recognized U.S. president ever to fight for slave rights, presidents serving before him, including Van Buren and Tyler, also tried to stop the slave trade. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful.<sup>19</sup> For example, then-President Tyler, who was succeeded by Abraham Lincoln in 1860, established a Sunday

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<sup>16</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, pp. 105-111.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

school for blacks in his home a year later, and later a day school.<sup>20</sup> Slavery expanded more and more and became a business without which America would not continue to flourish. The economy of the South was undergoing a huge transformation and slave numbers were soaring. By 1830, there were more than 2 million slaves in the United States, and by the last census before the Civil War, there were as many as 4 million.<sup>21</sup>

With the gained independence of the colonies and the creation of governments and rules, laws had to be created for the slaves as well. This is when the so-called Slave Codes came to light, which in a nutshell made a clear point: “slaves are not people but property.”<sup>22</sup> A slave had no rights and could not own land, could not hit a white man, and had to obey his master at his word. There were only two seasons when the pressure on slaves was not so high and that was in the summer and at Christmas.<sup>23</sup> Slaves were not entitled to medical treatment, which primarily affected women during pregnancy. Slave women often suffered miscarriages and there was a high mortality rate of slave children. There was also frequent mixing of races (primarily white master-black slave) and in many cases, the child was the result of violence. It is estimated that there were more than 400,000 mulattoes in the United States before the Civil War.<sup>24</sup> In most cases, the masters were aware that they had sired offspring with a slave. Some provided for their child, while others took the first opportunity to sell their child into slavery.

## 1.2 Mark Twain and Slavery

The fact that Mark Twain started writing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1876 and finished it in 1883 raises a question regarding what aspects made him spend so

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<sup>20</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 140.



much time on writing just one book. According to Edward M. Jackson, the possible explanation for the seven year time span could be that Twain himself could have known that the novel sometimes had disapproving tones and illogical shifts in the narrative.<sup>25</sup> We learn from documentary evidence that the issue of slavery and black equality was something he had long struggled with. Even though the book was published in 1884, its setting provides us with a clear look into the before-Civil-War society, i.e. the 1830s – 1840s. No doubt living at that time affected all lives including Twain’s and his view of slavery, as growing up in that background. He remarks in his autobiography the following: “In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing.”<sup>26</sup>

There were so many events that affected his personal life and these objections are reflected in his literary production. For instance, the evidence provides that even his father James Marshall Clemens was responsible for the sale of a slave named Charley. Although his father was also very friendly with the other slaves, slavery was for sure in the spotlight of Mark Twain’s childhood in Hannibal, his birth town in Missouri.<sup>27</sup> As being raised in a slave-holding family, he accomplished something that most of his contemporaries did not. From the apparent evidence summarized by Arthur G. Pettit in his article titled *Mark Twain and the Negro, 1867-1869* it is evident how much Twain’s judgment was influenced by the society in which he lived in certain years of his life. Although in his

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<sup>25</sup> Jackson, Edward M. *American Slavery and the American Novel, 1852-1977*. Wyndham Hall Press, 1987, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> Twain, Mark, and Albert Bigelow Paine. *Mark Twain’s Autobiography*. 1st ed., Harper & Brothers, 1924. 2 vols. p. 1:101.

<sup>27</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. “Mark Twain and Race.” *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain*. Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 131.

youth he made no secret of his opinion that the two races were not and would not be equal, plus he made fun of the Blacks, we can observe a rapid change of opinion as early as 1867:

Nevertheless, despite his eagerness to amuse White people by using Negroes as reliable indicators of ignorance and inferiority, Mark Twain did begin to abandon some of his more extravagant forms of prejudice against the Black man. The year 1867, for example, marked the end of Twain's frequent use of 'nigger' in print without quotation marks - except of course in *Huckleberry Finn*, where the author is not the narrator. Though he continued throughout his life to litter his private notebooks and letters with references to 'nigger' this and 'nigger' that, within a few months in 1867 Twain evolved quickly from 'nigger' through 'contraband,' 'Freedman,' 'colored,' and 'darky' to a final settlement on 'negro.'<sup>28</sup>

"By 1867 Twain was making a careful distinction between his clear distrust of the Black man's capacity for intellectual, political, or social equality with the White, on the one hand, and the terrible brutality of Black slavery on the other."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in the same year, he even admitted that he had long disliked the idea of Blacks being granted citizenship, but that he was slowly coming to terms with it. Two years later, he was publicly condemning violence against black people. He was probably driven to this change by the case of the rape of a white woman for which a black man was sentenced to death. He later turned out to be innocent, leading Mark Twain to scorn the judicial system of the time.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Pettit, Arthur G. "Mark Twain and the Negro, 1867-1869." *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 56, no. 2, 1971, pp. 88-96, *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2716231>. Accessed 4 Sept. 2022, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

In the introduction of the book, Peter Coveney writes that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is “a novel about freedom and integrity” (15) and this statement should be further fleshed out. Twain aimed to point out the division of the then society and its outdated view. During the book, we can come across some passages that show an indication of criticism on other topics apart from slavery. For instance, right in the second chapter, we can see perhaps a hint of how Twain himself viewed literature. During a conversation taking place between Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn and Ben Rogers, we learn the view that people who write are all-knowing and therefore, everything they write is the truth. (58) This may indicate his criticism of society, where people who read the works think that everything found in books or newspapers must be true. In other words, what is published sets the course of society, although it may be more of a liability or a distorted view of the subject.

The possible reasons that inspired him to write *Huckleberry Finn*, are various. Firstly, there was an incident in Twain’s childhood that most people do not talk about which included runaway slaves. According to Dixon Wecter, Twain was expected not to oppose slavery when he was younger. There was a trial in 1841 when his father was part of the jury that sentences three abolitionists to prison for twelve years. Those three men were caught while leading a group of slaves to freedom. This trial was unique especially owing to the fact that the abolitionists were sent to prison by the very slaves who testified against them, one of the few times African Americans were allowed to testify at court despite Missouri laws.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, as Twain mentions in his autobiography, the character of Huck Finn is only partly fictional. Tom Blankenship, a boy with drunkard father was the inspiration for his character: “In *Huckleberry Finn* I have drawn Tom Blankenship exactly as he was. He was ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a

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<sup>31</sup> Wecter, Dixon. *Sam Clemens of Hannibal*. Houghton Mifflin, 1952, pp. 72-73.

heart as ever any boy had. His liberties were totally unrestricted. He was the only really independent person – boy or man – in the community, and by consequence he was envied by all the rest of us.”<sup>32</sup>

### 1.3 Through a Child’s Eyes – Huck Finn as a Narrator

Although this narrative technique is rarely used in novels, two of the most famous American literature works are characterized by this phenomenon. *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) are novels showing racial injustice through a child’s eyes. While Huck Finn experiences the immorality of slavery in the antebellum South, Harper Lee provides us with a look into the Jim Crow South through an innocent and life-unexperienced Scout Finch. Despite the fact that the novels were published almost a century apart, both of them deal with racial discrimination and the faulty treatment of African Americans. Both narrators’ inner struggles show the reader how a child’s life is affected by the society they live in. Both characters are trying to put themselves in the shoes of others and get to the bottom of why society sets the values it does. In the end, both characters come to the same conclusion – namely that both races are equal and people should treat each other accordingly.

The narrative method is very relevant as we can come across only a few literature works written through a child’s eyes. It is already quite a rare case, and in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, the story is even more interesting owing to the perspective of a young innocent boy on the issue of slavery. Twain’s intention is obvious – to show what happens when we distance ourselves from social beliefs and start forming our own opinions

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<sup>32</sup> Twain, Mark, and Albert Bigelow Paine. *Mark Twain’s Autobiography*. 1st ed., Harper & Brothers, 1924. 2 vols. p. 2:174.

regardless of what the rest of society thinks. Twain presents this perspective through Huck's character. The novel contains many quotes that are not, arguably, only Huck's opinions, but also Twain's. Since Huck is a young boy, he is inexperienced in life. Before his sailing on a raft with Jim, he has not left his home town and had no idea of life outside his small town. The book offers a glimpse inside a boy's mind who continually fights with himself. He shares his thoughts with us, and the reader becomes the only one who can see what Huck is going through. "Huck had no voice to hear, no person to talk to with who could appreciate his moral decision, but readers fill that lack."<sup>33</sup>

The question of whether the narrator is reliable, or not, always arises as the narrative is written in first-person. Therefore, it is understandable that many critics have accused the book of its unreliability. The question of whether Huck Finn reliable or unreliable narrator is, arises while reading the novel. On the other hand, the depiction of social beliefs and prejudices through a child brings an undistorted view of the world. Huck Finn does not hide anything, he does not conceal anything, in the beginning, he probably could not even tell right from wrong. We can observe how Huck's thinking changes during their voyage. With time, Huck begins to distinguish good and evil, and with that, shows the reader that it is just all right to have trouble coming to terms with something new at first – in this case with the thought that African Americans can be friends with Whites just like Jim and Huck.

The way Huck sees Jim is also worth analysing. The character of Jim is probably one of the most outstanding characters Mark Twain ever created. Although the character of Jim is fictional, Forrest G. Robinson mentions that through witnessing real slaves (like Frederick Douglass for example), we can confirm how masters viewed slaves. According

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<sup>33</sup> Arac, Jonathan. *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, p. 62.

to him, the concept of slavery meant something as a “benign and morally defensible institution.”<sup>34</sup> Twain’s depiction of Jim is a little bit questionable. Although *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* can be perceived as an anti-slavery novel, Twain’s characterization of Jim is in some parts almost negative. For instance, in many parts, the reader is left wondering about Jim’s childishness. Also when we look at other parts of the novel, we come across parts where Huck pokes fun at Jim’s superstition and fear of witchcraft. When Jim gets bitten by a rattlesnake, Huck says that he had to do the crazy tasks Jim asked him to do: “Jim told me to chop off the snake’s head and throw it away, and then skin the body and roast a piece of it. I done it, and he eat it and said it would help cure him. He made me take off the rattles and tie them around his wrist, too.” (107) However, the way how Twain depicts Jim does not necessarily mean that this is the way he thought of slaves. Robinson in this matter cites Neil Schmitz who says that Jim’s “childishness ... is largely the product of Huck’s childish point of view, which requires Jim’s genial sufferance of pranks and abuse.”<sup>35</sup> In this case, we should not forget that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not only an anti-slavery novel but also a coming-of-age novel.

As a young and life-unexperienced boy, Huck struggles a lot to identify with Jim. Moreover, he does not hide his moral judgements at all. Chapter sixteen includes one of the most debated passages of the novel as Jim confides to Huck about his plan to buy his wife and children:

It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn’t ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made him the minute he judged he was

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<sup>34</sup> Robinson, Forrest G. “The Characterization of Jim in Huckleberry Finn.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1988, pp. 361–91. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3044898>. Accessed 18 Sept. 2022, p. 363.

<sup>35</sup> Schmitz, Neil. *Of Huck and Alice: Humorous Writing in American Literature*. University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 114.

about free. It was according to the old saying, ‘give a nigger an inch and he’ll take an ell.’ Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was the nigger which I has as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children – children that belonged to a man I didn’t even know; a man that hadn’t ever done me no harm. (146)

In this part, we can see, how hard is for Huck to understand Jim’s desire to free his family from slavery. Since being raised by an alcoholic father, which is what drove him to fake his death in order to escape from him, Jim’s love towards his children is not the type of parental love Huck is used to be surrounded with. Despite the fact that Widow Douglass and Miss Watson took Huck under their wing, he still does not have an idea of the love Jim has for his children and his wife because he has never experienced it on his own. At this moment he considers it a greater sin to separate a slave from his master than to separate a father from his family. The more time Jim and Huck spend together, the more Huck’s empathy with Jim grows.

#### **1.4 *Huckleberry Finn* in Context of Fugitive Slave Policy**

The *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* tells a story of a runaway slave rebelling against slavery. The reader finds out about Jim’s runaway on page 96 for the first time when Jim explains to Huck that he heard Miss Watson talking to a slave trader about selling him to New Orleans despite the fact she promised not to. Twain shows us how the slaved trade functioned in the pre-Civil-War era as Miss Watson saw an opportunity to make some money. As the slave trade began to spread across South, more slaves began to run away. However, as more and more slaves moved north or west of the country, the people living in these places became racist. Franklin and Moss write: “In Philadelphia in

1819, three white women stoned a black woman to death. A few years later, the citizens adopted a policy of driving blacks away from Independence Square on the Fourth of July, since they were considered not to have had any part in establishing the nation.”<sup>36</sup> Public disturbances also began to arise in cities in the North, among other places. Thus, abolitionists struck and groups fighting for black emancipation began to emerge. In 1831, a movement called the New England Anti-Slavery Society, led by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, was formed.<sup>37</sup> The more the group grew, the more means they had to spread their idea further. “A publicity program was drawn up and carried out largely by the New York group. Four periodicals were published: Human Rights, Anti-Slavery Record, Emancipator, and Slave’s Friend. Pamphlets were distributed throughout the North and, when possible, in the South.”<sup>38</sup> Garrison’s group was becoming so popular that the movement *Garrisonism* was derived from his name. In 1847, Frederick Douglass was elected president of the movement.<sup>39</sup>

When we talk about the anti-slavery movement, there is a concept that is very closely associated with this period, and given the subject matter of the *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it is important to introduce this concept in detail. It is the so-called Underground Railroad. This was a network of secret routes that provided an escape route for slaves trying to escape from the South to the free states in the North of the United States and Canada.<sup>40</sup>

Slavery was put in process of extinction at an early period in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and the New England states. From the five and a fraction states

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<sup>36</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 165.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-181.

