*Studies in American Literature*: **Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**: Honors Assignment- Fall 2017

For this assignment, I would like you to read an essay written by David L. Smith, an African-American Professor of English and Africana Studies at Williams College in Williamstown, MA. The essay is titled “Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse”. This essay was orginally published in 1992 as one of a collection of essays published in *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on “Huckleberry Finn”.*

While you are reading Smith’s critique of Twain’s novel, please respond to my questions below. Please type your responses and submit them through *Turnitin* by midnight on Wednesday, November 29. This assignment is worth a TEST grade.

1. Smith began this piece with a passage written by Thomas Jefferson. How does Jefferson describe black people (as compared to white people) in this passage from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (published in 1785)?
2. According to Smith, how does what Jefferson wrote support the fact that he “was a man of his time and ahead of his time” (363)?
3. What does Smith have to say to those critics who attack *Huckleberry Finn* for being a racist work?
4. What does Smith believe that this novel is actually a critique of?
5. Smith says that Twain develops an attack on race in this book. How does Smith define the term “race”?
6. According to Smith, how does Twain’s portrayal of Jim actually contradict the widely accepted view of “the Negro,” in both Jefferson’s time and Twain’s time?
7. How does Smith explain and even defend Twain’s use of the “n” word throughout the novel?
8. According to Smith, why does Huck use that word in his conversation with Aunt Sally in Chapter 32?
9. How is Pap’s racist tirade against the free black man from Ohio an example of the conventional thinking of that time period?
10. How would Smith respond to someone who believes that Twain could have avoided using the “n” word in this novel?
11. What reason(s) does Smith provide for Twain’s use of racial stereotypes?
12. What two incidents in the novel (both involving Jim) does Smith use as proof that Twain was trying to undermine racial stereotypes rather than support them?
13. In both of those situations, what is revealed about Jim’s personality that would again contradict the preeminent views of African-Americans during that time period?
14. On page 371 Smith mentions that the final section of the novel that includes the reappearance of Tom Sawyer is often considered by critics to be the weakest part of the novel. What are the three reasons he mentions for critics to object to this part of the novel?
15. How may this novel also be viewed as Twain’s attack on the church?
16. According to Smith, how do Jim’s actions after Tom has been wounded demonstrate his “moral superiority” and how does this impact the way the reader sees Jim?
17. Smith writes, “Huck declares that Jim is white inside (ch.40). He apparently intends that as a compliment, but Tom is fortunate that Jim does not behave like most of the whites in the novel” (373). What do you think he means by that last statement?
18. Smith points out that although Jim may be legally free, he can never truly enjoy “absolute personal freedom”. Why is that?
19. What does Smith suggest that Twain’s novel has to say about individual freedom? What does this mean for all humans?