

# A CALL TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR FICTION'S HEROES OF COLOR, OR HOW HAWKEYE, HUCK, AND ATTICUS FOIL THE WORK OF ANTIRACISM

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On God and Godlike men we build our trust.<sup>1</sup>

— Alfred, Lord Tennyson

How simply the fictive hero becomes the real.<sup>2</sup>

— Wallace Stevens

[W]e admire [heroes], we envy them, for great qualities  
which we ourselves lack. Hero worship consists in just  
that. Our heroes are the men who do things which we  
recognize, with regret, and sometimes with a secret

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† Director, Law Clinic, Cornell Law School. I want to thank Professor Sharon Rush for her thought-provoking article and for the continuing dialogue we engage in about justice and equality. I am also grateful to the editors and staff of the *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* for providing a forum for the discussion of the issues presented at this symposium and to the many participants who shared their ideas. Special thanks to my sister, Barbara Cook, whose insights were particularly helpful as I worked through various interpretations of the stories and the law.

<sup>1</sup> ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON, *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, in *POEMS AND PLAYS* 205 (Oxford 1973) (1852).

<sup>2</sup> WALLACE STEVENS, *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, in *COLLECTED POETRY AND PROSE* 352 (Frank Kermode & Joan Richardson eds., 1997) (1954).

shame, that we cannot do. We find not much in ourselves to admire, we are always privately wanting to be like somebody else. If everybody was satisfied with himself, there would be no heroes.<sup>3</sup>

— Mark Twain

## INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Nancy. I'm a white person, and I'm a racist.

I am also, as Professor Sharon Rush terms it, a "person of goodwill," so I prefer to think of myself as a recovering racist. But this is the bottom line: Like most, if not all, Anglo-Americans, I not only grew up in a racist society, I also absorbed the racism. And it is taking a lifetime of effort to rid myself of the disease.

I make this admission as a necessary prelude to a discussion of Mark Twain's much-loved novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. There may be many reasons why this work of fiction has been firmly installed in the literary canon, but one important reason is that so many whites identify with the young Huck Finn. Most self-identified progressive whites started out more or less like Huck, steeped in racist beliefs, and, like Huck, we've all had our little epiphanies. These moments of recognizing the pervasive evil of racism have lured us whites into believing we have earned a merit badge, the right to say we are antiracist. What we really mean, however, is that we are recovering racists. Accordingly, as in other programs for recovery, an admission of racism is necessary if white people of goodwill want to engage in the work of dismantling racism.

For me, an important question raised by Rush's critique is whether a white person's recognition of racism and the decision to take a stand against it make that person a hero. I believe they do not, but books like *Huckleberry Finn* allow whites to indulge in the fantasy that it does. The message we are sending to young people, by including *Huckleberry Finn* and similar works of fiction on their reading lists, is not only that white heroes are superior but also that their acts of doing good for people of color are extraordinary and even heroic. The inference to be drawn is that whites are entitled to center stage in heroic dramas, and for the accomplishment of recognizing their own, and white-dominated society's, racist disease.

In this article, I respond to Professor Rush in two ways. In Part I, I identify and comment on four essential points that she makes:

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<sup>3</sup> MARK TWAIN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY 263-64 (Albert Bigelow Paine ed., 1921).

- 1) Mark Twain's novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is a book by, for, and about whites
- 2) The teaching of this book in our nation's middle and junior high schools is purported to be, but is not, an act advancing multiculturalism
- 3) Huck Finn's decision to "steal Jim out of slavery," and "go to hell" should not be viewed as a moral decision
- 4) *Huckleberry Finn* provides no role models for children of color, and Huck is not a positive role model, even for white children.

In responding to these points, I voice agreement with much of what Professor Rush concludes but disagree in some significant ways, most particularly on whether Huck's choices are moral in nature. Moreover, although there is significant overlap in our ultimate conclusions about the use of *Huckleberry Finn*, I arrive at these conclusions by a different route. Therefore, in Part II of this article, I explore the novel from an alternative perspective. Unlike Professor Rush, who maintains that use of the book in schools violates equal protection,<sup>4</sup> I use affirmative action as the framework for discussion. In other words, I argue that a proactive approach to infusing literary education with nonwhite heroes is necessary to overcome the effects of past practices.

To reach this conclusion, I begin by demonstrating that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a book in the classic Indo-European heroic tradition. I then trace the development of the American literary hero tradition to show that Huck, like the original white American hero, Natty Bumppo (or Hawkeye), and like the quintessential twentieth-century lawyer-hero, Atticus Finch, fits within a particular pattern of heroism. These literary heroes have a significant impact on adolescent development, the full force of which can be documented.

For all the reasons Professor Rush has identified, this matters. Unwittingly, teachers are perpetuating the "race precept"<sup>5</sup> — and at the expense of intellectually immature and emotionally vulnerable children.<sup>6</sup> Thus, I conclude that it is time for the schools to give preference to new heroes, nonwhite heroes, true multicultural heroes. This poses a significant challenge for whites, who have always assumed that the hero's role is theirs. Accordingly, I end with a few ideas on how whites might begin to reassess their roles in the struggle against racism and to look for heroism in unexpected places.

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<sup>4</sup> Professor Rush elaborates on the points made in this article in her forthcoming article, *Emotional Segregation*, 36 U. MICH. J. L. REFORM (forthcoming Spring 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Rush, *The Anticanonical Lesson of Huckleberry Finn*, 11 CORNELL J.L. & PUB. POL'Y 577, 582 (2002).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 600 (explaining that the student who can't identify with the hero may end up feeling "confused, devalued, excluded, angry, resentful and betrayed").

## I. THE RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR RUSH

## A. A BOOK BY, FOR, AND ABOUT WHITES

What I understand to be the main point of Professor Rush's essay, although she does not articulate it this way, is that *Huckleberry Finn* is a book by, for, and about whites.<sup>7</sup> The reactions of whites and nonwhites to the book bear this out.

Shelley Fishkin, whose work Professor Rush critiques,<sup>8</sup> dramatically illustrates this. In her self-referential, Anglocentric reaction to those who criticize the book's inclusion in an American Literature curriculum, Fishkin states, "Every time I hear of another effort to kick Huck Finn out of school somewhere, I recall everything that Mark Twain taught *this* high school junior and I find myself jumping into the fray."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, if less sanctimoniously, George Carrington, a literary critic who examines the question of moral integrity in the novel, observes that "Without committing himself or forcing *us*, Twain allows *us* to identify contentedly with Huck; then he disillusion *us*, and we howl."<sup>10</sup> The "us" in this case is, by implication, whites.

With somewhat more insight, Richard Moreland, now a teacher, recalls that as a junior in an almost all-white, Southern high school, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was his favorite novel.<sup>11</sup> A supporter of the civil rights movement, he allied himself with Huck in the condemnation of racial injustice. In retrospect, however, Moreland sees that the novel's projections "function primarily in the service of goals other than fair and accurate representation of African-American experiences."<sup>12</sup>

Black readers, whether or not they see value in the book, are clear about the racial focus. Ralph Ellison notes that as a child, with his dual cultural background, he could identify with Huck Finn. He found it impossible, however, to identify with Jim, whom he describes as "a white man's inadequate portrait of a slave."<sup>13</sup> Toni Morrison calls Jim "the

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 501 ("Significantly, *Huckleberry Finn* is about race, primarily the white race and its attachment to slavery at one time in history"). Twain's intended audience is whites.

<sup>8</sup> See SHELLEY FISHER FISHKIN, *WAS HUCK BLACK? MARK TWAIN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICES* (1993).

<sup>9</sup> SHELLEY FISHER FISHKIN, *Forward* to *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, at xxv-xxvi (Oxford 1996).

<sup>10</sup> GEORGE C. CARRINGTON, *THE DRAMATIC UNITY OF Huckleberry Finn* 122 (1976) (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> RICHARD C. MORELAND, *LEARNING FROM DIFFERENCE* 15 (1999).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 30.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke* (1958), reprinted in *SHADOW AND ACT* 45, 58 (1964). James Baldwin makes the point more emphatically, although not in direct reference to Huck Finn. He states:

[I]n some subtle way, in a really profound way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres, and to the Empire State Building, a special attitude. These were not really my creations, they did not

visible other,"<sup>14</sup> whose presence serves to meet whites' unmet needs for forgiveness and love. Jim could not be white, Morrison notes, "because it would not have been possible for two children to play so painfully with the life of a white man . . . once he had been revealed to us as a moral adult."<sup>15</sup>

It is thus apparent that *Huckleberry Finn* was written for an audience of whites. While young black students may be able to draw something positive from the novel, they do so in spite of the book's Anglocentric messages and certainly not because of any universal applications.

