

EXPLORING INNEQUALITY AND CLASS STRUGGLES IN THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Cahyarani Triayu Hanifah¹, Deliana Fazra Oktavani², Nasywa Kamila³, Nurholis⁴

^{1,4}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

¹cahyaranitriayuh@gmail.com, ²delianafazra@gmail.com,

³nasywakamila1011@gmail.com, ⁴nurholis@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* serves as a profound critique of the class and racial inequalities entrenched in 19th-century American society. Through the characters of Huck Finn, a poor white boy, and Jim, an escaped slave, Twain illuminates the struggles faced by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Jim's journey for freedom symbolizes the broader fight against systemic injustice that characterized his time. As a black man in a society that dehumanizes him, Jim embodies the plight of individuals denied their basic rights and dignity. His aspirations for family, financial stability, and freedom from discrimination reflect a natural right to liberty that society systematically denies him. Huck's moral development is central to the narrative, as he grapples with societal norms that dictate racial superiority and class distinctions. Initially conditioned by the prejudices of his environment, Huck experiences a transformation as he befriends Jim. This relationship challenges his ingrained beliefs and compels him to confront the hypocrisy of a society that claims to be civilized while perpetuating slavery and inequality [5][7]. Huck's internal conflict highlights the tension between societal expectations and personal conscience, ultimately leading him to reject social hierarchies in favor of empathy and human connection. Twain's portrayal of these characters not only critiques institutional racism but also underscores the necessity of personal integrity in the quest for equality. The novel advocates for a moral awakening that transcends class and race, suggesting that true freedom and dignity can only be achieved through compassion and the rejection of oppressive societal constructs [6][8]. In this way, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remains a powerful commentary on the enduring issues of inequality and class struggle.

Keywords: Class Struggle, Social Inequality, Slavery, Social Hierarchy, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain.

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884, emerges as a seminal work during a pivotal period in American history, characterized by intense social upheaval and moral questioning surrounding issues of slavery and class stratification. The novel intricately explores the complexities of societal structures, revealing the stark divisions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, represented by affluent white families such as the Grangerfords, are depicted as those who possess wealth and control over the means of production. In contrast, the proletariat is illustrated through marginalized figures, primarily African Americans like Jim, who endure systemic oppression and are denied fundamental human rights. This division is not solely economic; it is deeply intertwined with racial identity, as Twain adeptly demonstrates how societal constructs enforce a hierarchy based on skin color.

At its core, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* narrates the journey of Huck Finn, a young boy navigating the tumultuous waters of adolescence while grappling with the abusive presence of his father, Pap. Huck's transformative odyssey down the Mississippi River alongside Jim, a runaway slave seeking freedom, serves as a powerful vehicle for exploring themes of friendship, loyalty, and moral growth. Through this journey, Twain critiques the moral fabric of a society that condones slavery and racial discrimination, revealing how these societal norms shape individual beliefs and behaviors.

Twain's narrative sharply critiques the moral disputes that pervaded 19th-century America, showcasing how social status influences interpersonal relationships across different strata of society. Huck's initial acceptance of societal norms regarding race is challenged as he develops a deep bond with Jim. This relationship catalyzes Huck's moral awakening, prompting him to question the prejudices he has inherited from his upbringing. The novel poignantly illustrates that those in positions of power often exploit their status to maintain control over marginalized groups, reinforcing the notion that white individuals from higher social classes are deemed superior to their black counterparts.

Moreover, Twain employs irony and satire to expose the hypocrisy inherent in these social constructs. Characters such as the Duke and the Dauphin—two conmen masquerading as nobility—highlight how easily societal status can be manipulated. Their actions serve to underscore Twain's critique of a system that allows for such charlatanry while simultaneously dehumanizing those at the bottom of the social ladder. The Grangerfords' feuding ways exemplify this hypocrisy; despite their elite status, they engage in violent conflicts that reveal their moral failings.

In addition to addressing class struggles, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* delves into broader themes of freedom and individuality within a context marked by oppression. Jim's quest for liberty represents not only his personal struggle but also serves as a metaphor for the collective fight against systemic injustice faced by African Americans. His longing for family and dignity reflects universal desires for autonomy and respect—values denied to him by a society that views him as property rather than a person.

Ultimately, Twain's work transcends its immediate narrative to engage with enduring social issues that resonate even today. The exploration of class struggle within *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* invites readers to reflect on contemporary societal constructs and consider how they perpetuate inequality. Through Huck and Jim's journey, Twain suggests that empathy and moral integrity are essential in combating oppression and fostering genuine human connections.

