

The problem with banning books

By DeVan Burton

As a child growing up with limited funds, I didn't have the money to set aside for entertainment. My grandparents often stressed the importance of reading as an alternative to video games and television shows. Once I learned the importance of active novel reading, I found a freedom that could never be taken away from me. I often immersed myself in a world that was formed by words on paper.

I had this newfound freedom until my grandmother told me about a book that I couldn't read. My grandmother was the master of censorship. There was always some song that was too racy for my young ears, or a movie that was too violent for my eyes to view. According to my grandmother, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was a racist novel. She saw that I didn't understand what she meant, and she explained her viewpoint. She summarized the story for me, and I learned that the word *nigger* was used freely in reference to black characters. She told me that I should be ashamed of myself if I read it. I found myself feeling the opposite.

I read the novel and felt drawn to the language, the tone, and to one character in particular. Jim was that character and proved to be not only one of the most important characters of the novel but in literary history. Mark Twain's use of Jim redefined the way African Americans were used in literature. Novels before *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* displayed African Americans as one dimensional creature. With this novel, Mark Twain examined African Americans and gave them something more than a role that was destined for an inanimate object. In Mark Twain's world, Jim was just as important a character as Huckleberry Finn was because he had dialogue just like Huck Finn did. He also had his own story separate from the protagonist.

The problem with banning *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that the youth of America cannot see how equality looked back in the time of Mark Twain. The problem with banning novels is that worlds that are at our fingertips are forever closed.