#### B. A FAILED EFFORT IN MULTICULTURALISM

Professor Rush convincingly demonstrates that teaching Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does not advance a multicultural agenda.<sup>16</sup> I would argue, in fact, that in promoting the idea that the novel makes such an impact, whites confuse their own consciousness-raising with multiculturalism.

Most Americans are, as Rush describes it, people of goodwill.<sup>17</sup> They want to do what is right, but they also want to believe that an individual change of heart — "a moral rebirth or conversion experience" — is enough to make social change.<sup>18</sup> Richard Moreland explores this pattern in an attempt to find a socially conscious, honest way of teaching *Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>19</sup> He notes that "Twain's novel has figured among the most persistent and prominent invocations of this ideology of American goodwill."<sup>20</sup>

Reflecting on his experience as a high school student in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1970, just as the school was undergoing racial desegregation, Moreland says that he and some other white students viewed the dramatic recomposition of the student body as a "kind of adventure," not unlike Huck Finn's.<sup>21</sup> Thus, along with multitudes of others who have read *Huckleberry Finn*, Moreland accepted the "familiar, self-con-

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contain my history; I might search in them in vain forever for any reflection of myself. I was an interloper; this was not my heritage.

JAMES BALDWIN, NOTES OF A NATIVE SON 6-7 (1983).

<sup>14</sup> TONI MORRISON, PLAYING IN THE DARK: WHITENESS AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION 56 (1992).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 57.

<sup>16</sup> Rush, *supra* note 5, at 581-83.

<sup>17</sup> *See id.* at 584.

<sup>18</sup> MORELAND, *supra* note 11, at 22.

<sup>19</sup> Moreland recommends that the book be taught in conjunction with Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). *Id.* at 37-63.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 15.

gratulatory cultural memory of slavery, race relations, and social change in American history” that the novel sustains.<sup>22</sup>

Moreland now believes that the civil rights movement was predominantly presented as “moralistic appeals to the individual consciences of ‘better’ white, male Americans to distinguish ourselves (like Huck) from a bigoted past represented by easily demonized, working-class, ‘redneck’ figures like Montgomery Sheriff ‘Bull’ Connors and Twain’s Pap Finn.”<sup>23</sup>

It is only as an adult that Moreland has been able to untangle some of the historical and literary nuances of *Huckleberry Finn*. His experience illustrates the fact that notwithstanding its feel-good impact on whites, the book fails as a means of incorporating multicultural perspectives.

### C. A QUESTION OF MORAL DECISIONMAKING

Although moral issues underlying the civil rights movements in America’s history have been easily overwhelmed by larger, arguably more powerful cultural forces, they are, nonetheless, inherent in those struggles. The experience Moreland describes of his youthful self-giving in to the hegemonic forces of white culture, in much the same way that Huck Finn did, may have left him feeling morally helpless, but that does not mean there were no moral decisions to be made.

Nor does a mistake of fact — the erroneous belief that integration is against God’s will, for example — render rejection of the purported moral tenet amoral. Thus, the question confronting Huck — whether to risk eternal damnation by denying someone her “property” — although based on an erroneous belief about what can constitute personal property, does present a moral conflict. Huck struggles with the decision; he believes it is wrong to harbor Jim, because that is what he has been brought up to believe. Huck has never questioned the moral precept. Because he is a child, one would not have demanded that of him. Therefore, we legitimately see it as a sign of his moral development that Huck now questions the lessons about right and wrong that have been fed to him.

While I disagree with Professor Rush’s conclusion that Huck’s decision in chapter thirty-one is not a moral choice,<sup>24</sup> I nevertheless do not read into the decision a great leap into sainthood. Rather, I would argue, this is only one of many moral conflicts that are put in Huck’s path; while he successfully resolves this one, he fails even to recognize, much less struggle over, many others relating to the treatment of Jim. How-

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<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 22.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>24</sup> See Rush, *supra* note 5, at 587.

ever, because Twain has framed Huck's decision not to return Jim to slavery as *the* central moral conflict in the book, readers are highly susceptible to viewing it that way.<sup>25</sup>

More troubling than whether Huck has or has not acted morally in declaring he will "go to hell," if that is the consequence of aiding Jim's escape, is the fact that Huck's other decisions are not presented as moral choices. This is particularly disturbing when Huck actively participates in Tom Sawyer's scheme to use Jim as a prop in a make-believe adventure. Here Huck is choosing, whether or not the struggle is visible — indeed, whether or not the choice is experienced as struggle — to put Jim's life and freedom at risk. By this point in the book, the reader knows that Huck has turned the corner into adulthood, and thus there can be no excusing the conduct.

#### D. A DEARTH OF POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

As Professor Rush amply documents, black children looking for characters with whom to identify in *Huckleberry Finn* are likely to be disappointed.<sup>26</sup> The nation's history of slavery makes identification with either Huck or Jim extremely difficult. While white children may find it relatively easy to identify with Huck and are apt to find emotional satisfaction in cheering his decision not to turn Jim in, there is a cost to this identification. To maintain a sense of moral integrity, they must either dismiss Huck's behavior in the later chapters of the book or rationalize that behavior.

The last third of Twain's novel is often forgotten by those who see in Huck's conduct on the river the triumph of good over evil. Huck's ordering of values in chapter thirty-one, placing Jim's freedom above obedience to the rules laid out by Miss Watson, elevates his moral status. In the very next chapter, however, Huck arrives at the home of Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas Phelps, and shortly after, he meets up with Tom. The two boys then embark on a complex, demeaning, and wholly unnecessary scheme to "free" Jim. Not surprisingly, most white

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<sup>25</sup> George Carrington argues that there is in fact no moral development in the character of Huck. Rather, he asserts, Huck is an expert in affecting small dramas in which situational ethics obtain. Thus, any heroism in Huck's conduct is read into the text by the reader. CARRINGTON, *supra* note 10, at 122–23. Toni Morrison concedes that Huck achieves some measure of moral development. However, she says, "What is not stressed is that there is no way, given the confines of the novel, for Huck to mature into a moral human being *in America* without Jim. To let Jim go free . . . would be to abandon the whole premise of the book. Neither Huck nor Mark Twain can tolerate, in imaginative terms, Jim freed." MORRISON, *supra* note 14, at 56.

<sup>26</sup> Rush, *supra* note 5.

readers have a great deal of trouble reconciling the ending chapters with their views of Huck's moral intrepidity.<sup>27</sup>

Readers could take the book's shift in tone as an opportunity to reflect on white hypocrisy or on Huck's complicity in the continued subjugation of Jim. It is in this spirit that George Carrington, in a vain effort to dispel any moral ambiguity in the tale, asserts that the novel challenges the reader to do just that. He claims that "The highest meaning of the novel lies in the reader's outraged response to it, the central part of that response being the unusual resentment of the ending."<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, such outrage is easily avoided, as evidenced by whites' satisfaction and pride in remembering the experience of reading the book.<sup>29</sup> Critics may be frustrated by the ending, but ultimately, most readers are not.

The average white reader, in fact, behaves in much the same way as the Phelps, who represent the dominant culture. Nonviolent and well-mannered (i.e., people of "goodwill"), they are "capable of devoting themselves to their spectacular dinners while they keep Jim locked in the little hut down by the ash hopper with its lone window boarded up." Aunt Sally checks to see that Jim is "comfortable," and Uncle Silas goes to the hut to pray with him.<sup>30</sup> Huck, of course, along with white culture's mischievous idol, Tom Sawyer, engages in acts of unspeakable humiliation against Jim. "[T]he unhappy truth about the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*," writes Leo Marx, "is that the author, having revealed the tawdry nature of the culture of the great valley, yielded to its essential complacency."<sup>31</sup>

Professor Rush is right to conclude that significant harm is caused when white teachers fail to understand the racism in the novel, but "*think they do*."<sup>32</sup> A belief that the book is antiracist and presents a realistic view of slavery undermines the very message such beliefs are meant to convey.<sup>33</sup>

If the white world has had difficulty remembering *Huckleberry Finn* for anything other than the goodheartedness of Huck and Jim, blacks have not been so easily blinded. "Fear and alarm are what I remember most about my first encounter with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckle-*

<sup>27</sup> MORELAND, *supra* note 11, at 24.