In conclusion, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* stands as more than just an adventure story; it is a critical examination of morality, humanity, and class struggles within American society. By portraying complex characters against a backdrop of systemic injustice, Twain compels readers to confront their own beliefs about race and class while advocating for a more equitable society. As such, this novel remains a vital piece of literature that continues to inspire critical thought about social justice and human rights in its various forms.

REASEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative analysis method with a literary criticism approach based on Marxist theory. The analysis focuses on the text of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, which is considered a representation of social structures and class struggles in 19th-century America.

Primary data is derived from the novel, analyzed through elements such as characters, plot, dialogue, and narrative descriptions to identify themes of social inequality, class struggles, and critiques of social norms. Secondary data is gathered from academic references, including books, articles, and journals relevant to Marxist theory and issues related to race and class in literature.

The research process begins with data selection by identifying significant excerpts from the novel that depict class disparities, class struggles, and racial discrimination. These excerpts are then thoroughly analyzed using the framework of Marxist theory to understand how social class influences relationships between characters and the themes presented in the story. Subsequently, the findings from the text analysis are connected to the socio-historical context of 19th-century America and Marxist theory to produce a comprehensive synthesis. The final stage involves critical interpretation, where the analysis results are developed to highlight the importance of empathy and humanity in challenging unjust social structures.

This method enables the study to delve deeply into how Mark Twain, through his literary work, not only portrays social injustices but also conveys a moral message about the need to transcend hierarchical social boundaries to achieve equality and humanity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Class Structure in American Society in the 19th Century

The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are clearly separated in the class structure of 19th-century American society, as illustrated in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Those who controlled the sources of production and were wealthy were known as the bourgeoisie. They can use capital to boost profitability and hire a large number of employees. White people with wealth and a prominent place in society are portrayed as belonging to this group. The Grangerford Family, an elite caste with a high level of education but no common sense, is used in this book to represent the bourgeoisie. It shows on page 107:

"Well... a feud is this way: A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then the other man's brother kills him; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the cousins chip in---... and by and by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud." (Twain, 1885:107)

This quotation demonstrates how ridiculous the struggle between aristocratic families mired in tradition is and how morality and knowledge are not correlated with social rank.

While the proletariat consists of poor people who are forced to work for the bourgeoisie. They often have no control over resources and are in difficult economic conditions. The proletariat are portrayed as this group because they are often exploited and humiliated in an unfair system of employment and slavery. Jim is portrayed as part of the proletarian society in the book. Looking at American history from the 17th century to the 19th century, slavery occurred throughout the European colonies in the Americas. Afro-Americans and African-Americans were mostly owned by the bourgeoisie. Enslaved African-Americans were usually employed as indentured laborers or servants in crop production such as tobacco and cotton. Most enslaved people lived on plantations or farms because of their jobs. This can be seen in the following quote:

"There lay a man on the ground. He was wrapped in a blanket with his head toward the fire. I sat behind some bushes and watched him. The day was getting brighter, and the man slowly sat up. He stretched his arms, and his blanket fell to the ground. The man was Miss Watson's black slave, Jim!". (Twain, 1885: 26)

The quote shows that the proletariat are slaves and are owned by the masters of their owners. There is no politeness between adults and children, even though he is younger than Jim, he always calls the bourgeoisie "master" and they call him "black slave". Jim accepted this situation because it was part of the rules of society.

"Miss Watson she kept pecking at me, and it got tiresome and lonesome. By and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers, and then everybody was off to bed. I went up to my room with a piece of candle, and put it on the table". (Twain, 1885: 7)

"We scrouched down and laid still. Miss Watson's big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him. He got up and stretched his neck out about a minute, listening". (Twain, 1885: 10)

"Jim was monstrous proud about it, and he got so he wouldn't hardly notice the other niggers. 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; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, 'Hm! What you know 'bout witches?'" (Twain, 1885: 12)

The quotations from the story above demonstrate racism against Black people; in this instance, it is evident that Mrs. Watson enslaves Black people and that social stratification and inequality are caused by the issues facing Blacks and Whites.

However, in contrast to Huck, although he is from the lower class, he still enjoys the privilege of having a white identity in 19th century American society with this privilege, Huck has the freedom to do what he wants without considering the consequences. It is clear that this is inversely proportional to Jim's rights, but beyond that Huck is also often caught in a moral conflict between the social norms he learned and his empathy for Jim, the norms he learned taught how the bourgeoisie had a higher status than the proletariat, Huck's

journey with Jim on the Mississippi River is one of the alternative ways to change Huck's perspective on Jim that he realizes that Jim is a human being like him and not a tool that can be used at any time as normalized by people in that era.

