

As long as original version still available, tweaking Twain is OK, professor says

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Changing words in "Mark Twain's classic book Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is fine as long as the original version still is easily available for readers, says Gerald L. Early, PhD, the Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters in Arts & Sciences and director of the Center for the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis.

A new edition of the "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," scheduled to be published in February by NewSouth Books, substitutes the word "slave" for the "n-word" and "Indian" for "injun" throughout the book.

The publisher has been accused of censorship and altering a classic of American literature for the sake of political correctness. Early argues that this is just another case of tinkering with texts in order to create a version that best serves its audience.

"We change texts all the time," Early says. "For instance, we make children's versions of the Bible, Homer and Shakespeare.

"We have abridged versions of many books for all sorts of reasons. Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus tales have been revised, rewritten, the dialect changed for modern readers."

Early says that removing the "n-word" from "Huckleberry Finn" is just that kind of abridgement.

"People do not have to accept it, and they can show their displeasure by

simply not buying and reading this abridgment,” he says.

“Many times abridgments are made that are unwise or unwarranted or unjustified. Sometimes not. Let the public decide in this instance, as it does in all others.”

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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