<sup>28</sup> CARRINGTON, *supra* note 10, at 122.

<sup>29</sup> *See id.*

<sup>30</sup> Leo Marx, *Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling and Huckleberry Finn*, 22 AM. SCHOLAR 423, 432 (Autumn 1953). Marx sees this as Twain's personal failure, as well as his characters'.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Rush, *supra* note 5, at 582.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 587.



*berry Finn*,” Toni Morrison recalls.<sup>34</sup> “Palpable alarm.”<sup>35</sup> She found the book “deeply disturbing” as a young reader; a second required reading brought on what Morrison describes as “a muffled rage,” as though the story demanded her “complicity in and sanction of something shaming.”<sup>36</sup>

Ralph Ellison’s criticism of the portrayal of Huck and Jim’s relationship is that the relationship appears to be more like a friendship between boys than one between a boy and a man. Ellison points out that in this relationship there is not only a “violation of the manners sanctioned by society for relations between Negroes and whites, there is a violation of our conception of adult maleness.”<sup>37</sup>

While some black critics, including Morrison, see the literary value in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and are able to recognize its usefulness in deconstructing white racism, the damaging aspects of using the book in adolescents’ courses remain clear. This is particularly true when teachers are not well equipped to handle the complex — and widely varying — emotions that the novel can elicit. Certainly Huck Finn is not, as many would have it, a model of multicultural heroics. The point is made by Victor Doyno in the afterward to a 1996 edition of the book. “In my experience,” he writes, “many younger students do not develop irony-decoding skills consistently, and they seldom — if ever — gain these skills about subjects close to themselves.”<sup>38</sup> For that reason, he recommends that younger students not be asked to read the book for school.

A similar position is taken by critic John Wallace. While he agrees the novel is appropriate for college-level or graduate students, he opposes making it part of the middle school or high school curriculum. Remembering his own feelings of humiliation and embarrassment on reading it as a child, and his son’s subsequent equally bad experience, he states plainly:

For years, black families have trekked to schools in just about every district in America to say that “this book is bad for our children,” only to be turned away by insensitive and often unwittingly racist teachers and administrators responding that “this is a classic.” Classic or not, it

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<sup>34</sup> Toni Morrison, *Introduction to ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN* xxxi (Oxford 1996).

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> Ellison, *supra* note 13, at 51.

<sup>38</sup> Victor O. Doyno, *Afterword to ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN* 21 (Oxford 1996).

should not be continued to make our children feel bad about themselves.<sup>39</sup>

## II. AN ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Like Professor Rush, I approach this topic as a writer, a parent, a teacher, and a lawyer. But I also come to the discussion with the perspective of one who thinks about the importance of literature to law and law practice, the impact of the stories we hear on socialization generally, and literature's effect specifically on the way we conceptualize lawyers.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, I view the issues through a somewhat different lens. While Rush focuses on what the novel is doing *to* people of color, I will discuss what this book does *for* whites.

Readers of stories and hearers of tales are strongly influenced by certain archetypes. In particular, I maintain that heroic tales, a subcategory of myths, make a deep and lasting impression on the subconscious and particularly on the minds of adolescents. Therefore, it is a matter of some importance that those charged with the education of children pay serious attention to the choice of literary works in which heroes appear.<sup>41</sup>

While there are many ways to classify and categorize heroes, my focus is on a particular type that is found in American literature. Huckleberry Finn fits the type, as do two other characters I consider, Natty Bumppo from James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. My argument is that these heroes perpetuate racial inequality not only by privileging the white hero but also by doing so in a manner that facilitates the internalization of white superiority. White heroes and nonwhite heroes in a supposedly multicultural curriculum are separate but not equal. Accordingly, I urge a policy that gives preference to nonwhite fictional heroes in the classroom.

### A. OF HEROES AND MYTH

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a book in the heroic tradition; its protagonist has all the attributes of a mythic hero. In considering this, it may be useful to start with the definition of myth, the literary story type in which the classical western hero first appears.

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<sup>39</sup> See John H. Wallace, *Huckleberry Finn Offensive*, WASH. POST, Apr. 11, 1982, quoted in MARK TWAIN, *TOM SAWYER AND HUCKLEBERRY FINN* 132 (Stuart Hutchinson ed., 1998).

<sup>40</sup> See Robert F. Seibel & Nancy Cook, *The Inaugural CLEA Creative Writing Contest*, 4 T.M. COOLEY J. PRAC. & CLINICAL L. 179, 182 (2001); Nancy L. Cook, *Outside the Tradition: Literature as Legal Scholarship*, 63 U. CIN. L. REV. 95, 100-01 (1994).

<sup>41</sup> I want to make clear that I use the term "hero" to refer to one in a narrowly defined class of characters. A full explication of the term as used in this article can be found *infra*.

The origin of the term “myth” is the Greek *mythos*, meaning, simply, a story;<sup>42</sup> but it has acquired a narrower meaning. While experts disagree about the definitional and categorical particulars, a working definition of myth is “[a] traditional story, often a folktale arising out of a culture’s oral tradition and involving gods or superhumanly heroic figures, that is used to explain the way things are and the way things happen, and to transmit the culture’s values and beliefs from generation to generation.”<sup>43</sup>

The definition is perhaps deceptively simple, since generations of scholars have struggled to unravel the essence of myth. For Henri Ricoeur, “myth fulfills a symbolic function for the individual and society; its meaning is multidimensional, open to all at their own level.”<sup>44</sup> Joseph Campbell, on the other hand, sees myth’s function as primarily psychological. In his view, myths portray the struggle of the psyche to discover its own identity.<sup>45</sup> Over time and across cultures, myths have taken on differing characteristics;<sup>46</sup> nevertheless, one component of myth — its role as arbiter of the ideal and the real — remains intact. As D.H. Lawrence explains in a critique of *Huckleberry Finn*: “What true myth concerns itself with is not the disintegration product. True myth concerns itself centrally with the onward adventure of the integral soul.”<sup>47</sup>

The hero of Greek mythology was a man of great strength and courage who was at least favored by the gods and at times was himself half-

<sup>42</sup> RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, UNABRIDGED 1272 (2d ed. 1987).

<sup>43</sup> *Glossary of Literary Terms*, in *THE STORY AND ITS WRITER* 1596 (Ann Charters ed., 3d ed. 1991).

<sup>44</sup> PIERRE HEGY, *MYTH AS FOUNDATION FOR SOCIETY AND VALUES: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS* v (1991). Hegy is comparing Ricoeur’s perspectives on myth with those of Joseph Campbell.

