

Twain's use of the reprehensible word was an accurate reflection of that era.

So it would be more useful to have any new edition offer students context and challenge them to ask hard questions: Why did Twain choose that word? What kind of country must this have been that it was so ubiquitous? How hardy is the weed of self-loathing that many black people rationalize and justify its use, even now?

I mean, has the black girl Gribben mentions never heard of Chris Rock or Snoop Dogg?

Finally, and in the third place, it is troubling to think the state of reading comprehension in this country has become this wretched, that we have tweeted, PlayStationed and Fox Newsed so much of our intellectual capacity away that not only can our children not divine the nuances of a masterpiece, but that we will now protect them from having to even try.

Huck Finn is a funny, subversive story about a runaway white boy who comes to locate the humanity in a runaway black man and, in the process, vindicates his own. It has always, until now, been regarded as a timeless tale.

But that was before America became an intellectual backwater that would deem it necessary to censor its most celebrated author.

The one consolation is that somewhere, Mark Twain is laughing his head off.

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