This statement can be evidence that Huck has a different point of view towards Jim

"All right, then, I'll go to hell!"

Huck said that when he wrote a letter to Mis Watson, Jim's owner to tell Jim's whereabouts but he undid his intention because he did not want to betray Jim by tearing the letter back. this is a form of his courage to oppose the existing social class.

2. A Symbol of The Struggle of The Lower Class

In the book "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn", Jim, a black slave fighting for his rights, is a symbol of the struggle of the lower class. The following are some evidences of Jim's struggle as a symbol of the lower class:

a. Jim as a symbol of resistance and the desire for freedom:

On page 45 tells how Jim escaped after learning that his owner planned to sell him to a New Orleans slave trader. Jim states:

"Ole missus ... could git eight hund'd dollars for me, en it 'uz sich a big stack o' money she couldn' resis'..." (Twain, 1885:45)

This demonstrates that Jim was only valued as a commodity and that he had to fight for his freedom by fleeing. Jim's escape not only challenges his physical servitude but also his status as a "commodity." The working class must struggle against economic oppression and being viewed as a means of making money for the ruling class, which is reminiscent of the class struggle in Marx's theory.

b. The value symbol of freedom is measured materially

On page 49, Jim states:

"I owns mysef, en I's wuth eight hund'd dollars." (Twain, 1885 : 49)

Jim describes his self-ownership as wealth, a satire on how economics determined human value in a society of slavery. His statement is also ironic because it reflects how the slavery system made people internalize their self-worth in material form. Jim realizes that he is just a saleable item in his society. Jim shows the realization that freedom is genuine wealth by saying that he is now "valuable" for having his own freedom. This is an illustration of the struggle carried out by the working class to take back control of their own lives and prevent them from being exploited by those with power.

In these moments, we can see that Jim's struggle for freedom reflects the desires of lower-class people, who are often oppressed by unjust social and economic systems. Twain uses the character of Jim as a critique of slavery and social inequality, showing that people who are considered "lower" must fight against dehumanization and simultaneously criticizing the system of slavery that was dominant in the American South at the time.

c. Grangerford and Shepherdson as a Representation of the Wealthy Class

*"It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a n****r; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither."*

This quote shows Huck's internal conflict about his value system versus the empathy he feels for Jim, reflecting a critique of social inequality. The Grangerford and Shepherdson families in the novel depict families who have wealth, land, and high social status. The conflict between them shows the tension between the elite groups, yet their status remains protected. This analysis draws on studies of social hierarchy in 19th century America. [Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*].

d. Jim as a Symbol of the Proletariat

"Slavery in America was not just a system of forced labor; it was a social order that embedded racial inequality into the very fabric of the nation's culture."

This analysis is relevant to Jim's position in the novel, where slavery is a symbol of class exploitation that perpetuates injustice. Jim represents the systemic oppression in the structure of slavery that deprives individuals of the freedom to work and live for themselves. This culture of slavery is considered an extreme form of class exploitation. [Kolchin, Peter. *American Slavery: 1619-1877*].

e. Huck Finn and his Role in the Class Conflict

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

This quote is relevant to understand how Twain, although not explicitly Marxist, depicts the power dynamics between the ruling class and the oppressed class in his narrative. Huck, although a white boy, also experiences marginalization due to his low social status. He is often in a position of subordination, both by his father and society. Huck and Jim's relationship reflects class solidarity. [Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto - basic concepts of bourgeoisie and proletariat*].

3. Equality Against Social Hierarchy

It is mentioned in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* on how the relationship between the characters, especially Huck and Jim, develops beyond the social norms and class or race roles that have been established by society. In the society where Huck and Jim live, race, education, and wealth determine one's social status. Jim and other types of children are at the lowest level of this hierarchy as they are considered property and have no human right to speak. Huck remains privileged because of his white skin even though he is poor and from the lower class. As a result, he is considered to have a higher social status than Jim.

Huck, who is still affected by racist societal norms, sees Jim with a sense of superiority and treats Jim as an object of jokes, such as hanging Jim's hat on a tree branch. In addition, Jim feels scared when he meets Huck because he is used to being treated badly by others. Found on page 44:

"Doan' hurt me—don't! I hain't ever done no harm to a ghos'. I alwuz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em..."