<sup>45</sup> See JOSEPH CAMPBELL, *THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES* 30 (1949). The unknown nature of myth’s message and the need for discovery that is paramount in Campbell’s analysis distinguishes it from Ricoeur’s. For Ricoeur, “Everything is already said and given, but as an enigma. Hence . . . any interpretation is circular: what we see is already given; yet what is given is our own interpretation.” HEGY, *supra* note 44, at vi. These views are not necessarily mutually exclusive; they may simply differ in emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> For example, “[t]he Greeks used mythological metaphors as the basis for heroic style; the Romans depended on biographical archetypes; the Middle Ages on hagiography.” Marshall Fishwick, *Heroic Style in America*, in *HEROES OF POPULAR CULTURE* 12 (Ray B. Browne et al. eds., 1972). Laurence Coupe, in his discourse on mythic epics, asserts that the hero of epic is usually noble, although of the human world, presented in a historical context, and thus of intense interest. Characteristically, in him is the “affirmation of . . . excellence in the face of imminent death.” LAURENCE COUPE, *MYTH* 102 (1997). Because the hero stands halfway between gods and mortals, more is to be expected of him. Homeric epic heroes, however, are “always convincingly human.” *Id.* They are not objects of reverence, Coupe believes, so much as literary devices. *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Novels*, in *STUDIES IN CLASSIC AMERICAN LITERATURE* 72 (Doubleday Anchor 1951) (1923).

god.<sup>48</sup> The notion of hero has evolved in much the same way as the concept of myth has,<sup>49</sup> so that now, in general, modern myth's hero is not literally divine but is "a human being in the process of becoming divine."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, he is not an ordinary human; a true mythological hero is a superior being, a person sent by destiny or divine forces.<sup>51</sup>

Northrup Frye classifies heroes on a kind of divinity scale. His taxonomy includes superheroes (not human), supreme heroes (mortal and vulnerable but so superior they function as demigods), leader-heroes (as good as humans can get), everyman-heroes (those having limited powers but who rise to an occasion), and subordinate heroes (those of lower status or ability).<sup>52</sup> For purposes of this essay, I use the term "hero" to mean something between Frye's leader-hero and supreme hero. Thus, the type of mythological character I focus on is not simply one who has done great deeds; in the ancient oral tradition, a hero is someone who has been called to action by forces outside the merely human.<sup>53</sup> It is someone who has found or achieved something beyond the ordinary, someone who has given his or her life to a cause or purpose bigger than the self. Joseph Campbell describes this profile in his landmark work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

The hero . . . is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern

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<sup>48</sup> According to Northrup Frye, myth can be the story of a god, a godlike being, or a hero, and it frequently involves all three. See Roger R. Rollin, *The Lone Ranger and Lenny Skutnik: The Hero as Popular Culture*, in RAY B. BROWNE & MARSHALL W. FISHWICK, *THE HERO IN TRANSITION* 14, 26 (1983).

<sup>49</sup> "The various uses of the term *hero* carry a number of significances, from a mediative position . . . to a slightly marked social status . . . to a figure of a remote and magnified time, and on to that status between the human and the divine." DEAN A. MILLER, *THE EPIC HERO* 4 (2000).

<sup>50</sup> EDGAR MORIN, *THE STARS* 39 (Richard Howard trans., 1961).

<sup>51</sup> Marshall W. Fishwick, *Introduction* to BROWNE & FISHWICK, *supra* note 48, at 8. See also MILLER, *supra* note 49, at 4 (noting the "widely accepted common notion of the 'hero' as a mediator, a conduit between the living world and whatever nonhuman powers and zones exist").

<sup>52</sup> Rollin, *supra* note 48, at 27–30.

<sup>53</sup> See DANIEL BOORSTIN, *THE IMAGE, OR WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AMERICAN DREAM* 48 (1962). "[A]ll heroes are self made" in the sense that they are doers of great deeds. But will alone can never make a hero; "the hero fulfills outside standards." *Id.* at 74.

man: but as an eternal man — perfected, unspecified, universal man — he has been reborn.<sup>54</sup>

Typically, in a hero tale the plot consists of a journey. Bruce A. Beatie writes that “the ‘lone wolf’ sets off in quest of ‘the impossible dream’ or faces an enemy apparently beyond his or her powers . . . overcomes in spite of all obstacles and becomes an important figure to his community.”<sup>55</sup> This quest can be consciously undertaken, but most often it is visited upon the hero.<sup>56</sup> The hero, in any case, must be ready for the adventure.

While not the only, or even the first,<sup>57</sup> to describe the schema of the heroic tale, Campbell provides a useful paradigm in his work. Briefly, the hero’s journey can be said to follow this pattern:

- A call comes to the hero, originating from some lowly place or from a mysterious origin; the listener or reader understands that the hero is marked, that the hero has been summoned.<sup>58</sup>
- The hero passes into the “belly of the whale”; a threshold (perhaps a mouth or a womb) is crossed, leading the hero into the unknown.<sup>59</sup>
- An “initiation” takes place. This is a time of successive trials and miraculous survival. Often (particularly in the case of a male hero) it involves the avoidance of a “temptress” or a coming to terms with a woman (who, in Campbell’s view, represents the anima). In addition, this period is marked by a resolution of a father conflict (or, in Jungian psychological terms, reconciliation with the animus).<sup>60</sup> The hero may undertake these trials in the company of another, but

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<sup>54</sup> CAMPBELL, *supra* note 45, at 19–21.

<sup>55</sup> Bruce A. Beatie, *The Myth of the Hero: From Mission: Impossible to Magdalenian Caves*, in BROWNE & FISHWICK, *supra* note 48, at 46.

<sup>56</sup> See *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth: With Bill Moyers* (PBS television broadcast, 1988). In his interview with Bill Moyers, Campbell notes that a common Celtic motif is that of an ordinary person being led into a forest by an animal, where magical, transformative events take place.

<sup>57</sup> Before Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, perhaps the best known taxonomy of the classic western heroic myth was by Lord Raglan. See generally FITZROY RICHARD SOMERSET, *THE HERO* (1936).

<sup>58</sup> CAMPBELL, *supra* note 45, at 58.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 90.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 97. According to Campbell, “The traditional idea of initiation combines an introduction of the candidate into the techniques, duties and prerogatives of his vocation with a radical readjustment of his emotional relationship to the parental images.” *Id.* at 136. See also MILLER, *supra* note 49, at 85 (observing that heroes’ sexual relationships tend to be “abnormal, abortive, and immature”), 88. (noting that tension and antagonism between father and heroic son are to be expected).

that does not take away the independence or isolation of the hero. He is, in such cases, "accompanied, but alone."<sup>61</sup>

- The hero enters into a peaceful state. Campbell terms this stage "apotheosis."<sup>62</sup> The idea is not so much that there is a resolution of the conflict generated by desire (*eros*) and hostility (*thanatos*) but that desire and hostility are eradicated.<sup>63</sup>

The hero's journey is cyclical in nature, a kind of death and resurrection. In every heroic myth, the hero leaves and thereafter finds the source of life.

In Campbell's words, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."<sup>64</sup> The heroic journey involves a transformation of consciousness that occurs through "trials and revelations."<sup>65</sup> It must involve more than simple morality; it is associated with the powers of life.<sup>66</sup>

## B. OF MYTH-MAKING AND LAW

Myths have influence, if not power, in the everyday lives of ordinary human beings. Although myths may be imagined tales — "simple" stories — for their believers, myths are not fiction. They are both *mythos* and *logos*, "chronicles that embody the Truth."<sup>67</sup> It is well documented that most people operate in two worlds, one real, and one artificial or ideal.<sup>68</sup> In the ideal world, people relate to themselves and to others through the imagery of the culture. That imagery is transmitted through, among other things, myths.<sup>69</sup> But more than being merely reflective of what is in people's minds, myths may actually be formative.<sup>70</sup> In other words, people build their lives to conform to a myth's aspirational im-

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel F. Melia, *Parallel Versions of the Boyhood Deeds of Cuchulain*, in *ORAL LITERATURE: SEVEN ESSAYS* 33 (Kevin Duggan ed., 1975).

<sup>62</sup> CAMPBELL, *supra* note 45, at 164.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.* at 164-65.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.* at 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth: With Bill Moyers*, *supra* note 56.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> Rollin, *supra* note 48, at 31. *Logos* is Greek for "the word."

<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at 40 (citing John L. Caughey, *Media Mentors*, *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY*, Sept. 1978, at 12, 45).