<sup>40</sup> Siebert, Wilbur H. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*. Dover Publications, 2006, p. 1.



created out of the Northwestern Territory slavery was excluded by the Ordinance of 1787. It is interesting to note how rapid was the progress of emancipation in the Northeastern states, where the conditions of climate, industry and public opinion were unfavorable to the continuance of slavery. In 1777 emancipation was begun by the action of Vermont, which upon its separation from New York adopted a constitution in which slavery was prohibited. Pennsylvania and Massachusetts took action three years later. Pennsylvania provided by statute for gradual abolition, and its example was followed by Rhode Island and Connecticut in 1784, by New York in 1799, and by New Jersey in 1804.<sup>41</sup>

Although in the second half of the 18th century states that did not support slavery began to emerge, it is too early to talk about abolition of slavery. In the first place, it should be mentioned that although some states had laws making it illegal to introduce slavery, this did not mean that slaves would gain their freedom. In 1793, Congress passed the first law regarding runaway slaves, who were then to be extradited back to the state from which they had escaped. The Fugitive Slave Act commanded that runaway slaves be returned to their masters immediately, even though they may have already been on the soil of free states. Naturally, abolitionists disagreed with this law. Although heavy fines were set for those who aided or concealed information about runaway slaves, on the contrary, it was the abolitionists' opposition that created even more fervor for the fight for black equality and the prohibition of slavery throughout the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Slavery began to escalate in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when people in the South saw a rapid expansion of industry. Important milestones in U.S. history such as

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<sup>41</sup> Siebert, Wilbur H. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*. Dover Publications, 2006, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

the Louisiana Purchase from Napoleon also known as the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 or the invention of the cotton gin started the great pressure that was placed on African Americans. The slave trade increased enormously during this time. It was the fear of being sold that forced the slaves themselves to increasingly bet on the luck of fate, as they began to flee more and more. It was at this time that rumors of the aforementioned Underground Railroad began to spread. The country that offered the most help to escaped slaves was Canada. The abolitionists spread the word among the slaves, trying to provide them with maps to escape to Canada to give them hope of freedom.<sup>43</sup> However, “By the enactment of the first Fugitive Slave Law, February 12, 1793, the aiding of fugitive slaves became a penal offence. This measure laid a fine of five hundred dollars upon any one harboring escaped slaves, or preventing their arrest.”<sup>44</sup> The dissatisfaction of planters whose property was dwindling resulted in the second Fugitive Slave Act. This law passed by Congress in 1850 was, of course, more stringent than the one enacted fifty-seven years earlier. Siebert summarizes the law as following:

Any person hindering the claimant from arresting the fugitive, or attempting the rescue or concealment of the fugitive, became ‘subject to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars, or imprisonment not exceeding six months,’ and was liable for ‘civil damages to the party injured by such illegal conduct in the sum of one thousand dollars for each fugitive so lost.’ These provisions of the new law only added fresh fuel to the fire.<sup>45</sup>

As the author mentions, the law has only further outraged society. The law divided the population as even people who supported slavery began to verbally abuse the abolitionists

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<sup>43</sup> Siebert, Wilbur H. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*. Dover Publications, 2006, pp. 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

who fought on the other side. There is also evidence that the homes of famous abolitionists were often under the watch of slave catchers.<sup>46</sup> In the novel, Huck morally struggles whether to help Jim to escape or not. He know that Miss Watson would not approve his refusal to take Jim back to her, but still he manages what most of the society could not at that time. After getting acquainted with Jim's goal to get to free state, and then buy out his family, he starts to realize that his intentions are justifiable. When the slave hunters approach Huck, he lies to them in order to protect Jim:

‘Well, there’s five niggers run off tonight, up yonder above the head of the bend.

Is your man white or black?’

I didn’t answer up prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn’t come. I tried, for a second or two, to brace up and out with it, but I warn’t man enough – hadn’t the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says – ‘He’s white.’ (147)

When the slave catchers do not believe him, he comes up with another lie and tells them the man on the raft is his father and has smallpox, to which Jim responds with words: “How you did fool ’em, Huck! Dat wuz de smartes’ dodge! I tell you, chile, I’ speck it save’ ole Jim – ole Jim ain’t gwyne to forgit you for dat, honey.” (149-150)

## 1.5 The Post-Civil-War Society

The greatest tensions in society, of course, began to build in the middle of the century, culminating in the Civil War. When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, his primary goal was to preserve the unity of the Union. However, his efforts were

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<sup>46</sup> Siebert, Wilbur H. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*. Dover Publications, 2006, pp. 49-51.

thwarted by South Carolina, which decided to secede from the Union at the end of the year. Her enthusiasm was shared by other states, and the society split into two camps. Since the states that seceded from the Union were mostly concentrated in the South, the war has also been called the War of the North against the South. The Southern states formed the Confederate States of America and elected their president, who became Jefferson Davis. In the spring of 1862, Lincoln tried to settle the country politically. “In a special message to Congress, President Lincoln recommended that a resolution be passed announcing that the United States would cooperate with any state adopting a plan of gradual emancipation together with satisfactory compensation of the owners.”<sup>47</sup> The South, however, did not want to give up slavery. Neither the South nor the North agreed with the President’s proposal, as abolitionists did not believe that slaveholders should be entitled to financial compensation since they were not the rightful owners. Eventually, the two governments agreed and the law went into effect on April 10, 1862. On June 19, the President signed the bill banning slavery. After Lincoln’s long effort came the turning point when The Emancipation Proclamation, a law that said that as of January 1, 1863, all slaves in the Confederate States of America would be free. According to Franklin and Moss, the new law in the Confederacy was kept secret from the slaves, and they did not learn of the proclamation until several months later.<sup>48</sup>

Slave owners also began to employ slaves in factories and also in the military.<sup>49</sup> “A bill was introduced in the Confederate Senate in 1865 providing for the enlistment of 200,000 blacks and their emancipation if they remained loyal through the war.”<sup>50</sup> The other side (the abolitionist party) also began to entice blacks into the war. Leaders such

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<sup>47</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 206.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

as Frederick Douglass served as recruiting agents.<sup>51</sup> According to data, approximately 186,000 blacks were enlisted on the Union side. Although the soldiers were paid, the pay of black and white soldiers differed by almost half. If the Confederate States captured blacks who served on the Union side, they then tried to sell them into slavery. Others were killed, as the following excerpt reports:

The worst case was the Fort Pillow affair. On April 12, 1864, the fort fell to Confederate forces under the command of Gen. Nathan B. Forrest. Blacks who were there were not permitted to surrender; they were shot, and some were burned alive. Yet many black troops were captured and held as prisoners of war by the South. In 1863 General Butler reported that 3,000 black troops were prisoners of the Confederates.<sup>52</sup>

After the capitulation of the Confederate army on April 9, 1865, the Union victory represented a change in society. After nearly 250 years, slavery was abolished when Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment. A period of Reconstruction followed. The industrial boom in the North began to attract former slaveholders to the North to find work. Some of them had trouble getting used to the new way of life, which centred on the industry and not agriculture. The integration of former slaves also represented another challenge as it was the first time in history they had the right to be concerned about the rights they were granted. Besides, a lot of them did not speak English, were illiterate or only knew the basics. Furthermore, the war-devastated South was also in the spotlight. It was much needed to reconstruct the Southern states, and restore the living conditions and the economy. Many of the former slaveholders and plantation owners abandoned their plantations, the braver ones stayed and faced the challenge. The consequences of war

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<sup>51</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 214.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

were devastating – people had no place to live, no goods or crops to trade, and the public buildings were burned down. Famine spread through the South just as many life-threatening diseases. The former slaves had no place to live and no chance to find a job as there were no workplaces to get employed.<sup>53</sup>

Abraham Lincoln's original idea was that the slaves would emigrate from the U.S. after emancipation, however, when the war ended, he found out that this idea was fallacious and that the country will have to cope with more than four million Blacks and will have to find them a spot in the society. The former president consented to grant citizenship to those who would meet the requirements. Andrew Johnson's presidency represented the opposite of Abraham Lincoln's intentions as a former president. In March 1865 Congress created the Freedman's Bureau (also called Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands), an act that was set to provide aid for freedmen and refugees including former slaves. The aim was to set up schools, land, and shelters and provide food for people affected by the war.<sup>54</sup> A month later when Andrew Johnson took the office, the political situation started to reverse again. The southern states did not believe that former slaves were able to direct themselves without white supervisors. An American historian Avery Craven believes that in practice the laws were more of a way to regulate and control black labor. He writes:

The Mississippi code may be taken as an example. It began with an apprentice law which required that all Negroes or mulattoes under eighteen years of age who were orphans or whose parents could not support them be bound out to some white

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<sup>53</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, pp. 221-223.

<sup>54</sup> Craven, Avery. *Reconstruction: The Ending of the Civil War*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, p. 118.

person – preferably their former masters. The white man was to provide them with sufficient food, clothing, and medical care, and teach them to read and write.<sup>55</sup>

The laws also mandated the leasing of land to Blacks outside the city, and a person had to apply for a license if he practised a mechanical trade. On one hand, they were granted rights to be legally married, on the other hand, interracial marriages were banned.<sup>56</sup> In this matter, we can observe, that even after the Civil War society was divided into two halves and fighting against each other. It was not helped by the views of Andrew Johnson at that time and his attitude towards Blacks. He owned slaves himself in the antebellum period and did not subscribe to the idea that all races were equal. The first ever dispute occurred on March 27, 1866, when President Johnson vetoed The Civil Rights Bill, which proclaimed all people born in the United States except Native American citizens of the country. Congress believed that this act will emphasize the core of the Thirteenth Amendment, as Congress was aware of the discrimination prevailing in the society. Although the president vetoed the bill twice, it became law on April 9. The Civil Rights Bill of 1866 was one of the many successes of the former United States Senator from Illinois Lyman Trumbull. “He had then attacked the black codes, which of course did not make the Negro a slave but did deprive him of his rights as a free man.”<sup>57</sup> The law eventually resulted in the Fourteenth Amendment passed on July 28, 1868, which became a revised version of The Civil Rights Bill of 1866. Nevertheless, the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment represented an issue. Craven writes: “All the southern states except Tennessee (with Johnson’s approval) refused to ratify.”<sup>58</sup> As the South wanted to regain its power, they repetitively started to re-establish authority and control

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<sup>55</sup> Craven, Avery. *Reconstruction: The Ending of the Civil War*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, pp. 119-120.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

the overpopulation of Afro-Americans and new measurements, also known as the Black Codes, were brought to life. These restrictive laws, which limited the freedom of Afro-Americans, laid the foundation for future Jim Crow Laws.

This was the first time African Americans were granted rights to be part of the political sphere. For example, “it was in South Carolina that they had the greatest numerical strength. In the first legislature there were eighty-seven Negroes and forty whites.”<sup>59</sup> Between the years 1869 and 1880 sixteen Blacks served in Congress.<sup>60</sup> Another important issue that should be mentioned is the African American right to vote. On January 8 of 1867, they were enfranchised in the District of Columbia. Despite the veto of President Johnson, African American men gain the right to vote in this area on this day.<sup>61</sup> However, it was not until 1870 that all African American men were allowed to do that.