This shows Jim's fear because he is a person who is used to being mistreated in society. However, Jim eventually begins to sense that Huck recognizes him and stops seeing him as "other", as shown in the following quote on page 44:

"It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back."

When Huck learns that Jim is more than just a slave—he is a friend—he starts to struggle against the social order inside of himself. This is also seen as he struggles with whether to defend Jim by upholding his morals or turn him over to Watson. He informs Miss Watson of his slave's escape in a letter, which he later tears up and say on page 214:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell!"

This act is a significant symbolic act. Huck realizes that the prevailing social norms are unfair, and he chooses to follow his conscience, even if it means breaking laws and norms. By doing this, Huck puts humanity and friendship above race and the law.

Twain uses this society as a backdrop to illustrate how difficult it is to go against the norms that have been instilled in a person. However, Huck and Jim build a relationship that challenges these social constructs during their journey together. Their journey shows how shared experiences and feelings can achieve equality.

4. Karl Marx's Class Theory

In the novel "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" it is very clear that black people are only considered as slaves who only have obligations but not rights. And Jim (as a black person) is very much against slavery and inequality, so Jim struggles to get his freedom, rights and peace in his life. Through Jim's story, we can observe it through Karl Marx's class theory. Karl Marx's theory or what is commonly called Marxism comes as Karl Marx's criticism of liberals who see the economic system as benefiting all parties involved more than they are invested (Hendriwani, Subur. 2020).

The observation that can be seen from this novel is that the class differences that apply in this novel are divided based on wealth, race, ability and skin color. So that because of the injustice of this class division, it eventually leads to class struggle. Marxism sees a struggle among social classes to gain a higher position (Berry, 2002: 157). From this idea, we can see that Marxism talks about the struggle that comes from the classes to get a better life as if they have a lot of money and have high power (shown by the bourgeoisie).

According to his theory, Marx also believed that everything that happens in history is caused by the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

"Capitalism is considered as the first coined to describe a system in which small groups of people own large amounts of money, land and resources; it describes the economic system in which the means of production are privately owned. In addition to that, the social relations of production involve different classes. The basic determinant of one's class is one's relationship to the means of production. For example, in late capitalist society the two basic

classes remaining are the owners of the means of production, capitalists, and those who own only their labor, i.e., the workers or proletariat.” (Abrams, 1999: 233).

In this case, Mark Twain's novel belongs to the category of superstructure roots. Since capitalism is referred to as an economic system, it indicates a change in the social system. Therefore, the conflict faced by the main characters of the novel is caused by the distinction made between the bourgeois class and the working class. Otherwise, the ownership of property as a means of production determines how one is categorized in a particular society. Those who do not own the means of production are considered lower class, such as Miss Window Douglas and Miss Watson, while those who own the means of production are considered upper class. As a result, Jim experiences many struggles until he finds his freedom. Even from the beginning to the end of the novel, his struggles drive the class consciousness of society.

CONSLUSION

Mark twain wrote “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” not just as an ordinary story but as a form of social criticism of slavery and racism that was still happening in America at that time. The novel raises issues of social inequality and tension between the classes of society, as well as the struggle for freedom by individuals living on the margins of the social system. In addition, Twain also shows how society upholds unjust laws and norms based on rich white people in high positions and black people in low positions.

Huck Finn, a poor boy, and **Jim**, a runaway slave, symbolize those who try to transcend the oppressive social hierarchy. Through Huck and Jim's journey, Twain explores themes of freedom, equality, and illustrates their search for humanity in a society full of hypocrisy. Twain uses the setting of the Mississippi River as a space outside the confines of society where Huck and Jim can build a more equal relationship. However, although they find temporary freedom, the reality of a society full of social injustice continues to haunt their journey, emphasizing the difficulty of achieving true equality.

This article asserts that Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a sharp critique of the social and racial hierarchies that dominated 19th-century America. Twain not only explores the injustices faced by the working class and enslaved black people, but also shows how deep human connections, such as the friendship between Huck and Jim, are able to transcend such social boundaries.

Through their journey, Twain underscores the importance of empathy as the foundation for resisting oppressive norms. Huck, despite being from the lower class, still benefits from his white privilege, yet he chooses to defy the unjust social structure in defense of Jim. This choice reflects the courage to put humanity above discriminatory laws and traditions. The novel teaches that the fight against inequality requires moral courage, social awareness, and a desire to see others as equals. Twain's message of empathy, friendship, and social justice remains relevant today, inspiring readers to continue fighting for a more equal and humane world.

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