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> This is the theory Claude Levi-Strauss posited and developed. Levi-Strauss's goal, says Terence Hawkes, was to show "how myths think in men, unbeknown to them," more than how men think in myths. *TERENCE HAWKES, STRUCTURALISM AND SEMIOTICS* 41 (1978).

agery as much as, if not more than, myths reflect cultural norms. Children are particularly vulnerable.<sup>71</sup>

The importance of myth to the collective consciousness and individual unconscious has not been lost on writers who now bear some responsibility for the transmission of myth. In this century, black writers in particular have deliberately plumbed mythological roots. Ralph Ellison, for example, notes both the impact that writers like James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Ernest Hemingway had on his understanding of folklore's influence and also his struggle to adapt their ideas to the situation of blacks in the United States.<sup>72</sup> He sees fiction writers as having an important role in the formulation of mythology, a role that encompasses social activism as well as storytelling: "People rationalize what they shun or are incapable of dealing with; these superstitions and their rationalizations become ritual as they govern behavior. The rituals become social forms, and it is one of the functions of the artist to recognize them and raise them to the level of art."<sup>73</sup>

Richard Wright, too, acknowledges the power of heroic tales in his life. He attributes the "accidental reading of fiction" as an important step in his development as a writer. Although "the kind of world in which [white authors] lived was as alien to me as the moon," he says, he eventually came to appreciate the power of the mythic form:

These writers seemed to feel that America could be shaped nearer to the hearts of those who lived in it. And it was out of these novels and stories and articles, out of the emotional impact of imaginative constructions of heroic or tragic deeds, that I felt touching my face a tinge of warmth from an unseen light.<sup>74</sup>

Heroes are instrumental in identity formation. They provide role models and, perhaps more significantly, are one means by which young people absorb their culture and their places within it. Images stick. Thus, it is necessary for those in education to recognize how this process occurs and to pay careful attention to the literary characters touted as heroes.

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<sup>71</sup> ROBERT EISNER, *THE ROAD TO DAULIS: PSYCHOANALYSIS, PSYCHOLOGY AND CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY* 59 (1989).

<sup>72</sup> Ellison, *supra* note 13, at 58.

<sup>73</sup> Ralph Ellison, *The Art of Fiction: An Interview* (1955), reprinted in *SHADOW AND ACT*, *supra* note 13, at 174.

<sup>74</sup> RICHARD WRIGHT, *BLACK BOY*, in *RICHARD WRIGHT READER* 3, 27-28 (Ellen Wright & Michel Fabre eds., 1978).

## C. THE PECULIARLY AMERICAN (WHITE) HERO

There exists a particular brand of hero in the United States that poses considerable problems in the struggle against racism. The original model for this hero type, which is described in detail below, is Hawkeye, or Natty Bumppo, of James Fenimore Cooper's creation.<sup>75</sup> Hawkeye has been followed by a number of characters fitting the same mold, including Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.<sup>76</sup> Another figure coming straight out of the Hawkeye-Huck tradition is Atticus Finch, the lawyer in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.<sup>77</sup> In this section, I argue that this particular heroic tradition, endemic to the United States, carries some exclusionary messages and that its propagation needs to be checked.

Hawkeye, Huck, and Atticus can all be seen as heroes in a classic, mythological sense. They are also, however, peculiarly American in character. What makes for a peculiarly American hero is often described in terms of the "frontier," in both its literal and figurative meanings.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the transformation of the landscape, and the rise of the American hero, can be traced to industrial capitalism and urbanization.<sup>79</sup> The American heroic pattern I observe, to which Hawkeye, Huck, and Atticus all conform, contains certain commonalities. They are:

- Lack of adherence to a primary group's norms
- Lack of intimacy with women; an implicit if not explicit rejection of or detachment from women
- Performance of service that is representative of a raised consciousness
- Humility and lack of vulgar ambition.

Each of these heroes also follows the traditional hero's path, outlined earlier. That is, each receives a call or summons to action while occupying a lowly place and crosses into unknown territory. He thereaf-

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<sup>75</sup> James Fenimore Cooper is the author of numerous works of fiction. Of particular relevance here are the five books known as the Leatherstocking Tales. They are: *THE PIONEER* (1823), *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS* (1826), *THE PRAIRIE* (1827), *THE PATHFINDER* (1840), and *THE DEERSLAYER* (1841).

<sup>76</sup> Although I focus on only three here, a number of other fictional works appearing in middle and high school literature courses have protagonists who meet the criteria for what I call the "peculiarly American hero." See, e.g., MICHAEL BLAKE, *DANCES WITH WOLVES* (1988); WILLA CATHER, *DEATH COMES TO THE ARCHBISHOP* (1927); CONRAD RICHTER, *THE LIGHT IN THE FOREST* (1953); HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN: OR LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY* (1852).

<sup>77</sup> HARPER LEE, *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* (1960).

<sup>78</sup> Much of the prevalent understanding of the term "frontier," of course, arises from white society's historical accounts of immigration, white settlement, and westward expansion.

<sup>79</sup> Dean Miller argues that the particular socioeconomic and political conditions in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created the kind of "impersonal and oppressive atmosphere" that often gives rise to new folk heroes (little but noble in adversity). MILLER, *supra* note 49, at 23-24.



ter undergoes a series of "trials and revelations," at the end of which is a tentative resolution of underlying animus-anima conflicts. Each story ends anticlimactically when the protagonist, through the redemption of others, enters a new state of acceptance.<sup>80</sup>

The idea of redemption is particularly strong in these American heroes. The ideal man-child is seen as acting for others who, without him, will fail. In the American tradition described here, these "others" are, significantly, not white. At the same time, the hero is seen as symbolically redeeming the white, unenlightened majority. A brief look at each of the three characters makes this clear.

James Fenimore Cooper has been widely acknowledged as the first writer to capture the American nation in novel form, and his most famous protagonist, Hawkeye, is recognized by many as the first truly American white hero.<sup>81</sup> "Leatherstocking stands as not only the greatest, but as the prototype, of American fictional heroes," David Brion Davis states unequivocally.<sup>82</sup>

D.H. Lawrence, the first of Cooper's twentieth-century critics, was quick to see the mythic quality of the Leatherstocking Tales. He describes them as "a wish-fulfillment vision, a kind of yearning myth." The stories, he notes, project "deep subjective desires" and are "almost prophetic."<sup>83</sup> A white man raised with American Indians, Hawkeye is removed from the dominant culture's value system. His lack of attachment to society, and female society and white society in particular, is one of the first things noted by the critics.<sup>84</sup> He represents more a model of

<sup>80</sup> Anthony Hopkins identifies similar patterns in American film heroes. The hero features he observes in contemporary film are: (1) The hero "possesses exceptional natural vitality"; (2) "Society is inherently and massively repressive"; (3) "Despite increasing social pressure, the hero remains nonconforming"; and (4) the hero "suffers defeat, destruction, or death." Anthony Hopkins, *Contemporary Heroism — Vitality in Defeat*, in *HEROES OF POPULAR CULTURE*, *supra* note 46, at 113, 113–14.

<sup>81</sup> Hawkeye is one name by which the protagonist, Natty Bumppo, is called. He is also variously referred to as the Trapper, Deerslayer, Pathfinder, La Longue Carabine, and the Leatherstocking.

<sup>82</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Deerslayer, A Democratic Knight of the Wilderness: Cooper, 1841*, in *TWELVE ORIGINAL ESSAYS ON GREAT AMERICAN NOVELS 1* (Charles Shapiro ed., 1958); see also Leslie A. Fiedler, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Historical Romance*, in *LOVE AND DEATH IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL* 149 (1960) (recognizing two mythic figures in American literature: Natty Bumppo and his companion, Chingachgook, who represents "the Vanishing American"); Warren S. Walker, *Introduction to LEATHERSTOCKING AND THE CRITICS* (1965) ("During the 1820s, Cooper established himself as the father of the American novel").

<sup>83</sup> Lawrence, *supra* note 47, at 55.

<sup>84</sup> Leslie Fiedler notes Hawkeye's determined rejection of women, calling his relationship with Chingachgook "the pure marriage of males — sexless and holy." Fiedler, *supra* note 82, at 208. Lucy Lockwood Hazard observes that Hawkeye lacks any group relationship. LUCY LOCKWOOD HAZARD, *THE FRONTIER IN AMERICAN LITERATURE* 110 (1927). See also Lawrence, *supra* note 47, at 73 (describing Hawkeye as "[a] man who turns his back on white society. A man who keeps his moral integrity hard and intact").

environmental awareness than any raised consciousness about Anglo-American attitudes toward the Indian population. He is a man more at one with nature than with any human community. As such, he is freed from ordinary ambitions and the pitfalls of pride. Neither marriage nor lasting attachments to anyone (including the nonwhite shadow, Chingachgook) detain him. "He is silent, simple, philosophic, moralistic, and an unerring shot . . . Almost he is sexless . . . yet intelligent, hardy, dauntless."<sup>85</sup>

Hawkeye does not go looking for adventures; he is drawn into them. Having come out of nowhere — he "seems to have been born under a hemlock tree out of a pinecone"<sup>86</sup> — Cooper's protagonist enters a "wilderness" and there encounters seemingly endless physical challenges. He responds to these with superhuman skill.<sup>87</sup> Stoic throughout, Hawkeye eventually retires to isolation in the western plains, which during the eighteenth century were sparsely settled by whites.