The reforms in the educational system could be also seen. By the year 1870 public schools started being established all over the South. The only states that attempted to build up racially mixed schools were South Carolina and Louisiana. However, these attempts were unsuccessful.<sup>62</sup> Segregated schools were the only option at that time, but that seemed not enough for the locals. The evidence shows several incidents when local white opponents set the black school on fire.<sup>63</sup> More and more violence, had been performed against African Americans. One of the most horrific organizations which promoted violence against black people was the Ku Klux Klan, which was firstly established in Tennessee at the end of 1865. The Klan described itself as an establishment

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<sup>59</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *After the Civil War*. The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.



of “chivalry, humanity, mercy and patriotism.”<sup>64</sup> The Ku Klux Klan happened to encourage other opponents to make up other groups: “While the Klan made rapid strides in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Alabama, other similar groups were springing up elsewhere. In Louisiana it was the Knights of the White Camellia. In Texas it was the Knights of the Rising Sun. In Mississippi it was the White Line, and on and on throughout the former Confederate states.”<sup>65</sup> The original group was made up of six people – young veterans of the Confederate Army. They all had one main goal – to re-establish white supremacy. The members of the Klan also tried to interfere in politics as they were intimidating witnesses not to testify. The former North Carolina Governor asked President Grant for his support. This call for help resulted in the installation of the Enforcement Act.<sup>66</sup> Three Enforcements Acts were passed in total. The main purpose was to protect the rights of African Americans to vote, hold office and serve on juries. The Third Enforcement Act passed on April 20, 1871, is also known as the Ku Klux Act. The Ku Klux Klan is remembered as the most horrific organization established in the United States. There are many testimonies, especially from the victims of the Klan: “One of them told how he was whipped because he had not lifted his hat when he met a white man on the road. Another related how a Negro was killed by mob after an altercation with white man. A Negro woman told how the Klan dragged her husband from their home and lynched him, presumably because he was politically active.”<sup>67</sup>

From the economic point of view, thanks to the Reconstruction, the South was more industrialized than ever before by the year 1880.<sup>68</sup> The North invested a big amount of money in Southern railroads, people started to mine coal and iron, the cotton textile

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<sup>64</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *After the Civil War*. The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 154.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

industry was growing rapidly as well. The economic boom, however, did involve the Blacks only to a small extent. Some of them improved their position but most of them had no other choice than to offer their labor. A lot of them stayed in rural areas at the plantations. Franklin stresses: “In every important social relationship the Negro was kept at a ‘safe distance.’ The result was that in education, religion, social welfare, and the like, the Negro had to build institutions completely separate from those of the whites.”<sup>69</sup>

### 1.5.1 The Publication of the Novel in Years of Disunited America

Living in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not easy, and Twain guides us through the book in this spirit. Throughout the story, the protagonist of the book, Huck, struggles because he knows that is expected to behave towards slaves differently than he does. However, he tries to find his own opinion on this matter during the story. Taylor’s statement: “Despite all that his racist conscience tells him, Huck still manages, what so few in the society could manage, to respond to Jim as to a fellow human being,”<sup>70</sup> describes his act of helping Jim as something unbelievable and extraordinary in the then society. The slaves generally had nothing to choose from that would affect their personal life, their position in society was strictly set.<sup>71</sup> In the book, Twain’s ironic conclusion is that two human beings, however different in background, can become friends if they are far enough from the corrupt influences of civilization. According to Barksdale: “Twain appears to suggest with more than an ironic gleam in his eye, that such a friendship could develop only on a socially isolated raft in the middle of the nation’s biggest and longest river and thus as far from the shores ruled by law and order as a man could get in middle

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<sup>69</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *After the Civil War*. The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 224.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor, Craig. “Huck Finn, Moral Reasons and Sympathy.” *Philosophy*, vol. 87, no. 342, 2012, pp. 583–593. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41682983](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41682983). Accessed 13 Sept. 2022, p. 589.

<sup>71</sup> Barksdale, Richard K. “History, Slavery, and Thematic Irony in ‘Huckleberry Finn.’” *Mark Twain Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1984, pp. 17–20. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41641248](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641248). Accessed 17 Sept. 2022, p. 17.

America.”<sup>72</sup> But the idea of Afro-Americans being equal to White people was taboo even after the abolishment of slavery. It was more than enough time to build a social structure and divide society into unequal white and black classes, but the problem was simple – the Whites living in the 1870s - 80s have never met Blacks who were not slaves and their parents or grandparents did not remember that either. In their eyes, Afro-Americans were still the same, just human forces that should help them on the plantations. After being slaves for perhaps half of their life, many of them had a hard time standing on their own feet. They needed a place to live and a full-time job to provide money for the family, however, the White Americans did not accept that Afro-Americans had the same rights as much as they did. The reason was quite straightforward – they did not want to become suddenly friends with someone who used to cook or work on the plantations for them.

The novel introduces the idea that the co-existence of the races is possible if both sides are willing to accept change. For instance, the relationship between Huck and Jim changes during the story. The way Huck talks about Jim at the very beginning of the story as “Miss Watson’s big nigger” (53) indicates that Huck considers Jim just as Miss Watson’s property. Firstly, he rather thinks about Jim as something which belongs to the slaveholders than a proper human being. On the other hand, after meeting Jim in the forest, he changes his attitude towards him. Taylor’s suggestion that “he helps Jim because he recognizes him as a person”<sup>73</sup> shows that he did not think about Jim as property at that moment. Surprisingly, Huck’s attitude toward Jim as among equal beings can be observed during the whole story. But the fact that he was taught from childhood that slaves are ‘just things’ and not real human beings is something appalling from today’s

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<sup>72</sup> Barksdale, Richard K. “History, Slavery, and Thematic Irony in ‘Huckleberry Finn.’” *Mark Twain Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1984, pp. 17–20. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41641248](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641248). Accessed 17 Sept. 2022, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, Craig. “Huck Finn, Moral Reasons and Sympathy.” *Philosophy*, vol. 87, no. 342, 2012, pp. 583–593. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41682983](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41682983). Accessed 13 Sept. 2022, p. 587.

point of view, however, such idea was prevalent in the antebellum period and even many decades after the abolishment of slavery. We can observe an example of such behaviour in chapter thirty-two, when Aunt Sally asks about a steamboat explosion: “‘Anybody hurt?’ ‘No’m. Killed a nigger.’ ‘Well it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt.’” (291) Aunt Sally’s list of values reveals that the word ‘people’ is defined only as ‘white’ and that it does not include the African Americans.<sup>74</sup>

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slavery was well spread and the protagonist grew up in a society that believed that two races are not equal. Huck saw slavery as a normal thing and that it is something society cannot live without until he started helping Jim to escape. He cannot sympathize with Jim in this matter as his young soul is so affected by social views. Moreover, he thinks it is normal for Blacks to spend their lives as slaves because slavery is something that has always existed. He starts having a little bit of a twinge of conscience because of betraying Miss Watson. Later in chapter thirty-one, after his discovery that the King and the Duke sold Jim back to slavery is Huck very upset by that as he cannot believe that they “‘make him a slave again all his life, and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars.” (281) He is so shocked by that, that he even considers writing a letter to Miss Watson and finally plucks up the courage and decides to do that to her to pray himself clean. The memories of him and Jim spending time together, laughing together, singing together lead him to the decision to tear the paper into pieces added by words: “‘All right, then, I’ll go to hell.’” (283) Knowing that helping a slave to escape is evil and that he will probably ‘go to hell’ for it, is kind of heroism here, but it cannot be said that it opened his eyes since he still believes that slavery is

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<sup>74</sup> Railton, Stephen. “Jim and Mark Twain: What Do Dey Stan’ For?” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1987, pp. 393–408. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26438114](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26438114). Accessed 4 Sept. 2022, pp. 394–395.

moral.<sup>75</sup> However, according to Fishkin, “to help steal a horse or a cow was a low crime, but to help a hunted slave ... or hesitate to promptly betray him to a slave-catcher when opportunity offered was a much baser crime.”<sup>76</sup> Not surprisingly, Huck cannot be expected to behave differently if he was taught the opposite his whole life.

Twain’s depiction of Jim’s character is something extraordinary given the fact Twain portrays Jim as a kind and generous slave. Brander Matthews in his review included in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Authoritative Text, Contexts and Sources, Criticism* emphasizes that “the essential simplicity and kindness and generosity of the Southern negro have never been better shown than here by Mark Twain.”<sup>77</sup> We can say, without any doubt, that Twain’s aim to show the audience that the Afro-Americans are also humans just every other White and that the fact that they work or worked for White people does not make them less worthy, was successful. Moreover, Afro-Americans protecting and caring for a white young boy represent racial equality that the then society could not consent to. Jim takes over the role of fatherhood later on and this is, of course, such a breakthrough that shows the possible coexistence between two races. For instance, protective instincts radiate from Jim. In terms of character roles, many critics argue that Huck takes over the role of an adult even though Jim is one in reality. As a matter of fact, Huck has the last word most of the time as Jim listens to him, but when we speak about mature behaviour, it is Jim who overshadows Huck and not the other way around. Jim cares for Huck as father cares for his child. For example, Jim cooks for him, minds Huck to rest enough and the like. Besides, at the end of the novel the

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<sup>75</sup> Railton, Stephen. “Jim and Mark Twain: What Do Dey Stan’ For?” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1987, pp. 393–408. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26438114](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26438114). Accessed 4 Sept. 2022, p. 396.

<sup>76</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. “Mark Twain and Race.” *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain*. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 127-162, p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> Twain, Mark, and Thomas Cooley. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Authoritative Text, Contexts and Sources, Criticism*. 3rd ed., W.W. Norton, 1999, p. 333.

reader finds out the truth about the dead body on a floating house which he encountered in chapter nine. In that chapter, Jim affirms there is a dead man who has probably been shot in the back, and he does not want Huck to see his face because it is “too gashly.” (103) Then, he goes and throws “some old rags over him” (104) to hide the identity of the body as Huck describes. The dead man’s identity is not revealed till the end of the novel when Jim confesses that it was Huck’s father. This was one of the most parent-like behaviour we witness between Jim and Huck. As Jim did not want Huck to see his father’s dead body, he tried to spare him the look that would probably be etched in his memory for life.

As far as minstrelsy is considered, Twain’s hint on minstrel shows that they were popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which can be also spotted in the book. Minstrelsy was this kind of show “usually involving a small band of white men armed with banjo, fiddle, tambourine, and bone castanets and arrayed in blackface makeup and ludicrous dress, the minstrel show, from the 1830s to the early years of the twentieth century, offered white travesties and imitations of black humor, dance, speech, and music.”<sup>78</sup> The performances were mostly in front of shopkeepers and teamsters. They incited people to racism, and according to sources, the minstrels deepened the animosity between the two races across America. This hostility, for example, fuelled the 1834 race riots in New York City. Eric Lott writes that the minstrel show’s influence on Twain is most evident in *Huck Finn*, and that it “underwrote one of the nineteenth century’s most powerful antiracist novels.”<sup>79</sup> The proof of this statement is in the comic dialogues between Huck and Jim, most of which pokes fun at Jim. When Joanna in the book asks about the condition of servants in England, Huck responds: ““Why, Hare-l- why, Joanna, they never see a holiday from

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<sup>78</sup> Lott, Eric. “Mr. Clemens and Jim Crow: Twain, Race, and Blackface.” *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*. Edited by Forrest G. Robinson. Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 129.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

year's end to year's end; never go to the circus, nor theatre, nor nigger shows, nor nowhere.” (238) Main purpose of these so-called performances was to present a minstrel stereotype, in other words, “the racist representation of the African American as uneducated, simple-minded, insensitive and unfailingly cheerful, common in all forms of popular entertainment in the period.”<sup>80</sup> It is obvious that Huck has never been to England so he does not know, what is the situation there, but the fact that he mentions “nigger shows” indicates that they were really popular at that time. This, of course, also supports the idea of banning the reading of *Huckleberry Finn* in schools as the novel portrayed Afro-Americans, not in a good way, more likely they appeared as childish, dull and happy. Furthermore, these performances, unfortunately, depicted that racial equality is unfeasible by making fun of Afro-Americans at a time when they have already had so much trouble integrating.

### **1.5.2 The First Signs of Public Outrage over the Novel**

The first publication of the book dates back to 1884, and when the novel was published a year after in America (that is twenty years after the Civil War), the topic of slavery was still in the spotlight. Over the decades, many critics have argued if the novel should be banned in schools as required reading or not. The most relevant aspects that support these ideas are first, the copious use of the N-word - precisely 212 times<sup>81</sup> - and secondly, the way Jim talks throughout the book. However, this closely relates to the period when the novel was or is read. Perception of the abundant use of the N-word by a person living in the post-Civil War era is most likely to differ from the interpretation of someone reading it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To support this idea, critic Edward M. Jackson

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<sup>80</sup> Messent, Peter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Mark Twain*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 82.

<sup>81</sup> Sloane, David E. E. “The N-Word in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Reconsidered.” *The Mark Twain Annual*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, pp. 70–82. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.5325/marktwaij.12.1.0070>. Accessed 11. Oct. 2022, p. 71.

indicates his clear justification of the word's use in the book like this: "The use of the word 'nigger' is not an indication of Twain's intolerance but the word was used in pre-Civil War America as synonymous with slaves."<sup>82</sup> To support Jackson's idea, the words 'slave/slavery' occur only eleven times in the novel which validates the synonymity.<sup>83</sup> As we can see above, this does not support the criticism toward Twain's use of language, on the other hand, it only justifies it as a reflection of the time. Secondly, Jim's way of talking and his grammar can be also easily vindicated by the norms given at that time, moreover, "Jim should not be expected to speak with a New England accent; he is, like most Blacks at that time, illiterate."<sup>84</sup>

As for the literacy of the slaves, there was only a small percentage who could read and write. For example, the narrative of Frederick Douglass tells how his mistress taught him. Sometimes the children of masters were involved in teaching slaves. Teaching a few slaves was not taken as a violation of the law, but if someone taught a group of black children in secret, as groups of white children were taught in school, they would be punished for it. According to the data, some towns were exceptions where schools for Blacks were allowed.<sup>85</sup> Such included Savannah, Charleston, Raleigh, and others. It was generally believed that only one in fifty slaves was literate. In the last decade before the Civil War, schools for Blacks were increasingly established. However, this only applied to Northern communities, that is, towns in the northern United States where slavery was not practiced. In the antebellum period, many poets, playwrights, and novelists who were black also began to assert themselves. The most important works of this period are still

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<sup>82</sup> Jackson, Edward M. *American Slavery and the American Novel, 1852-1977*. Wyndham Hall Press, 1987, p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Sloane, David E. E. "The N-Word in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Reconsidered." *The Mark Twain Annual*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, pp. 70–82. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.5325/marktwaij.12.1.0070>. Accessed 11. Oct. 2022, p. 71.

