



The Historian's Huck Finn: Reading Mark Twain's Masterpiece as Social and Economic History (The Historian's Annotated Classics)

By Ranjit S. Dighe



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Putting Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in historical context, connecting it to pivotal issues like slavery, class, money, and American economic expansion, this book engages readers by presenting American history through the lens of a great novel.

- Presents Twain's book as a historical novel that brings up key historical issues both in the antebellum period in which the novel is set and in the post-Reconstruction period in which it was written
- Identifies how *Huckleberry Finn* underscores perhaps the cruelest aspect of slavery: the involuntary separation of husbands, wives, and children from each other
- Ideal reading for college and high school students taking American history classes as well as general readers with an interest in American history, Mark Twain, or both
- Provides extensive annotations that are useful, accessible, and interesting to readers without specialized knowledge of 19th-century history

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Editorial Review

Review

"Though the bibliographic record does not indicate it as such, this is actually an edition of Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*, not just a book about that novel. *Huck Finn* is set several decades before its 1884 publication, which has often confused readers. Dighe's 170 annotations to this edition will help readers understand the novel's historical context. The notes address slave ownership and abolition, slang and dialect, steamboat terminology, the value of money, types of river commerce, food, clothing, and almost every other feature of 19th-century life depicted in the novel. The volume also features dozens of illustrations: selections of Edward Kemble's drawings made for the first edition along with contemporary photographs and other images that help convey a sense of the novel's setting. A preface geared toward history teachers interested in adding *Huck Finn* to their lesson plans offers suggestions about how to pair it with textbooks or integrate it with other historical readings. Two chapters preceding the text of the novel contextualize the work in terms of Twain's life and 19th-century themes of prosperity, expansion, inequality, and commercialism. This is a fine edition of the novel for new readers and is especially valuable for those wishing to gain a deeper understanding of its times. Summing Up: Recommended. Lower-division undergraduates through faculty; general readers." - **Choice**

"The edition Dighe has prepared promised to introduce readers to the novel through an unconventional, interdisciplinary lens, perhaps generating fresh perspectives on these debates and others. At CMTS, we vigorously applaud the implicit position of *The Historian's Huck Finn*, that Twain's works make valuable contributions to courses outside the Department of English." - **Center for Mark Twain Studies**

"This literature dissection will be of interest to undergraduate students and scholars researching history and literature of the United States. Those studying U.S. economics will also benefit from this examination. Recommended." - **ARBA**

Review

"With lively writing and solid research, this book lures students and general readers into the 19th-century world that produced both Mark Twain and Huck Finn, placing this timeless classic into its historical context. You will never read *Huck Finn* in the same way again." (Judith Wellman, Director of Historical New York Research Associates and author of *Brooklyn's Promised Land: The Free Black Community of Weeksville, New York*)

"Ranjit Dighe has done a brilliant job of annotating *Huckleberry Finn*. He explains all of the obscure terms and references, but also puts Huck and Jim's journey into a larger context. Students, history buffs, and even professional historians will learn a great deal about the political and economic history of the United States in the 19th century from Dighe's notes to the text and longer essays on Samuel Clemens and 19th-century America. It is all here: slavery and emancipation, tobacco and cotton, smallpox, steamboats, financial speculation, politics, and much, much more. Highly recommended." (*Hugh Rockoff, Distinguished Professor of Economics at Rutgers University and author of America's Economic Way of War: War and the US Economy from the Spanish-American War to the Persian Gulf War*)

"In this new edition of Twain's classic work, Dighe not only examines the cultural and economic history that shaped the novel, he also proves that *Huckleberry Finn* is still relevant today. This book should be of interest to Twain fans, students of American history and literature, and anyone interested in understanding

contemporary issues in American society." (David B. Parker, Professor of History at Kennesaw State University and coauthor of *Carpet Capital: The Rise of a New South Industry*)

"*The Historian's Huck Finn* sends students on a journey down the Mississippi River that is both interpretive and entertaining; there's no better way to travel through the nation's social and economic history. Expertly introduced and annotated, this book will provide a whole new perspective on one of America's most compelling literary characters." (Sean Patrick Adams, University of Florida)

About the Author

Ranjit S. Dighe, PhD, is professor of economics at the State University of New York at Oswego.

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