Similarly, Huckleberry Finn has been freed from ordinary "civilization" by his mother's actual death and his father's disappearance into drunkenness and general oblivion. Both Huck's father and Miss Watson, with whom the boy is required to live, operate in the novel more as devices than real characters. Huck, seizing the opportunity to escape first from Miss Watson's overly civilized home and then from his father's dangerously uncivilized authority, ends up literally adrift. Like Hawkeye, he successfully avoids lasting attachments to women. An honest and self-deprecating storyteller, Huck confides that he has, at best, modest ambitions.

According to Marshall Fishwick, in Huckleberry Finn "Mark Twain created the last genuinely American folk hero."<sup>88</sup> Andrew Jay Hoffman agrees with the categorization of Huck as a "traditional hero": "His heroism comes to us out of folklore, myth, and legend, from the preliterate past which remains, if not intact, then at least vital in even the most literate societies."<sup>89</sup> Certain aspects of the traditional hero are particularly present in Huck. They include the apparent impermanence of death, the significant presence of kings, and the involvement of divinity or magic.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Lawrence, *supra* note 47, at 70.

<sup>86</sup> *Id.*

<sup>87</sup> Mark Twain, in a famous essay, catalogs a number of Hawkeye's feats and comically assails, among other things, the lack of realism in Cooper's writing. Mark Twain, *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses*, 456 N. AM. REV. 1 (July 1895).

<sup>88</sup> Fishwick, *supra* note 46, at 12.

<sup>89</sup> ANDREW JAY HOFFMAN, *TWAIN'S HEROES, TWAIN'S WORLDS: MARK TWAIN'S ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN, A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT, AND PUDD'NHEAD WILSON* 53 (1988).

<sup>90</sup> With respect to the impermanence of death, Huck fakes his own death; perhaps more significantly, his father, thought to be dead, returns. The con men who pass themselves off as

Unquestionably, Huck inhabits the lowly place of a hero-to-be when the story begins. Also, clearly, his sudden departure from the island with Jim sends him across a threshold into unknown territory. Hoffman points out that "Huck is a traditional hero placed in a realistic world. Huck's heroism is of a folkloric and so ahistorical nature, unrestricted by the historical world of time, writing, casualty or law."<sup>91</sup>

In the trip down the Mississippi River, Huck encounters chapter after chapter of "trials and revelations." If he does not wholly resolve "the most basic conflict in the novel . . . between Huck as a traditional hero from outside the realm of history and a world with history in its very nature,"<sup>92</sup> he nevertheless represents the "redemptive possibilities of the human race."<sup>93</sup> In the end, an uneasy peace is achieved; Huck has reached a temporary plateau and accepts that there will be no return.

While Atticus Finch, the white, Southern lawyer who represents Tom Robinson, a black man, in Harper Lee's tale of a 1930s rape trial, does not come out of the American frontier in quite the same way that Hawkeye and Huck do, he is included here for two reasons. First, I believe he *is* a frontiersman of sorts, representative of the post-Gandhi world.<sup>94</sup> Just as Huck and Hawkeye are "modern" heroes to the extent that their adventures take place in a world more characterized by colonization than by war, Atticus is a man engaged in yet another, newer kind of nonviolent struggle. Thus, his inclusion demonstrates the evolution of the traditional hero while simultaneously illustrating the recycling of the basic hero pattern.

In addition, Atticus is included because of his influence in the legal profession. Indeed, in the area of law and justice, no fictional character is lauded by whites as much as Atticus Finch. This is important because in the field of law, as in any other, professional character is formed in part through a process of identification with hero figures. As James Boyd White notes in *The Legal Imagination*, "The activities of the lawyer's life . . . include a process of self-imagination. For as you work through your life as a lawyer . . . you work out an identity for yourself, you define a mind and character, very much as the historian or poet or novelist might be said to do."<sup>95</sup>

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a king and duke, while frauds, provide an apparent presence of royalty. Finally, magic is present in the prevalence of superstitions throughout the book. *Id.* at 17.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.* at 53.

<sup>92</sup> *Id.*

<sup>93</sup> Marx, *supra* note 30, at 432.

<sup>94</sup> Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), an Indian social and political reformer, practiced *satyagraha*, a form of nonviolent resistance, in the first half of the twentieth century. Many of his methods were adopted by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other American civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>95</sup> JAMES BOYD WHITE, *THE LEGAL IMAGINATION* 760 (1973).

To say that Atticus Finch is the leading model for white lawyers as they engage in this process is an understatement. A quick search on Westlaw to locate his name in recent law journals yielded almost 500 documents.<sup>96</sup> He is the “lawyer most often eulogized as the ethical ideal.”<sup>97</sup> He has, it is said, “inspired generations.”<sup>98</sup> Former independent counsel Kenneth Starr called him an “ethical role model” in a speech to a North Carolina bar association during the Clinton impeachment hearings;<sup>99</sup> there is a monument erected in his honor by the state bar association at the Monroe County courthouse in Alabama.<sup>100</sup> Last year, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was Mayor Richard Daley’s choice of “great book” for Chicago’s annual library week celebration; all Chicagoans were encouraged to read it, discussion groups were organized throughout the city, and the bar association sponsored a re-enactment of Tom Robinson’s trial.<sup>101</sup> The list of references and uses to which the book — and the character — are put in the legal context is almost endless.<sup>102</sup>

This adoration, then, demonstrates how heroes of mythical proportions become an essential part of a communal identity. Like other fictional and mythical heroes, Atticus Finch has been absorbed into the belief and value systems of a great many people. To recognize the profound influence of this character on the national legal psyche is to acknowledge the importance of myth and heroes in all our lives.

Atticus fits the pattern of American hero that has been previously described. He has been referred to as a “folk hero”;<sup>103</sup> “the wise hero of *To Kill a Mockingbird*”;<sup>104</sup> the “archetypal good lawyer”;<sup>105</sup> the “proto-

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<sup>96</sup> Of these, almost 400 were from the past five years.

<sup>97</sup> Deborah Luyster, *Lawyering Skills in Law and Literature*, 81 MICH. B.J. 56, 56 (Jan. 2002).

<sup>98</sup> Nanette K. Laughrey, *A Tribute to Governor Mel Carnahan*, 66 MO. L. REV. 271, 271 (2001).

<sup>99</sup> William Simon, *Moral Pluck: Legal Ethics in Popular Culture*, 101 COLUM. L. REV. 421, 421 (2001).

<sup>100</sup> Samuel A. Rumore, Jr., *Building Alabama’s Courthouses*, 62 ALA. LAW. 110, 115 (Mar. 2000).

<sup>101</sup> Bill Haltom, *Atticus Finch Loses in Muskogee but Wins in Chicago*, TENN. B.J., Oct. 2001, at 37.

<sup>102</sup> For example, Atticus’s character is the prototype used in a stress management workshop for lawyers. William A. Martin, *Success Briefs for Lawyers: Inspirational Insights on How to Succeed at Law and Life*, 36 ARK. LAW. 8 (2001). Interestingly, literary critics have not flooded the shelves with thoughts about Atticus.

<sup>103</sup> Calvin Woodard, *Listening to the Mockingbird*, 45 ALA. L. REV. 563, 566 n.4 (1994).

<sup>104</sup> Anne M. Burke, *Women in the Law: Reshaping the Character of the Profession*, CHI. B. ASSOC. REC., Nov. 2001, at 28, 31.

<sup>105</sup> W. Bradley Wendel, *Nonlegal Regulation of the Legal Profession: Social Norms in Professional Communities*, 54 VAND. L. REV. 1955, 2020 (2001).

type of the ideal lawyer";<sup>106</sup> and the "ultimate lawyer."<sup>107</sup> A single parent who maintains a modest, unentangled distance from the main adult female characters in the novel,<sup>108</sup> Atticus stands apart from his small town neighbors. We learn, almost by accident, that this wasn't always so,<sup>109</sup> but it is clear that he is now living humbly and quietly in Macomb, Alabama. There is no hint in the novel that he aims in any way to achieve greatness. Atticus is reluctant to take the Robinson case, but in traditional hero fashion, he gets involved despite his ambivalence. A series of challenging events then follows.