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, Edward M. *American Slavery and the American Novel, 1852-1977*. Wyndham Hall Press, 1987, p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 137.



considered to be the narratives of former or escaped slaves. These writings had an important influence on the prohibition of slavery as they vividly described the hardships that slaves had to go through. Some of the most famous authors include Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Lunsford Lane.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, the South made it difficult to obtain an education as “all the Southern states made it very difficult for them to secure an education by passing laws making it unlawful to instruct free blacks.”<sup>87</sup>

Another point that promotes the disputes between the social norms and Jim’s behaviour is the fact that Jim is allowed to comment on other people, as he comments in chapter 23: “‘But dis one smell so like de nation, Huck.’” (218) indicates that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the first book in which an Afro-American expresses his opinion of someone’s smell, but most importantly of a White man.<sup>88</sup> Such type of behaviour was not observed back then and, of course, people, who read this book after its publication, were taken aback by that. A literary critic, Ralph Ellison mentions in *Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke* the reason why can many Afro-Americans perceive the unfair way of interpretation of their race. He claims that “the Negro is made uncomfortable”<sup>89</sup> by reading the book that shows Jim’s appearance more like a boy, while Huck Finn can be more seen as a grown-up man. Which is in reality, the total opposite. However, as Jackson emphasizes: “One of the mistakes that Blacks make in interpreting the character of Jim is that they apply twentieth century ‘sensibilities’ to nineteenth century realities.”<sup>90</sup> Twain has been criticized for his characterization of Jim many times, however, critics

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<sup>86</sup> Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994, p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>88</sup> Railton, Stephen. “Jim and Mark Twain: What Do Dey Stan’ For?” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1987, pp. 393–408. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26438114](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26438114). Accessed 4 Sept. 2022, p. 400.

<sup>89</sup> Ellison, Ralph. “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke.” *Shadow and Act*, Vintage International, 1958, p. 49.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson, Edward M. *American Slavery and the American Novel, 1852-1977*. Wyndham Hall Press, 1987, p. 36.

have also come up with the idea of Twain's false assumption that his audience was exclusively white.<sup>91</sup>

The reception of the novel differed in the past. It is essential to remember the conditions under which literature was chosen into the libraries in the 1880s. Furthermore, in Twain's era, most of the librarians were white females. It was mainly their job to supply the library with new works and book recommendations as their job was to choose suitable books and put them into the selection. One could say they made up the literary canon. However, the committee of the board had the final say.<sup>92</sup> The first ever banning of the novel happened in 1885, when the Concord Public Library decided to exclude it from its reading list. According to the research of Robert M. Rodney, the author of *Mark Twain International: A Bibliography and Interpretation of His Worldwide Popularity* published in 1982, Twain's works such as *Prince and the Pauper* and *Innocents Abroad* were very popular at his times. However, it was not until the 1910s and 1920s when people became more interested in reading of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The public librarians were the ones who had a power to exclude some books from the selective canon, the fact that Huck was not always included in the canon does not mean that it was widely censored. There was only a few libraries that banned the work.<sup>93</sup> From Lear's research, we find out that "no fewer than 38% of public libraries on this study owned *Huckleberry Finn* during any given decade since its publication."<sup>94</sup> However, it is important to mention that her research included not many libraries from South, which can be misleading. It

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<sup>91</sup> Arac, Jonathan. *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> Lear, Bernadette A. "Were Tom and Huck On-Shelf? Public Libraries, Mark Twain, and the Formation of Accessible Canons, 1869–1910." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2009, pp. 189–224. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2009.64.2.189>. Accessed 5 Oct. 2022, pp. 192–193.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194–203.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

should be also noted that some libraries shelved *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as children's literature.

## 1.6 Today's Controversy

Teaching of *Huckleberry Finn* at schools widely spread after the World War II. This was also the time when the desegregation of schools began to be promoted. The social disputes escalated in *Brown v. Board of Education*, an act passed by the Supreme Court which proclaimed the racial segregation in public schools as unconstitutional. The society had to adapt to the new conditions that united the two races into a single class. The book thus caused outrage among new readers. Jonathan Arac provides a letter sent to the *Times* back in 1980s as an evidence of an Afro-American's struggle during the class reading of *Huck Finn* back in his school days. He writes: "I still recall the anger and pain I felt as my white classmates read aloud the word 'nigger' ... I wanted to sink into my seat. Some of the whites snickered, others giggled."<sup>95</sup> This decade included the most critical years for *Huck Finn*. John H. Wallace, the former administrator at the Mark Twain Intermediate School, provoked the biggest controversy in 1982, when he called the novel "the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written."<sup>96</sup> More and more parents started to approach teachers not to teach Twain in class. The public schools of New York City and the state of Illinois all together with Miami-Dade Junior College removed the book from their reading lists between the years 1957-1976. Wallace provides several reason why the work should be excluded from teaching. For example, he mentions that it is difficult for teachers to set a level playing field for students without anyone feeling

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<sup>95</sup> Arac, Jonathan. *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, p. 21.

<sup>96</sup> Wallace, John H. "The Case against *Huck Finn*." *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, edited by James S. Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis, Duke University Press, 1992, p. 16.

discriminated against. However, this effort is buried as soon as the passage from the book is read aloud. Moreover, the Afro-American student takes it personally, and evokes the teacher's prejudices against them without even noticing it. Wallace therefore advises that *Huckleberry Finn* should be listed as racist and excluded from the reading lists at schools. He further suggests that if the teacher wants to teach Twain at all cost, he should use his revised version *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Adapted*, in which he eliminated the offensive language.<sup>97</sup>

Over a century of debates whether *Huck Finn* is racially offensive, it resulted in the new edition of *Huckleberry Finn* in 2011. The NewSouth Books edition replaces the N-word with 'slave'. Alan Gribben, the editor of Twain's work came up with this idea in order to "bring new and younger readers to Twain's masterpiece."<sup>98</sup> The following section provides the comparison of Twain's original work and the edited version by Alan Gribben:

*Original edition by Mark Twain (1884):*

"*Niggers* would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any *nigger* in that country. Strange *niggers* would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. *Niggers* is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire;"<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Wallace, John H. "The Case against *Huck Finn*." *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, edited by James S. Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 16-24.

<sup>98</sup> Sheehan, Clair A. "WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES: RECONSIDERING LANGUAGE IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN." *IJAS Online*, no. 9, 2020, pp. 53-55. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27032403>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2022, p. 54.

<sup>99</sup> Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Edited with an Introduction by Peter Coveney. Penguin Books, 1966, pp. 54-55.

*New edition by Allan Gribben (2011):*

“*Slaves* would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any *slave* in that country. Strange *slaves* would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. *Slaves* is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire;”<sup>100</sup>

However, as Sheehan emphasizes, “Teaching texts like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) in conjunction with one another provides a vital link to an historical understanding of Twain’s problematic use of language in his novel. As Twain’s narrative is set during the period of Douglass’s lived experience, the Douglass text offers essential context to Twain’s plot.”<sup>101</sup> For instance, Douglass’s copious use of the N-word in the context of ‘slave’ is a proof. It is therefore crucial to teach *Huckleberry Finn* in the context of American history. Moreover, when we look at other anti-slavery novels like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for example, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s language have never been criticized as much as Twain’s. However, as Gibson points out the reception of these two works differ as the portrayal of Jim and Uncle Tom is completely different. He writes: “At least Jim seeks freedom when his condition becomes utterly intolerable. This distinguishes him from Harriet B. Stowe’s long suffering Uncle Tom, who acquiesces to the pain, misery, and hardship of his life in hope of a glorious life in heaven.”<sup>102</sup> This thesis does not intend to compare *Huckleberry Finn* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, however, it is significant to take them

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<sup>100</sup> Twain, Mark. *Mark Twain’s Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. Edited by Alan Gribben. NewSouth Books, 2011, p. 244.

<sup>101</sup> Sheehan, Clair A. “WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES: RECONSIDERING LANGUAGE IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN.” *IJAS Online*, no. 9, 2020, pp. 53–55. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27032403>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2022, p. 54.

<sup>102</sup> Gibson, B. Donald. “Mark Twain’s Jim in the Classroom.” *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*, edited by Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985, pp. 107-108.

into consideration as both books are among the most famous American anti-slavery novels. Both novels shaped American literature and provided an important piece of information for the future historians. Moreover, as the author of *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* writes:

If most of Americans before the Civil War had felt about slavery the way Huck does about Jim, there would have been no war. As Harriet Beecher Stowe had urged in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Americans would have brought themselves to 'feel right', and those who owned slaves would have freed them. Huck in the widespread critical commonplace, represents a morally idealized best American self.<sup>103</sup>

William Dean Howells, a famous American writer and a close friend of Mark Twain, once in his work titled *My Mark Twain* wrote that "Clemens was sole, incomparable, the Lincoln of our literature."<sup>104</sup> The message of the anti-slavery novels is important as it helps people to understand the struggles in the antebellum Civil War era. The age, maturity of the students, the methodology of the teacher how to approach the subject, these are key concepts to assess before deciding to teach *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* at schools. Although Huck Finn has received much criticism for racist suggestions, many critics argue that is it the total opposite. Its message is relevant from today's point of view as racism in the United States has gained momentum in recent years.

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<sup>103</sup> Arac, Jonathan. *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Howells, William Dean. *My Mark Twain*. Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1910, p. 101.

## 2 Kathryn Stockett – *The Help*

### 2.1 Narrative Technique in *The Help*

The narrative switches between three main characters – Aibileen (an African American maid in her fifties), Minny (an African American maid in her thirties) and Skeeter (a White woman in her twenties). Only one chapter is written in third-person narration. The rotating narration provides us a clear look into the dynamics of the then society in Jackson as having representatives of both races. Firstly, Aibileen is a maid/nanny in her fifties working for the Leefolt family. She is well-respected in the Black community, and therefore, when she decides to help Skeeter writing her book, other domestic helps follows. She remembers she was fifteen years old when she started working as a maid, as she tells us when introducing herself for the first time. (149) Having over forty years of experience with working for White families, she provides us the most information what is it like to work as a maid for Whites in Mississippi. She tells us that she raised seventeen kids in her lifetime (1), and also confesses, how she struggles every month with a small income she earns as a maid:

The bus gone up to fifteen cents a ride any my rent gone up to twenty-nine dollars a month. I work for Miss Leefolt eight to four, six days a week except Saturdays. I get paid forty-three dollars ever Friday, which come to \$172 a month. That means after I pay the light bill, the water bill, the gas bill, and the telephone bill, I got thirteen dollars and fifty cents a week left for my groceries, my clothes, getting my hair done, and tithing to the church. (16)

Stockett provides us with a clear look through Aibileen's character to see the financial situation of maids. We can look closer at Afro-American community through her

character as well as everyone in the community values her the most. As having no family to count on, her long-time friendship with Minny, and also her later one with Skeeter, gave her the courage to talk about her life story. Aibileen is the person who takes the most risk, as early on, she agrees to meet Skeeter at her house in a black neighbourhood. After recruiting more maids, they all go to her house to confess because they do not want to risk the lives of their loved ones. For the sake of her friends, she and Skeeter take most of the danger on themselves.

The second narrative is presented by Aibileen's best friend Minny. Compared to Aibileen, Minny is more outspoken and she always tells what is on her mind which gets her into trouble most of the time. Her abusive husband Leroy beats her, but she refuses to leave him since they have five children together. Minny is Miss Walter's maid when we meet her for the first time in the novel. However, as her daughter Miss Hilly has decided to put her mother in a nursing home, she is jobless all of a sudden. At this moment, we find out how loyal Minny is to her friends. As Minny is famous for her cooking and baking skills, Miss Hilly wants her to take over her current maid's spot. It is impossible for Minny to steal her friend's job, so she refuses to accept the job offer. What follows that is never ending dispute between them as Miss Hilly spreads a rumour accusing Minny of theft as revenge for her rejection. Her job as a maid is saved by a young white lady Celia Foote who has not heard the rumours about Minny as she never leaves her house, and other White women do not take her in. It takes a lot of persuading from Aibileen before Minny finally agrees to tell her story. Minny's goal is not to have a right to vote or go to the same supermarket as Whites but she says: "What I care about is, if in ten years, a white lady will call my girls dirty and accuse them of stealing the silver." (218)



The third point of view is provided by Miss Eugenia Phelan but is mostly referred to as Skeeter. Even though the white supremacist ideology rules the town of Jackson, Skeeter's family is one of only a few white families that does not agree with this ideology. We discover that her family has always treated Blacks kindly from the memories of her childhood. She herself was raised by a Black maid named Constantine who was like a second mother to her. As being raised on the plantations surrounded by Blacks all the time, she is aware of their low status in society, and she demands a change for them. Other characteristics of her should be highlighted. Skeeter is not a typical white lady in the 60s in America. She does not care about the tea parties and bridge games with other white ladies. Her desire to become a writer and make money on her own exceeds the desire of finding a suitable love match which presents an opposite compared to her friends who married men to provide for them. Van Wormer writes: "White women and black women were both politically and economically powerless within the patriarchal system that was ruled by white men of a certain class."<sup>105</sup> For instance, Skeeter mentions what happened when her friend Hilly found a suitor: "At Ole Miss, Hilly and I roomed together for two years before she left to get married and I stayed on to graduate." (54) As we can see, we learn that the purpose of a white lady is to find a suitable husband rather than to graduate from college. There is also a dialogue between Skeeter and her mother, which points out how little a woman's college education is regarded as an important aspect of a woman's life.

'For years my daughter goes off to college and what does she come home with?' she asks.

'A diploma?'

'A pretty piece of paper,' Mother says. (55)

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<sup>105</sup> Van Wormer, Katherine. *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South*. Louisiana State University Press, 2012, p. 16.

Education is important to Skeeter and she wants to follow her dream of becoming a writer. “All my life I’d been told what to believe about politics, coloreds, being a girl.” (63) Despite the expectations of her mother and the rest of the society, she decides to help the oppressed group and comes up with an idea “to really show what it’s like to be a maid in Jackson.” (102) She is aware that she does not only put the maids’ life on risk but also hers as well. While having her first interview with Aibileen, she keeps wondering what would happen if somebody found her in the colored part of the town: “Would they call the police, to report a suspicious meeting? I’m suddenly sure they would. We’d be arrested because that is what they do. They’d charge us with integration violation – I read about it in the paper all the time – they despise the whites that meet with the coloreds to help with the civil rights movement.” (145)

## 2.2 “Separate but Equal”

A period of volatility and uncertainty followed after the Reconstruction era. Racial segregation presented “the nation’s broadest twentieth-century enactment of the difference between blacks and whites.”<sup>106</sup> The problem of how to set the social order in the South was still on the agenda. The former slaveholders witnessed former slaves being granted lands of former Confederates, getting paid, and being able to be enrolled at schools. Moreover, in 1870 The Fifteenth Amendment, which allowed African American men to vote, was ratified. “Reconstruction ended officially in 1877, and the former Confederates regained control of the South. The freed people entered the post-Reconstruction era determined to hold onto their conception of freedom as literacy, mobility, and economic and political self-determination.”<sup>107</sup> But the opposite became a

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<sup>106</sup> Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. Vintage Books, 1999, p. xi.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-19.

reality as the legacy of the Reconstruction period brought with it the notorious Jim Crow. Jim Crow Laws were the name for a series of laws that applied in the United States from the end of the Reconstruction era in 1877 to the mid-1960s.<sup>108</sup> The purpose was to introduce such measurements that would allow the separation of a social minority, in this case, African American race in almost all social aspects. This law involved measurements including, for example, transportation, housing, employment, education and the use of the public facility. As one of the first restrictions was the prohibition of the presence of African Americans in the same railroad cars as the Whites. These kinds of restrictions were firstly introduced in Louisiana and then spread to other southern States. As years followed, the additional segregation laws were ratified. These laws mainly concerned states of the former Confederacy and additionally Missouri, Kentucky and Oklahoma. However, as Woodward points out, this system was born in the North.<sup>109</sup> It was a response to the increasing integration into society. The situation was straightforward – although the North was far more assertive of the Blacks’ rights, it was also the North, which had to deal with the massive relocation of African Americans from the south to the north of the United States. As industry overshadowed agriculture, people needed to move to places, where they could find a job. Compared to the Southerners, they were not used to the presence of Blacks.

It was the Mississippi state, where extreme measurements were undertaken. “After 1906 cities of more than 3,000 were directed to maintain three rest room in train depots, one each for white men and women and one for ‘colored.’”<sup>110</sup> Taxi drivers were not allowed to drive both races at one time, Afro-American patients had to be treated at

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<sup>108</sup> Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 2nd revised ed., Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 191.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>110</sup> McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. University of Illinois Press, 1989, p. 8.

separated parts of the hospitals. Black nurses could only treat black patients and the other way around. Racial segregation also affected working conditions. The rooms had to be segregated also in the textile factories. The employees had to have their own entrances, exits, stairways, and toilets according to their race. The Afro-Americans had to even wait in line until all Whites were served.<sup>111</sup> Most of them tried to avoid the Whites if the situation allowed it. It is not surprising that interracial marriages were also prohibited. However, the result of the census of 1860 showed that twelve per cent of all African Americans living in the South were mixed races.<sup>112</sup> Jim Crow laws also ordered segregated jails. In public places like theatres, courtrooms and toilets, according to one's race, one was expected to behave based on a statue or direct himself according to the 'Whites Only' or 'Colored' signs. These signs also commonly appeared over entrances and exits.<sup>113</sup> There were only a few libraries that allowed admission to Blacks. The only existing Black library was situated in Meridian until after World War I.<sup>114</sup> To illustrate, on page 154 Aibileen asks Miss Skeeter to borrow her some books from the library as "the colored folks ain't allowed in." (154) However, public transport were not included in the segregation as we learn on page 193.

The education of both Whites and Blacks under the same roof was prohibited.<sup>115</sup> One could say that the biggest target of the segregation laws were schools. The intention was to deny access to proper education, textbooks and other educational facilities.<sup>116</sup> It was the lack of resources to educate Blacks that, among other things, led to the

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<sup>111</sup> McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. University of Illinois Press, 1989, p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 2nd revised ed., Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>114</sup> McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. University of Illinois Press, 1989, pp. 10-11.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>116</sup> Telgen, Diane. *Brown v. Board of Education*. Omingraphics, Inc., 2005, p. 15.

establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The target of the NAACP was to eliminate the injustice and arrange the same education for African Americans as the Whites. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of more and more all-black colleges.<sup>117</sup> For instance, *The Help* depicts one of the major milestones of the organization – the enrolment of James Meredith at Ole Miss (nickname for The University of Mississippi). James Meredith went down in history as the first African American student at Ole Miss and when he showed up at the university back in 1962, it caused a big stir. Stockett describes it through Skeeter’s eyes as follows: “I hear the words Ole Miss and on the fuzzy screen I see white men in dark suits crowding the camera, sweat running off their bald heads. I come closer and see a Negro man, about my age, standing in the middle of the white men, with Army men behind him. ... Yet I am neither thrilled nor disappointed by the news that they might let a colored man into Ole Miss.” (83) Without the support of the NAACP, this would not be happening. The organization not only fought for the rights of African Americans to attend universities but also sought to ensure pay equity for teachers regardless of race. One of the first victories was, for example, the case of Lloyd Gaines, an African American law student, who became famous in the case of Missouri ex rel. Gaines v Canada. This case represented a victory as the U.S. Supreme Court sided with Gaines.<sup>118</sup> The Supreme Court ordered the Missouri state to create a law school for African Americans. The result of this dispute is today’s law school at Lincoln University. Twenty-four years later James Meredith was accepted to Ole Miss. Even though the Supreme Court was persuasive and more states started establishing new all-black colleges, Mississippi state was “the most obstructionist state in the union.”<sup>119</sup> The previous African American applicants to Ole Miss had been

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<sup>117</sup> Telgen, Diane. *Brown v. Board of Education*. Omingraphics, Inc., 2005, p. 29.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

rejected and it was not until Meredith's suit against the university that set things in motion. As the former Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett refused to meet Meredith's requirements, the President himself decided to interfere: "This defiance of U.S. law angered Kennedy, who issued an executive order mandating Meredith's admittance. To ensure that his order was obeyed, he also sent 500 U.S. marshals to accompany Meredith to registration."<sup>120</sup> President Kennedy's effort paid off as James Meredith graduated from Ole Miss in 1963.<sup>121</sup> The enrolment of James Meredith has gone down in history, Stockett describes the astonishment people felt at that time seeing an African American at the previously all-white university. The fact that President Kennedy "has ordered the governor to step aside for James Meredith" (83) even further underscores this milestone. In the future, he paid attention to similar incidents. For instance, the University of Alabama refused to enrol two black students in 1963, since the former Alabama Governor publicly promoted blocking desegregation. He called up the marshals once again and assigned a task to them to escort black students to the university. That same evening June 11, 1963, President Kennedy delivered a speech on national TV and addressed the integration issue: "We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative bodies and, above all, in all of our daily lives."<sup>122</sup> His call for the end of racial segregation is considered one of the greatest civil rights speeches America ever witnessed: "It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color."<sup>123</sup> The assassination of President Kennedy on November 22 of the same year "has struck the world dumb." (342) Stockett describes how America became silent

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<sup>120</sup> Telgen, Diane. *Brown v. Board of Education*. Omingraphics, Inc., 2005, pp. 96-97.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96-97.

<sup>123</sup> Dudley, William. *The Civil Rights Movement: Opposing Viewpoints*. Greenhaven Press, 1996, p. 178.

after the death of President Kennedy, how everyone was mourning and nothing seemed important enough as a reason to break the silence. (342)

As previously mentioned, racial segregation played a significant role in the 1960s in the United States and Mississippi was the state which was affected the most by this policy. *The Help* demonstrates how difficult a life African Americans had to live as a part of the discriminated minority. The first mention of racial segregation comes up in the first chapter as Miss Leefolt suggests Miss Hilly use the guest bathroom, which is a bathroom, where the help goes. (7) We found out that Miss Leefolt's house is one of a few houses in Jackson that does not have colored bathrooms. "Everywhere in town they got a colored bathroom, and most of the houses do too." (8) Moreover, there is a part when a young man becomes blind after "two white mens chased him and beat him with a tire iron" (101) because he "accidentally" (103) used the white bathroom. The bathroom issue may be perceived as a minor problem, however, it is what the story revolves around. Furthermore, there is a reason why Jackson's Whites insist on the help to have their own bathrooms. As a matter of fact, they do not even try to hide their reasons: "Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do. I double." (8) This belief that Blacks carry diseases is discussed several times in the novel. Although, Miss Leefolt does not stand the idea that it is true at first, since all her friends believe that, she has to act accordingly to it.

Colored hospitals are also mentioned a couple of times in the novel. Firstly, when Aibileen describes the incident when one of the children she took care of in the past got hurt and she had to rush him into the hospital: "Tote him to the colored hospital cause I didn't know where the white one was. But when I got there, a colored man stop me and say, *Is this boy white?* ... And I say, *Yessuh*, and he say, *Is them his white fingers?* And I

say, *Yessuh*, and he say, *Well, you better teel em he your high yellow cause that colored doctor won't operate on a white boy in a Negro hospital.*" (151) Another time, she remembers the day, when her son died and a White man dropped his body off at the colored hospital and drove away. (153)

Given the law, some of the places were only available to Whites as Blacks were excluded from places such as swimming pools, tennis courts, hotels and restaurants.<sup>124</sup> The novel does not directly mention that the African Americans would not be allowed to the restaurants. When she goes to buy an ice cream, she comments that there is a separate window at the back of the building which is reserved for Blacks. (202) The only specific mention of restaurants is almost at the end of the book, when she comments on the fact that Blacks are now allowed to sit at the Woolworth counter – "It is 1964 after all." (390) What Aibileen points to are the years of effort by President Kennedy that resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 after his death. This document, approved by President Lyndon B. Johnson banned discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender or nationality. In other words, this law legally ended racial segregation and Jim Crow laws.

### **2.2.1 Other Signs of White Supremacy in the Novel**

White supremacy presented an issue which was closely related to racial segregation. As we could see in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many white supremacist groups started emerging. Intimidation and violence became commonplace in the 1890s. "Lynching, in particular, became a favoured method of disposing of black men and women who refused to bend to white authority."<sup>125</sup> Most of the lynched victims were involved in some way in the political sphere and were fighting for the civil rights of

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<sup>124</sup> Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 2nd revised ed., Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 14.

<sup>125</sup> Telgen, Diane. *Brown v. Board of Education*. Omingraphics, Inc., 2005, p. 16.



African Americans. However, the victims often included those who were found to be disrespectful of racial segregation as well. The intimidation played a significant role in the registration to vote. For example, according to the records, more than 130 000 Blacks registered to vote in Louisiana state in 1896. Compared to that, not even 1 500 of them came back the next year.<sup>126</sup> Some other states, such as Mississippi, chose a different approach as they “held a constitutional convention to establish a literacy test as a qualification for voting.”<sup>127</sup>

The signs of racial discrimination and violence can be traced in many parts of the novel. Stockett describes many times the clashes between African Americans and Whites, where in most cases the African American is beaten or murdered. A man got beaten up because he used the white bathroom. (101) Someone burned up a woman’s car “cause she went down to the voting station.” (103) For instance, in chapter fourteen, Aibileen is expelled from the bus as a Black man got shot and the bus could not continue on its regular way. The bus driver tells the passengers: “Colored people off, last stop for you. ... White people lemme know where y’all need to get to. I’ll get you close as I can.” (193) The reason why the driver wants to take the passenger home is obvious. But his efforts to bring people home safely are only about the white ones which is quite a paradox given the fact that an Afro-American has been shot. Another African American is more likely to be shot than a white man and nobody pays attention to that. “In two seconds, my stockings is rubbing together so fast I sound like zippers zipping. Up head I see three people walking fast like me. All of em turn off, go into houses, shut the door.” (193-194) What Stockett shows us here is the constant fear the Blacks had to live in. She provides us with a clear look into their minds as they have to worry about their families as there

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<sup>126</sup> Telgen, Diane. *Brown v. Board of Education*. Omingraphics, Inc., 2005, p. 17.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

are no colored policemen who would protect them. (196) But besides that, one should not forget that 1960s was a time of the notorious Ku Klux Klan terror. Regardless of the vanishing of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1870s, the fear-inducing Ku Klux Klan was reborn in 1915.<sup>128</sup> Despite the fact that the Klan started increasing its numbers day by day, the Americans did not pay as much attention to it owing to the World War I happening overseas. However, Newton writes that “race remained a life-and-death issue in wartime Mississippi.”<sup>129</sup> The second Klan’s agenda included the intimidation and if possible expulsion of the NAACP members. If we look at the situation in Mississippi, it is not surprising that the violence continued to spread, as even the former governor of Mississippi Bilbo (in office 1916-1920) did not stop it. Newton quotes him as saying:

This is strictly a white man’s country ... and any dream on the part of the negro race to share social and political equality will be shattered in the end. If the northern negro lover wants to stop lynching in the South, he must first get the right conception of the proper relation that must necessarily exist between the races and teach and train the negro race along these lines and in this way remove the cause of lynching.<sup>130</sup>

The group was growing rapidly as gradually more white supremacists began to join them. Thanks to the community events, distributed photographs of the Klan and the media interest, the Klan became a lead in the public attention in the 1920s. Trained speakers travelled across the country and spread their belief that “America was in danger”<sup>131</sup> and that people should join them and help to save the country. According to data, there were

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<sup>128</sup> Newton, Michael. *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010, p. 66.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>131</sup> Meltzer, Milton. *The Truth about the Ku Klux Klan*. F. Watts, 1982, p. 34.

over 5 million members of the Ku Klux Klan by the peak of the twenties and the African Americans were not the only target as the Klan also focused their hate on Jews and foreigners.<sup>132</sup> Tens of thousands of Klan members paraded down the cities. With such huge power, they had enough votes to install its several members into the U.S. Senate and other political fields.<sup>133</sup> Although the Klan lived in high hopes of expanding its already strong powers, one of the worst economic downturns took place since the Great Depression hit. As members could not afford to pay the dues, the Klan split up. It was not until the 1950s that the Ku Klux Klan was revived again.