In one scene, Atticus takes a single shot at a rabid dog and, to the amazement of his children, kills it.<sup>110</sup> Then follows a series of incidents related to Atticus's representation of Tom Robinson. When a neighbor condemns Atticus with racist comments and his son Jem retaliates by cutting down her prized camellias, Atticus must choose his response to both the neighbor's words and his son's actions.<sup>111</sup> A short time later, a group of Macomb's citizens confront Atticus at his home about the wisdom of handling the Robinson case, and he must answer them.<sup>112</sup> Another, potentially violent confrontation occurs that same night when a group of Ku Klux Klansmen comes to the jail with the intention of lynching the accused. Atticus, keeping watch outside the jail, stands up to the group.<sup>113</sup> Atticus is also challenged by his sister, who has come to help out with the children. He resists her demand to dismiss the Finches' black housekeeper.<sup>114</sup> Robinson's trial presents a classic conflict, in which Atticus, not Tom Robinson, is the central protagonist. The ultimate conflict of the book — the animus of white people toward black people — is not resolved. Yet Atticus (as well as the children on whom he bestows his wisdom) passes through his series of trials and reaches a state of acceptance. This is in sharp contrast to Tom Robinson, the black

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<sup>106</sup> Robert W. Mayhue Jr., *Crisis of Conscience: Lessons Learned from Legal Literature through an Analysis of To Kill a Mockingbird and Intruder in the Dust*, 46 S.D. L. REV. 813, 815 (2001).

<sup>107</sup> Steven Lubet, *Reconstructing Atticus Finch*, 97 MICH. L. REV. 1339, 1341 (1999).

<sup>108</sup> They are Calpurnia, the Finch family's full-time black housekeeper, and a white neighbor, Miss Maudie.

<sup>109</sup> Although the reader learns early on that Atticus comes from "good" family, with long-time roots in the South, Atticus is silent on his background. When he is called upon by the community to shoot and kill a rabid dog and he does so with hair-splitting accuracy, the reader is able to infer that Atticus was formerly a more visible presence in the community. See LEE, *supra* note 77, ch. 10.

<sup>110</sup> *Id.*

<sup>111</sup> *Id.* ch. 11. Atticus holds Jem responsible and requires him to make amends. With respect to the neighbor, he concludes that age and illness (drug addiction) excuse her conduct and that she, like everyone else, is "entitled to her opinions." *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> *Id.* ch. 15.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.* The group eventually disperses when Atticus's young daughter, Scout, arrives on the scene, recognizes one of the men and engages him in a verbal exchange about his son. *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *Id.* ch. 14.

defendant, who is killed in an alleged escape attempt. In his unsuccessful representation of Robinson and in admonishing his white neighbors to “by God, gentlemen, do your duty,” Atticus is the representative of white racial consciousness. As redeemer, he represents the hope of both the black race and the white race.

#### D. THE LEGACY: CULTURAL BIAS

These mythical heroes — white, male, isolated — have been “canonized” in the United States. The American literary canon romanticizes flight and individualism; its heroism is characterized by solitude, or what Toni Morrison calls a “separate confinement.”<sup>115</sup> The rhetoric surrounding the stories bills the isolation as freedom, somehow detached from the dominant culture’s politics and social insensitivity,<sup>116</sup> when in fact it “is profoundly shaped by the domination to which it is opposed and to which it often variously reverts.”<sup>117</sup> This inversion is particularly striking with respect to matters of race.

While the messages of heroism in American myths are at odds with social reality, particularly as social reality is experienced by minorities, it is clear that these myths exercise a kind of cultural power that operates as cultural truth. Over time, people within the culture absorb the messages transmitted through myth; they believe in them and operate from the assumption that the beliefs generated by the myths are reality-based, rather than culturally devised and transmitted. Consequently, the problem is not that the story contains a self-fulfilling prophecy but that the values inherent in the story are adapted into a society as given truths. The situation can become one in which heroic tales are “not only misrepresenting social reality but also enforcing these misrepresentations in the organization of social reality.”<sup>118</sup>

Each of the three heroic tales that are the focus of this essay has left the imprint of white superiority as part of its legacy. That is one of the values the stories transmit. This result is wholly unintentional, but it occurs because the characteristics of the ideal American hero are the very traits that ensure inequality. The hero’s separateness, his decisive actions, and his supernatural social consciousness combine to create an identity of elevated status and at the same time emphasize the distinction between the white hero and the presumptively lesser beings he tries to save.

In the *Leatherstocking Tales*, for example, Hawkeye’s relationship with Indians and his accomplishments in alliance with them or on their

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<sup>115</sup> MORRISON, *supra* note 14, at 1, 12.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.*; MORELAND, *supra* note 11, at 20.

<sup>117</sup> MORELAND, *supra* note 11, at 20.

<sup>118</sup> *Id.* at 30–31.

behalf is sometimes viewed as racially enlightened. “[I]n his sympathy and respect for the hostile savage,” writes David Brion Davis, “Deerslayer redeemed his less sensitive brothers.”<sup>119</sup> Such a view, however, is a confused inference drawn from Hawkeye’s heroic status. It is Hawkeye’s separation from society that is believed to free him from the dominant culture’s views about native peoples. In theory, Hawkeye is “devoid of prejudices, pro and con, about Indians, and hence left free to form his own opinions about them.”<sup>120</sup> But his views, as it turns out, are racist.

Hawkeye initially earns his reputation as a hero when he “kills his first Indian.”<sup>121</sup> Despite his years of intimacy with native peoples, Hawkeye never enters into the native culture; furthermore, from his perspective, no Indian — even a “good Indian” — is to be “judged by white standards.”<sup>122</sup> Hawkeye’s distancing himself from Indian society is symptomatic less of his independence than of his condescension toward the Indians. Thus, the reader is constantly reminded that Hawkeye is white, “committed to white ethics but rejecting white society.”<sup>123</sup> Ultimately, as Lucy Lockwood Hazard notes, “No one holds more dogmatically than Hawkeye that red man and white man are fundamentally different, with the superiority decidedly in favor of the white.”<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, Huck Finn is apparently free from the constraints of a white society that decrees its superiority. Within this open space, Huck represents the “redemptive possibilities of the human race.”<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately, Huck does not fulfill this potential. The structure of Twain’s novel, its full literary context, renders plot and character impotent, and in the end, Huck reverts to a role vis-à-vis blacks that white society assigns.

The poet W.H. Auden, comparing Huck to *Oliver Twist*, has observed the tragic irony of this flaw. He notes that readers want to assume that the characters are making a friendship that will last.<sup>126</sup> Although Huck and Jim are much more intimate than *Oliver Twist* and his criminal compatriots, however, readers know they will part. “There hangs, over the book,” Auden writes, “a kind of sadness, as if freedom and love were incompatible.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Davis, *supra* note 82, at 16. He goes on to say that “[a] sordid fact of American history was purified when the woodsman killed the noble savage in this idyll of death in the midst of unspoiled nature.” *Id.*

<sup>120</sup> WARREN S. WALKER, *LEATHERSTOCKING AND THE CRITICS* 115 (1965).

<sup>121</sup> Davis, *supra* note 82, at 21.

<sup>122</sup> HAZARD, *supra* note 84, at 99.

<sup>123</sup> WALKER, *supra* note 120, at 115.

<sup>124</sup> HAZARD, *supra* note 84, at 99.

<sup>125</sup> Marx, *supra* note 30, at 437.

<sup>126</sup> W.H. Auden, *Huck and Oliver*, in *THE LISTENER*, Oct. 1953, at 540–41.