The third wave of Klan continued to spread its belief throughout the United States in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century once again, and Stockett outlines the fear in which the people of Jackson lived at that time. Apart from other trivial references to the Klan, *The Help* depicts the last days of one of the most important American civil rights activists Medgar Evers. His figure firstly appears in chapter fourteen, where the author mentions the following: “Medgar Evers, the NAACP officer who live five minutes away, they blew up his carport last night. For talking.” (164) Couple of pages later, we found out that he was assassinated: “KKK shot him. Front a his house. A hour ago.” (194) Stockett describes a sequence of events that actually took place in 1963 in Jackson. Medgar Evers, as the NAACP’s first field officer in Mississippi, is remembered as one of the most respected leaders of the NAACP, an American civil rights organization founded by famous activist W. E. B. Du Bois in 1909. The organization which was strenuously fighting for the Afro-Americans’ rights played a big role in the mid of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The news about the assassination run on national TV as the assassination took place only several hours after President Kennedy’s speech to the nation. With the help of the FBI,

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<sup>132</sup> Meltzer, Milton. *The Truth about the Ku Klux Klan*. F. Watts, 1982, p. 36.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-53.

the Jackson authorities discovered and charged the shooter. The shooter was a member of the Ku Klux Klan Byron De La Beckwith. When people thought justice would be served, the unthinkable has become reality. The all-white jury found him not guilty and he was set free. It was not until 1994 that he had been arrested and sent to prison for the murder of Medgar Evers. The assassination caused a colored march the day after his funeral. As a well-respected person, his body was sent for burial to Washington, at the Arlington Cemetery. (196-197) The tension among the Mississippians gained strength. The 1963's events caused fear in the African American community. "The year closed with a flurry of racist propaganda and violence. October witnessed circulation of Klan posters bearing photographs of Medgar Evers, Ed King, James Meredith, Bob Moses, John Salter, Emmett Till, and others, with crosses drawn over those already dead."<sup>134</sup> Several people were kidnapped or murdered during the last months of that year.

As Skeeter searched through the library with Aibileen's lists of works which included, for example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (154), she was terrified that she would be caught as she says: "I knew there was something not right about that Skeeter Phelan, hunting for those Negro materials..," (172) and she follows: "In nonfiction, I spot a single copy of *Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. I grab it, excited to deliver it to Aibileen, but when I open it, I see the middle section has been ripped out. Inside, someone has written NIGGER BOOK in purple crayon." (172) It is commonly known that the censorship also presented a big issue. According to evidence, some of the textbooks were even excluded because of the references to voting rights at black schools.<sup>135</sup> However, this the moment we find out what happens, when

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<sup>134</sup> Newton, Michael. *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010, p. 135.

<sup>135</sup> Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 2nd revised ed., Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 98.

texts fighting for black equality and against the racial discrimination, appear in all-white libraries. This is also the part when Skeeter realizes what common belief rules among the society. As her close friend Hilly is planning to build up colored bathrooms all over Jackson, she points out: “Jim Crow or Hilly’s bathroom plan – what’s the difference?” (181), when she finds a booklet titled “Compilation of Jim Crow Laws of the South” (172) and takes it home with her. One afternoon when they discuss the possibility of desegregation, Miss Hilly desperately tries to convince Skeeter that segregation is the only right option: “You want to let them get in our swimming pools? Let them put their hands on everything in our grocery stores?” (206)

Not only the maids, but Skeeter worries what would happen if someone found out they were writing a book about the treatment of maids in Jackson. She realizes that as a white woman, she has certain privileges that would be denied to her, but in no way would she have faced such consequences as the maids. By way of illustration, in chapter nineteen, she reads an article about an Afro-American teacher who gave an interview to a reporter about his life in Mississippi. Shortly afterwards, she reads about his death. Skeeter is aware that his death is the result of his talking, that although the residents of Jackson would probably not physically harm her, her friends (the maids) would be in danger of their lives. The bad consequences of talking can be traced back to the beginnings of 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, there is a case from 1906 where a white man was attacked and driven out of a town in Mississippi after being caught having a close conversation with a black man.<sup>136</sup> In the days of Jim Crow, there probably was not a black man who was not aware of his low status in society. Everywhere he went, whites let him know where he belonged as “the racial code also prohibited all forms of interracial

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<sup>136</sup> McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. University of Illinois Press, 1989, p. 29.

activity that might imply equality.”<sup>137</sup> However, Blacks were not the only one taking the risk.

### 2.3 The Treatment of Afro-American Maids by White Families

*The Help* provides us with a look into the social dynamics of Jackson, Mississippi in the 1960s. The novel rarely features white husbands which prompts us that it was usually the housewife who was in charge of the household running. After all, they are the ones who assign the tasks for domestic help and they decide which maid they want to hire. Owing to many social events and parties, these women do not have time to take care of the household and after the children. Therefore, hiring a maid became a common thing in the Southern states at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Katherine van Wormer in her book *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South* mentions: “The dependency was mutual. ... The white woman depended on her maid to perform necessary household tasks, cook for the family, and mind the children. The servant depended on her employer for income and sometimes for help of a practice nature.”<sup>138</sup> Hiring an Afro-American maid became very common in a given era. By 1920, 46 percent of employed black women were working as domestic help. By 1940, the ratio rose to 60 percent. In the 1920s, conditions also changed as maids began to refuse to live with white families because it evoked a sense of ownership.<sup>139</sup> The form of payment for services has therefore also changed, to illustrate, previously the family offered a place to

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<sup>137</sup> McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. University of Illinois Press, 1989, p. 24.

<sup>138</sup> Van Wormer, Katherine. *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South*. Louisiana State University Press, 2012, p. 34.

<sup>139</sup> McElya, Micki. “Confronting the Mammy Problem.” *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-century America*. Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 211.

sleep, food, promised medical care and other stuff. Maids' moving out from the white households brought a classic form of wage payment Whites have resisted for so long.<sup>140</sup>

As the narrative changes between three narrators, we can observe two viewpoints of maids and one viewpoint of a white woman. Firstly, Minny's story lets us take a look at how was it like to work for Miss Hilly's mother and her new employer Miss Celia. Secondly, as Aibileen is employed by Miss Leefolt, she provides us with another important look into the situation. On the other hand, we have Miss Skeeter that takes part in most of the Whites' conversations as being friends with Miss Hilly and Miss Leefolt. Her viewpoint is therefore very crucial because she represents the white voice in the book. Miss Leefolt is of a different opinion on racial segregation than her friends at first. As not being a member of the richest families in Jackson, she is aware of how much will the colored bathroom for Aibileen cost her family as she says to her little daughter: "Guess what, honey? ... You're not going to college so your mama's friends don't have to use the same bathroom as the maid." (15) However, her attitude changes throughout the story. To illustrate, when Aibileen teaches Miss Leefolt's daughter how to use the toilet, the little girl runs to the colored bathroom and Miss Leefolt loses her nerves: "I did not raise you to use the colored bathroom!' I hear her whispering, thinking I can't hear, and I think, *Lady, you didn't raise your child* at all." (95) Aibileen remarks. Miss Leefolt wraps up her lecture to her daughter with the words "this is dirty out here, Mae Mobley. You'll catch diseases! No no no!" (95) Aibileen comments: "I want to yell so loud that Baby Girl can hear me that dirty ain't a color, disease ain't the Negro side a town. I want to stop that moment from coming – and it come in ever white child's life – when they start to think that colored folks ain't as good as whites." (96) Miss Leefolt represents a

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<sup>140</sup> McElya, Micki. "Confronting the Mammy Problem." *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-century America*. Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 225.

person that acts according to the expectations of the society. There is no doubt, that her friendship with Miss Hilly affects her a lot as will the following example show. In chapter twenty-nine Aibileen describes a day like any other at work, however, on that day she is not able to concentrate on work because it is too hot outside. After forty-one years as a maid, she decides to skip putting on stockings for the day. She does not feel confident about her decision as she asks Miss Leefolt if she does not mind keeping her legs bare. She replies: ““Oh don’t worry about it Aibileen. It’s too hot for stockings.”” (389) However, a couple of minutes later she claims the opposite: ““And I can’t have you serving us like that, with your – your legs showing!’ ‘I tole you-’ ‘Hilly’s going to be here in five minutes.’” (390) If her friend Hilly was not coming to visit, Aibileen could work all day with her bare legs.

In one of the interviews, we listen to Louvenia’s story, a maid who works for one of Miss Hilly’s friends, and we find out that her grandson was blinded that year for using a white bathroom. (257) During the interview, Miss Skeeter learns that Miss Lou Anne is not in reality what she pretends to be in front of her friends:

I learn that Lou Anne, whom I find dull and vapid and have never paid as much mind to, gave Louvenia two weeks off with pay so she could help her grandson. She brought casseroles to Louvenia’s house seven time during those weeks. She rushed Louvenia to the colored hospital when the first call came about Robert and waited there six hours with her, until the operation was over. (258)

Nobody in Jackson has ever heard about Miss Lou Anne being there for her maid at such a difficult time. The fact that she kept that as a secret tells us a lot about the then society.

The relationship between Minny and her new employer Miss Celia represents the most unusual relationship in the novel. From Minny’s narration, we learn that Miss Celia



has been kind to her from the first time meeting each other. "I've never in my life had a white woman to tell me to sit down so she can serve me a cold drink" (32), she points out. When one day Miss Celia loses her temper and their argument results in Minny's firing, Miss Celia then apologizes to her the next day: "I'm sorry I hollered at you like I did." (134) Their relationship is the most remarkable one in the novel. We can argue whether it is because of Miss Celia's loneliness that she finds comfort in being friends with Minny. This kind of very intimate relationship between a maid and a housewife is the only one portrayed in the novel. Minny even confesses that they eat lunch together every single day and she cannot get used to Miss Celia's friendliness as every white woman she has ever worked for ate in her dining room "as far away from the colored help as they could." (215) Already at the beginning, Minny recalls that her mother introduced her to seven rules for working for a white lady when she was sent to her first real job at the age of fourteen. She mentions that if a maid wants to keep her job, she has to follow those rules, such as tasting food with another spoon or eating in the kitchen by herself. (38-39) Therefore, it is no doubt, that dining with her employer every day, makes her uncomfortable. In addition, there is no reference from Minny that she would have her own segregated bathroom at the house.

The main reason why Miss Celia hired Minny in the first place was to show her husband Mister Johnny that she is capable of looking after the household. She even refuses to tell her husband about hiring a maid. In this case, Minny becomes some kind of mentor to her employer as she teaches her how to cook, provides her gardening tips and other stuff. Miss Celia's character represents a total opposite of the way how other housewives treat their maids. Their relationship even reaches a point where it could be called a friendship. One day, Miss Celia confesses to Minny about her four miscarriages. (235) No doubt, she has no one to talk to, but Miss Celia's devotion to Minny is apparent from

the way she talks to her. Unlike the rest of the society, Miss Celia does not consider herself superior to her maid. The fact that she does not have friends plays a significant role. In such a matter, we see a White woman treating her Afro-American maid as other Whites. However, if Miss Celia was taken more into society, she would arguably change her behaviour. We can observe such changes, for instance, by Miss Leefolt. We can see that she sincerely cares about Aibileen but she is never going to admit that publicly because her best friend Miss Hilly (the most respected woman in Jackson) promotes racial segregation like anybody else.

In general, one can say that housewives treat their maids kindly. Even Miss Hilly politely asks when she needs something and gives thanks. On the other hand, she stands firmly behind the fact that both races are not equal. She promotes the idea of “separate but equal.” (185) In many ways, there does not seem anything wrong with Miss Hilly. She treats her maids well, and she loves her children, but at some points, she seems to not know what conversations not to bring up. She often makes her superiority apparent, not only to Blacks but also to Whites. For example, on page 185, she directly asks Aibileen if she would not find strange going to school with the Whites. In this case, Miss Hilly does not care what Aibileen says as an answer. Aibileen is merely a maid and therefore even if she disagrees with Miss Hilly’s opinion, it is clear that she will be put off. On the other hand, objectivity is evident in Aibileen’s narrative as you can observe any kind of resentment against Whites. She admits when they treat her and her friends well, for instance, she mentions that Miss Hilly sent her to buy drinks for them and insists Aibileen buy one extra drink for herself even she did not have to. (203)

Since Miss Hilly plays an important role in the story, we also get a glimpse into her relationship with her maid, Yule May. Chapter nineteen of *The Help* is dedicated to

the inability of some housewives to sympathize with their maids. When Yule May asks Miss Hilly for a loan as she does not have enough money to pay the tuition for both of her sons, Miss Hilly rejects her request with the words “that a true Christian don’t give charity to those who is well and able.” (251) After Yule May being backed into a corner, she steals “an ugly ruby ring” (250) from Miss Hilly. Miss Hilly makes sure for her to be sentenced to four years behind bars and to pay a high fine.

## 2.4 The “Black Mammy” Issue

The role of motherhood in the novel plays a significant role as there is a clear difference as far as taking care of a child is concerned. From what we know, maids are not just responsible for cooking, cleaning houses, and doing laundry, but also for taking care of children. We get the best view of this matter through Aibileen’s eyes as she has raised seventeen children in her lifetime. Most maids stick with one family for their whole life, however, Aibileen moves from one family to another and specializes in raising children. She also confesses her experience with white babies calling her “Mama.” (155) Mutual affection between Aibileen and May Mobley is evident to the reader. There is a shred of evidence that small white children felt sometimes closer to their black nannies than to their real mothers.<sup>141</sup> For instance, May Mobley tells Aibileen that she is her “real mama.” (284) Aibileen tries to explain to her that she is not, but you cannot talk a four-year-old out of a thought like that. Almost at the end of the book, while saying each other goodbyes as Aibileen has been fired from her job, May Mobley begs her nanny to stay and starts crying. (442) Grace Elizabeth Hale in her critical work *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* uses the term ‘mammy’ which describes

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<sup>141</sup> Van Wormer, Katherine. *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South*. Louisiana State University Press, 2012, p. 15.

the state when the nanny assumes the role of mother in the eyes of the child. She writes that “mammy was a white child’s best friend, a secure refuge against the world.”<sup>142</sup> This corresponds to the picture Stockett illustrates to us. Whenever May Mobley feels down, which in most cases is due to her mother’s treatment of her, Aibileen whispers to her “You kind, you smart, you important.” (199) The same was true of Skeeter’s former nanny Constantine. One day, when Skeeter came home from school as a little girl, she was looking for comfort by her nanny as a boy at her school called her ugly. Constantine takes on the role of a mother and insists that ugly only “live up on the inside.” (62) It was common for ‘mammies’ to teach children how to behave until they went to school. Not only did they teach them manners, but also how to love themselves which is mainly considered as task of a biological mother. To give more examples, May Mobley often comes up with questions about race and Aibileen tries to teach her that both races are equal. Through her character, we can observe how children are exposed to white supremacy at school from a young age. One day, May Mobley comes home from school and asks Aibileen how come she is colored, to which she answers: “‘Cause God made me colored.” (392) What prompts her to ask that question, is her teacher Miss Taylor claiming that colored children cannot go to schools because they are “not smart enough.” (392) In such a case, Black nannies represented the link between reality and ideology ruling in the 1960s. Nevertheless, as Aibileen herself points out, it was mostly a futile effort to teach children racial equality because then they grew up anyway and followed in the footsteps of their parents.

In many cases, the maid gave up her own child to be able to succeed at her job. Wallace-Sanders in her article *Every Child Left behind: The Many Invisible Children in*

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<sup>142</sup> Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. Vintage Books, 1999, p. 99.

*The Help* points out a fact that may not be entirely apparent at first glance. She mentions that, in Aibileen's case, she is more identified with white children than her own. She supports this idea with two pieces of evidence. Firstly, there are seven times more references to May Mobley in the novel compared to her son Treelore, and secondly, addressing May Mobley by the nickname 'Baby Girl' most of the time.<sup>143</sup> When Skeeter asks Aibileen "what does it feel like, to raise a white child when your own child's at home, being looked after by someone else" (144-145), Aibileen is not capable of answering her. Another maid character that dedicated her life to raising White children was Skeeter's former nanny. She is struck by Constantine's absence when she comes home from university. Their nanny-child bond was very strong, as we learn from Skeeter's cherished memories. She tries to find out what happened to her nanny, however, not only her mother refuses to tell her the truth but also the other maids including Aibileen. She does not learn the truth until almost the end of the novel until Aibileen tells her of Constantine's white daughter whom she had to take to an orphanage in Chicago. As Skeeter is caught off guard, she explains to her the situation of an African American maid giving birth: "A lot of colored womens got to give they children up, Miss Skeeter. Send they kids off cause they have to tend to a white family." (358) Constantine decided to send her four-year-old daughter away because of her light color of skin.

Being Negro with white skin ... in Mississippi, it's like you don't belong to nobody. ... White folks would stop her, ask her all suspicious what she doing toting round a white child. Policeman used to stop her on State Street, told her she need to get her uniform on. Even colored folks ... they treat her different, distrustful, like she done something wrong. (353)

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<sup>143</sup> Wallace-Sanders, Kimberly. "Every Child Left Behind: The Many Invisible Children in *The Help*." *Southern Cultures*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2014, pp. 65–76. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26217340>. Accessed 26. Oct. 2022, p. 67.

Aibileen did not send her son Treelore away, she lost him owing to terrible consequences, but both Aibileen and Constantine devoted their whole life to serving white families. Stockett has been criticized for her stereotypical image of a ‘black mammy’. While reading the novel, we do not get to see into maids’ personal lives apart from Minny’s, which prompts the question of why Stockett decided to focus on the Black maid – White family’s relationships only instead of focusing on the life of an African American that period beyond their work life. However, what Stockett achieved while writing the novel was an image of what was it like to work as a maid/nanny for a white family. The roots of the ‘black mammy’ stereotype date back to the Old South era. The role of original ‘mammy’ played a significant role in the plantation household:

The ‘Black Mammy’ was a household servant who generally had specific duties to perform. These were mainly connected with the care of the children of the family, thus relieving the mistress of all the drudgery work connected with child care. ... In the plantation household the ‘Black Mammy’ was considered as much a part of the family as the blood members were. She occupied a lower status, but was included in the inner circle.<sup>144</sup>

The position of a ‘black mammy’ was the highest position a slave could achieve in the antebellum period. Her job was always secured as she was exempt from sale, the punishments were remitted, and “her work was less strenuous than the physical labor of the other slave women.”<sup>145</sup> Moreover, ‘mammies’ were trained as nurses and used to nurse any family member in case of emergency. Not only the child dependent on her ‘mammy’ but also the whole household. “She has been charged with having a far greater

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<sup>144</sup> Parkhurst, Jessie W. “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household.” *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1938, pp. 349–69. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2714687>. Accessed 26 Oct. 2022, pp. 351-352.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

affection for them than she had for her own children,”<sup>146</sup> and the child had usually trouble recognizing its real mother from the nanny. After the child grew a little, it started to pay attention, for example, to the different skin colors. This behaviour can be also traced in *The Help* as May Mobley constantly asks Aibileen about her skin color. There is a scene when she complains to Aibileen about her teacher calling her face “dirty” (409) as she colored herself black in a picture. The reason behind coloring herself black was Aibileen’s skin color. There is no doubt, that there are many similarities between the vision of Old South ‘black mammy’ and the characters of Aibileen and Constantine, however, the fact that Aibileen has raised seventeen children during her career as a nanny contradicts that since ‘mammies’ kept working usually in one family only. The nannies in the antebellum South as a rule lived in the house of their employers. In the book, each maid has her own home. Moreover, Aibileen’s affection for May Mobley can be also a sign of grief and mourning as her son Treelore was killed only months before she started working for the Leefolt family. She recalls how she was only able to “look out the window, see if the world still there” (3) for three months and took five months off before signing for the nanny job for May Mobley. We do not know much about Aibileen’s relationships with the previous sixteen children, therefore, we can argue whether the affection towards May Mobley is not just a result of her grief over her own child and if nursing May Mobley represents a replacement for Aibileen’s motherly love. Aibileen immediately became emotionally attached to the little girl as she herself states: “May Mobley my special baby.”(2)

Like in a previous chapter there is a difference between Miss Leefolt and Miss Hilly’s roles as a mother. Miss Leefolt seems like a woman that does not know how to

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<sup>146</sup> Parkhurst, Jessie W. “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household.” *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1938, pp. 349–69. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2714687>. Accessed 26 Oct. 2022, p. 361.

take care of a child on her own. On page fifteen Miss Leefolt complains to her maid Aibileen that her daughter does not want to fall asleep. At that moment, we learn that it is no wonder May Mobley did not want to sleep because the last person to change her was Aibileen when she left work the night before. And Miss Leefolt had not thought to change the baby all night and all morning. (15) Parkhurst writes that it was completely normal for a nanny to have a broader knowledge of how to take care of a child than the mistresses.<sup>147</sup> Miss Hilly represents a contradiction to Miss Leefolt as Aibileen confesses: “One thing I got to say about Miss Hilly, she love her children. ... Always telling her she the most beautiful girl in the world. And Heather love her mama too.” (184) There are only a few moments when Miss Leefolt makes her love for her children apparent. In chapter eleven, she even complains to her White friends that her older sister has a live-in help and that she had not to see her daughter at all while staying at her sister’s house. (147) However, Skeeter seems to be the only one noticing what her friend implies by such a statement: “I cringe at this moment, but no one else seems to notice.” (147) In addition to that, when May Mobley goes to eat with Aibileen instead of staying in her high chair Miss Leefolt tells her: ““I told you to eat in your high chair, May Mobley. How I ended up with you when all my friends have angels I just do not know ...”” (91)

## 2.5 Publication of the Novel and Its Criticism

The publication of *The Help* became immediately a huge success after its publication in 2009 and “the novel spent 100 weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller List.”<sup>148</sup> However, it presented many obstacles, for as is often the case – a white author

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<sup>147</sup> Parkhurst, Jessie W. “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household.” *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1938, pp. 349–69. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2714687>. Accessed 26 Oct. 2022, p. 363.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, Valerie. “Black Women’s Memories and *The Help*.” *Southern Cultures*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2014, pp. 26–37. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26217337>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2022, p. 27.



describing the lives of black women raised questions of credibility. Kathryn Stockett herself struggled with the publication of the novel as publishers questioned whether it is the right choice for a white author to create a narrative depicting the life of a black maid from the twenty-first-century point of view.<sup>149</sup> At the time, they had no idea what kind of response the book (and later the adaptation of the book) would generate. *The Help* was translated into more than forty languages and became listed on the public schools and universities' reading lists. Garcia et al. even acknowledge that "it may become the *To Kill a Mockingbird* of the twenty-first century."<sup>150</sup>

The reception of the work is naturally very significant. Since the book is concerned with racial segregation and racial discrimination, it is understandable that the response of both races might have differed. Suzanne W. Jones in her article *The Divided Reception of The Help* states that even though some African Americans have found the characters rather stereotypical and the African Americans insufficiently developed, others, on the other hand, have appreciated the transparent approach to the matter. Jones cites one of the book reviews: "It is not a well-kept secret, but this is the first time I can say the truth is being told ... Yes, it may have taken someone from the other race to help 'put it out there,' but that was the instrument that opened the eyes of the world regarding the struggles of 'colored' maids/help."<sup>151</sup> In contrast, some readers lack the more in-depth depiction of the Ku Klux Klan terror, the harsh life of maids, and the stereotypical characters including the 'mammy' which resulted in many negative reviews among readers. Some critics also criticize the topics of the novel as they consider "Skeeter's love life, disintegrating friendships, and career aspirations" as "the main concerns of the

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<sup>149</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>151</sup> Jones, Suzanne W. "The Divided Reception of *The Help*." *Southern Cultures*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2014, pp. 7–25. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26217336>. Accessed 3 Nov. 2022, p. 9.

novel.”<sup>152</sup> According to other opinions, Stockett’s “mild criticism of white brutality”<sup>153</sup> indicates that she despite it all, is siding with the whites and is loyal to her race.

Furthermore, some critics argue that *The Help* represents Stockett’s nostalgia rather than pursuing the race issue that Stockett has failed at clarifying some of the topics mentioned in the book. For example, she is often criticized for the missing representation of rape and sexual harassment African American maids had to face.<sup>154</sup> Firstly, the author takes the issue into account as she writes that “angry stories come out, of white men who’ve tried to touch them,” (258) but she elaborates on that in two lines only. Secondly, during a conversation between Skeeter and Constantine, as Skeeter recalls, Constantine revealed to her that her father was white. She continues explaining how “he used to come over to the house every Saturday afternoon,” and confesses that her father called her “his favourite.” (66) However, we never learn what the relationship between Constantine’s parents looked like. The only thing we know for sure is they were not married as interracial couples were prohibited until 1967. Stockett decided to depict how well a white father treated her illegitimate mixed-race daughter, how he kept bringing her gifts from his travels and other stuff only, which does not reveal the circumstances of her birth. Her portrayal of a kind-hearted white man contradicts the physically abusive Afro-American to whom Minny is married. Garcia et al. claims that “Stockett’s novel suggests that white men should not be blamed for past abuses against black women and instead places black men as the only threat to black women.”<sup>155</sup> What supports this idea is the scene when Miss Celia’s husband comes home earlier and finds Minny at his property. He is not angry, on the contrary, he compliments her that she is the best cook he has ever known.

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<sup>152</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom’s Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 167.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The author provides us with a clear difference in how men treat Minny according to their race, in the end, it is a Black man who makes Minny's life miserable. Furthermore, through Minny and Aibileen's characters, we perceive two Afro-American women not being entirely miserable while working for white families. "Cooking secured Minny's job while it also offered her personal pleasure within her own turbulent life,"<sup>156</sup> and as Aibileen has dedicated her life to children, she is also happy with her job as a nanny. Apart from the financial struggle, the reader does not observe so much resistance to her profession as he would expect. Additionally, as Garcia et al. acknowledge: "We learn little from Aibileen about her life, less about her pain, and nothing about her anger."<sup>157</sup>

The novel became a spot among many heated debates because a White woman was "getting rich off the backs of a story that is NOT hers to tell."<sup>158</sup> This idea was not helped when a former maid from Stockett's family sued her for stealing her story.<sup>159</sup> The author's initial goal was to write a story about the place she missed – her hometown Jackson. She was not aware of the racial injustice when she was little, she herself admits that she considered their maid lucky to have them because otherwise, she would have nowhere to go. "*The Help* is the balm to Stockett's white guilt,"<sup>160</sup> as the regret of not asking Demetrie, what it was like to be black in Mississippi, followed her at every corner. Stockett knew what she was getting into and that it was not easy to write a story from a black woman's perspective that was not hers to tell. "I was scared, a lot of the time, that I was crossing a terrible line, writing in the voice of a black person," (450) as she states in the afterword. When Ablene Cooper, an alleged inspiration for the character of

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<sup>156</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authoried Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 65.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>158</sup> Jones, Suzanne W. "The Divided Reception of *The Help*." *Southern Cultures*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2014, pp. 7–25. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26217336>. Accessed 3 Nov. 2022, p. 11.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>160</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authoried Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 166.

Aibileen, filed a lawsuit against Stockett for stealing her story in February 2011, the conflict naturally captured the media. Garcia et al. write: “Both Cooper and the fictional Clark are middle-aged women, have a gold tooth, and provide care to white children who affectionately refer to them as ‘Aibee.’ They each also tragically lose their adult sons months before their employer’s families welcome newborns.”<sup>161</sup> Cooper started working for Stockett’s brother in October 1998 as she mentioned in one of the interviews. The reason for her lawsuit was the resemblance between her traumatic event of losing a son due to leukemia and the portrayal of Aibileen’s mourning over her dead son Treelore. She says: “I’ve read Ms. Stockett’s book ... Losing a child is hard enough without having to relive that moment as part of someone else’s story. I feel as if she invaded my privacy and exposed one of the most awful times in my life to the world.”<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, Stockett herself claims the only voice she was writing in was the voice of Demetrie, an African American maid who worked for her family when she was a little: “Demetrie came to cook and clean for my family when she was twenty-eight. My father was fourteen, my uncle seven. Demetrie was stout and dark-skinned and, by then, married to a mean, abusive drinker named Clyde.” (447) As she later points out Demetrie’s extraordinary cooking skills and her amazing caramel cake, parallels between Demetrie and the fictional character of Minnie come to light. We can find a resemblance between the women Kathryn Stockett knew in real life and the characters in her book. Moreover, her other description of Demetrie rather points to the character of Constantine. She writes that Demetrie used to support her with the words like “You are beautiful. You a beautiful girl.” (448) which is no doubt reminiscent of Constantine’s self-esteem boost for Skeeter. The relationship between Constantine and Skeeter resembles in many ways Demetrie and

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<sup>161</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom’s Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 26.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Stockett's. Whether Stockett was indeed inspired by Ablene Cooper while writing her novel remains a question.

Additionally, one of the critical interpretations in Garcia et al.'s survey comes up with the idea that "*The Help* is a product of Skeeter's guilelessness and the unreliability of Stockett's memory."<sup>163</sup> However, nowhere in the book, does it say that the author intended to describe her childhood. There are some autobiographical elements in the work indeed, but Stockett did not try to tell Demetrie's story, on the other hand, she found inspiration in it. It was her affection towards her former nanny and her homesickness that drove her to return to the past. Besides, it is hard to judge the author's lack of historical credibility since she has not lived at the time of the novel's setting. As being born in 1969, she could not have experienced Jim Crow Laws with her own eyes. One should not forget that the work is not meant to serve as a memoir but as fiction.

If one overlooks all the criticism of the book, one can see the positive impact of the book on society. Katherine van Wormers, the author of *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South* published three years after *The Help*, describes the influence of this novel on history. She mentions that *The Help* was the reason why she decided to write her maid narrative story collection. Owing to its publication and also turning the book into a movie process, more and more maids reached out to her and told their stories. In the prologue to her work she writes: "One day, I thought, I will get, must get, their stories. My library is full of slave narratives, but where are the maid narratives? Don't these women of a later generation, these descendants of slaves who lived under a later version of white supremacy, have stories and recollections

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<sup>163</sup> Garcia, Claire Oberon, et al. *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to the Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Life*. 2014th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 76.

of value as well?”<sup>164</sup> Owing to Stockett’s writing, history has been enriched by maid narratives. Although her novel is fiction, her approach draws attention to the role of domestic help in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America.

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<sup>164</sup> Van Wormer, Katherine. *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South*. Louisiana State University Press, 2012, p. xiv.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to draw a comparison between Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett based on the issue of race portrayed in both works, and assess, how they view the role of African Americans in society. The setting of the works differ by approximately 120 years, however, we encounter racial discrimination towards the Afro-American race in both of them. Racial discrimination is a phenomenon affecting millions of people all around the world today but it is the United States that draws the most attention to itself due to its views affecting the racially diverse society. Since the idea that American history put its founding to today's racism in the U.S. is increasingly gaining momentum, this thesis dealt with novels depicting two of the most crucial periods in the history of the United States – namely the eras of slavery and racial segregation. After the introduction of slavery in the nation owing to the hundreds of years of the transatlantic slave trade, slavery has gone down as one of the most horrendous periods in American history which laid the foundations for the later racial segregation policy. From the invention of the cotton gin to the expansion of territory, many aspects affected the rise of slavery. As gradually more European started moving across the Atlantic Ocean, labor was needed to maintain the settlement and economic stability. Since the discovery of America in 1492 launched the transatlantic slave trade, the westward expansion would be unsuccessful without the help of slaves. When the situation circulated in of the worst wars the American continent has ever witnessed the damage had been done, and people had a hard time accepting the consequences.

The first part focused on the analysis of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Even though the novel was published in the early days of Jim Crow,

the novel takes place in the antebellum period depicting a runaway slave forming a bond with a white individual. Although the future looked promising after the official abolishment of slavery in 1865, the society adopted such measures that the white group was guaranteed to maintain control. When Twain published the novel in 1885 in the United States, the country has been disunited which did not help his message that the coexistence of both races is possible when one is willing to accept change. The second part of this thesis dealt with the portrayal of race in *The Help* published by Kathryn Stockett in 2009. Its setting provides us with a clear look into the years 1962-1964 in Jackson when the racial segregation laws ensured minimal contact between the races. Jim Crow laws were a series of laws that applied mainly to the South of the United States and affected the lives of Afro-Americans for almost 90 years. The segregation policy covered almost every part of social life including public transport, education, health care, and working conditions, and *The Help* outlines the problems African Americans had to face while living in the segregated Mississippi. Stockett pays attention to the civil rights movement and the Ku Klux Klan terror as she describes the fear that not only African Americans but also civil rights activists had to cope with.

The analyses revealed that even though the novels were published more than a century apart, both authors used a very similar techniques to show racial inequality as many similarities as far as the issue of race is concerned came to light. Despite the difference in the setting of the works, which is about 120 years, we can observe the topic of racial discrimination in both of them. The thesis showed that no matter what period of American history we focus on, racial discrimination represented an everyday occurrence. Although the Civil War legally abolished slavery, the population has not stopped treating African Americans badly. The era of racial segregation, which followed up the period of slavery created even deepened chasm between both races. In the days of slavery, Southern



people were used to being surrounded by African Americans, however, in the Jim Crow era, they tried to exclude African Americans from social life as much as possible. Although slavery had been ended by law, African Americans had not have much choice as far as the work opportunities are considered. As a result, Afro Americans had to work for white families for minimum wages and thus faced racial discrimination every day.

Similarly, the works are built on the basis of historical events, which gives them authenticity. Twain focuses on the fugitive slave policy which prohibited a man to help a runaway slave. However, he opposes these norms as his character of Huck protects Jim from being caught. The fugitive slave policy represented an issue between the years 1793 and the end of the Civil War. The thought of being sold and be never able to see his family again prompted Jim to run away which was a common thing in the last decades before the war. In comparison to Twain, Stockett focuses her novel on the Jim Crow era, an era in which most of the African American's life has been segregated. Although being born in 1969, the extraordinary nature of her debut novel lies not only in its description of segregated South but also in events that actually took place between 1962 and 1964 in Jackson. She integrates real-life events such as the murder of NAACP officer Medgar Evers by the Ku Klux Klan (1963), the enrolment of an Afro-American student James Meredith at Ole Miss (1962), or the assassination of President Kennedy (1963) into her writing which add to the authenticity of her work.

Both novels portray how a friendship could form between two people of a different races when they distance themselves from society. In *Huckleberry Finn*, this aspect is depicted in Huck and Jim's relationship. Twain succeeded in outlining the situation in the antebellum South, when slaves were not treated as human beings, contrarily as property. At the beginning of the novel Huck refuses the idea of the

immorality of slavery, however, later on, he manages to empathize with Jim. Owing to the isolation of both characters on a raft, they get a chance to get to know each other and Huck comes to a conclusion that Whites and slaves are more alike than he initially thought. Stockett's description of Miss Celia and Minny's friendship represents a parallel to that. Even though we cannot witness any form of dislike towards Minny when she and Miss Celia meet for the first time, their employee-maid friendship represents a unique case. Since Miss Celia never leaves the house, she creates a bond with her maid far from social norms and without the judgmental opinions of the other residents of Jackson. While the rest of the town builds up the segregated bathrooms for the African Americans, Miss Celia finds comfort, support and friendship in her maid. She stresses neither the different skin color of her maid nor her social status, but just as Huck saw in a runaway slave, Miss Celia sees an equal in her maid.

In both novels, we encounter a parent-like relationship between an Afro-American grown-up and a white child which questions the ability of a white individual to provide for and raise their child. Twain's intention to portray a caring, kind and nurturing slave who assumes the father-role whereas the biological father is steadily drinking himself to death, rebels against prejudices towards the Afro-American race. While Twain intended to create an extraordinary situation, Stockett describes a fairly common occurrence. As maids spent most of the time with the children of their employers, took care of them, and raised them, the bond between a black maid and a white child usually strengthened until it got to the point where the child saw a mother in her. The same occurrence can be seen in *The Help*, specifically, in the relationship between Aibileen and Miss Leefolt's daughter May Mobley. What Stockett does here, is show a White woman's incapability to take care of her child, so her Afro-American maid fills that gap. Moreover, her description of a nanny-child intimate relationship is also associated, and sometimes even

criticized, with the 'black mammy' stereotype which was created in the antebellum period.

The works are also connected by the fact that they have provoked a lot of criticism. Arguably, you would not find a novel that today, even after almost 140 years since its publication, has been still provoking such criticism in society as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Based on reader feedback that the work has racist implications due to the abundance of the N-word, a lot of schools are removing the novel from their reading lists. Besides, the racially offensive language was the reason for the birth of an edited version of *Huckleberry Finn* which eliminates the N-word. However, others argue that the abundant use of the word simply reflects the time setting since it served as a synonym for 'slave' and that readers should look at the work simultaneously with the historical facts connected to the antebellum era. After *The Help*'s publication, the author also received criticism since the readers accused Stockett of not having the right to create a story depicting the life of Afro-American maids while being white. Among other things, the book generated negative feedback due to its lack of attention to the sexual harassment the domestic help had to deal with as well as white brutality. She is also sometimes blamed for creating rather stereotyped characters of blacks, and despite all her effort still siding with her race.

On the other hand, some aspects distinguish these works. Firstly, the authors' reasons to write a racial-oriented story differ. As being born in a slave state, Twain came into contact with slaves on a daily basis. Regardless of being raised in a slave-holding family, he managed to break free from social beliefs and wrote, arguably, one of the greatest American novels. There are possible triggers for his aim to write *Huckleberry Finn*. One of them could be the fact that his father took part in a trial sending abolitionists

to prison as a punishment for helping slaves to escape. Alternatively, he witnessed a faulty treatment of African Americans which may have encouraged him to elaborate on the issue of race. In comparison to that, the most likely reason that prompted Stockett to write *The Help* was her homesickness and bringing back memories of her maid Demetrie, which was an inspiration to her characters in the novel. Secondly, as far as the narration is considered, the authors approach different narrative techniques. *Huckleberry Finn* explores the issue of slavery through a child's eyes, contrary to that, Stockett switches her narration between two black women and one white woman. However, both works managed to reflect the period and portray the issue of race regardless of their narrative approach.

Since this thesis showed a very similar way of emphasizing the issue of race in famous American works written by White authors, the research could be always extended by other white-authored works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

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