<sup>127</sup> *Id.*

Again, one reason for the ultimate failure to unify the community lies in Huck's heroic character as that character is defined in American literature. As a literary hero, Huck is an outsider to society, but as a character in a novel written as literary realism, he is not separated from history. The story's conclusion, consistent with the heroic journey, brings Huck back into the society, where nothing has changed. Unlike more traditional myths, however, Huckleberry Finn's society is historically situated, which constrains the hero's transformation. Andrew Jay Hoffman observes that "Mark Twain has created a comprehensive traditional hero and placed him in a world where his heroism cannot function, where the magic, the idealism, the integrity of the traditional hero have no power."<sup>128</sup>

Huck Finn is credited with breaking down barriers to equality, rejecting stereotypes, and taking decisive action that leads to a triumph in a struggle for racial self-determination. Yet, to the extent that he actually accomplishes these things, his heroic actions are dependent on his already existing and continuing status as a white person in a racial hierarchy. What should be recognized, but often is not, is that the "satisfactory outcome of Jim's quest for freedom must be attributed to the benevolence of the very people whose inhumanity first made it necessary."<sup>129</sup> Huck Finn, the white hero, is portrayed as rescuing the black victim from an enslaved condition that has been imposed by white society. He is elevated above other whites in this process, and he provides the novel's white readership with an ideal to imitate and identify with. Significantly, however, the status of the black person has not changed, and no new black hero has emerged.

The problems inherent in this brand of white American hero persist with Atticus Finch. Readers cannot forget that he is white, nor can they deny him the spotlight. White readers' identification with Atticus is often at this essential level of race. The reflections of attorney Bill Haltom are illustrative. He recalls: "In 1964, when I was 12 years old, I sat in the Northgate Theater and watched a picture show that did more than entertain me. It moved me. It challenged me. It inspired me. And I've never gotten over it. The picture show was called 'To Kill a Mockingbird.'"<sup>130</sup>

He writes of the point when, at the end of the trial, Atticus walks out of the courtroom and the gallery of black citizens rises in respect, "That

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<sup>128</sup> HOFFMAN, *supra* note 89, at 4.

<sup>129</sup> Marx, *supra* note 30, at 432.

<sup>130</sup> Haltom, *supra* note 101, at 37.



scene changed my life.”<sup>131</sup> From that moment on, Haltom wanted to be a “courageous” lawyer like Atticus.<sup>132</sup>

Similar stories of inspiration have been told by many lawyers since the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, the mere suggestion by ethics expert Monroe Freedman that Atticus was less than the perfect role model for lawyers<sup>134</sup> was met with such hostility and criticism<sup>135</sup> that Freedman — ordinarily not one to shrink from controversy — wrote a partial retraction.<sup>136</sup>

What is particularly interesting and revealing about Haltom’s comments is that they are made in the context of a complaint seeking the removal of *To Kill a Mockingbird* from a student reading list in Muskege, Alabama. The complaint was registered at the initiation of black parents who alleged that the novel was racist. With not even a nod to the irony of his position, Haltom says of the decision to take the book off the list, “Once again, justice did not prevail.” One could infer from this story that whites are determined to be recognized as heroes in tales of racial injustice whether racial minorities view them that way or not.

#### E. A CALL TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Haltom’s reaction to the critique of Atticus Finch is reflective of the more general view that Atticus — the white hero — deserves his elevated status, regardless of the resulting perpetuation of white racial dominance. Indeed, perhaps his heroism depends upon that condition. What happens with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as with the Leatherstocking tales and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is that an underlying cultural bias “sets standards or performance in terms of the tendencies, skills, or attributes of white America.”<sup>137</sup>

What would it take to revamp tales of heroes idealized for their antidiscrimination into true tales of antidiscrimination? Is it impossible to imagine the fictional hero who is transformed through courageous acts

<sup>131</sup> *Id.*

<sup>132</sup> *Id.*

<sup>133</sup> See, e.g., Michael Asimow, *Embodiment of Evil: Law Firms in the Movies*, 48 UCLA L. REV. 1339 (2001); Laughrey, *supra* note 98, at 271; Luyster, *supra* note 97, at 56; H.M. MacMillan, *My Heroes Have Always Been Lawyers*, WYO. LAW., Oct. 24, 2001, at 13; John B. Owens, *Grisham’s Legal Tales: A Moral Compass for the Young Lawyer*, 48 UCLA L. REV. 1431 (2001); Jay Rigdon, *Atticus Finch — A Model That Inspires*, IND. LAW., June 3, 1992, at 4; Matthew Hodel, *No Hollow Hearts*, 77 A.B.A. J. 68 (1991); Thomas L. Shaffer, *The Moral Theology of Atticus Finch*, 42 U. PITT. L. REV. 181 (1981).

<sup>134</sup> Monroe Freedman, *Atticus Finch, Esq., R.I.P.*, LEGAL TIMES, Feb. 24, 1992, at 20.

<sup>135</sup> For a report of this controversy, see David Margolick, *At the Bar*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 28, 1992, at B7.

<sup>136</sup> Monroe Freedman, *Finch: The Lawyer Mythologized*, LEGAL TIMES, May 18, 1992, at 25.

<sup>137</sup> John O. Calmore, *Critical Race Theory, Archie Shepp, and Fire Music: Securing an Authentic Intellectual Life in a Multicultural World*, 65 S. CAL. L. REV. 2129, 2219 (1992).

in the face of racism and whose story supports and inspires young people facing their own struggles with racism?

Perhaps, but first, a shift in perspective is needed. The words of Cheryl Harris are pertinent in this context: "Affirmative action begins the essential work of rethinking rights, power, equality, race and property from the perspective of those whose access to each of these has been limited by their oppression."<sup>138</sup> Professor Rush makes a strong case for using the law of equal protection to help ensure that children of color are not harmed by the well-intentioned but ill-advised efforts of schools to provide heroic models for adolescents. While there is a great deal of validity in her arguments, I believe that affirmative action provides a better working framework.

For several reasons, equal protection analysis is lacking as a referential paradigm. In the context of the educational curriculum, it holds little promise because it is a formalistic doctrine; as such, it demands a showing of highly specific discriminatory treatment, including proof of a causal relationship between discriminatory act and harm, as well as identification of a guilty party.<sup>139</sup> Because of these stringencies, in the almost half-century since *Brown v. Board of Education*<sup>140</sup> was decided, the Supreme Court has provided children of color with neither a right to integrated education nor a right to equal resources.<sup>141</sup>

While the evidentiary demands of equal protection are rigid, the substantive analysis does not go deep enough. As Cheryl Harris explains, "Formal equality overlooks structural disadvantage."<sup>142</sup> It is the structural disadvantage inherent not only in the educational system but also in the curriculum and in the literature itself that is problematic here.

In contrast to equal protection, affirmative action frames the problem in the context and language of maximizing opportunities for development to achieve a lasting justice. It is based on principles of antisubordination<sup>143</sup> and is grounded in historical analysis, and thus, it involves much more than the equal distribution of existing resources.

Affirmative action is closely tied to notions of cultural pluralism, which goes to the heart of curricular planning. At the very least, as

<sup>138</sup> Cheryl I. Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1709, 1779 (1993).

<sup>139</sup> See Alan Freeman, *Antidiscrimination Law: The View from 1989*, 64 TUL. L. REV. 1407, 1418 (1989) (arguing that in the first thirty-five years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court adhered to a "perpetrator perspective," which was "characterized by an indifference to results").

<sup>140</sup> *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>141</sup> See *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974) (denying a request for an order to consolidate Detroit city schools with suburban schools as a means of achieving integration); *San Antonio Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 959 (1973) (finding no violation of equal protection to have unequal resources without regard to district's ability to pay).

<sup>142</sup> Harris, *supra* note 138, at 1788.

<sup>143</sup> *Id.* at 1785.

Duncan Kennedy has observed, to achieve a multicultural ideal, our institutions should be structured "in such a way that no community or class is systematically subordinated."<sup>144</sup> Affirmative action aids this process by changing the focus of discussion and introducing new (outsider) perspectives. Reconstituting the makeup of any class or group also brings into the conversation the debates and discussions that are already taking place in the communities whose members have previously been denied meaningful access to the privileged group.<sup>145</sup> These changes can be achieved not only by broadening the membership in terms of real people — students, teachers, administrators — but also by shifting the numbers in terms of who is the focus of study.

Critical race scholars have long focused on the importance of seeing that every decision made by those in power represents a choice among alternatives. Key to the maintenance of power is the presentation of choice as not-choice. In Cheryl Harris's words, "The law masks as natural what is chosen; it obscures the consequences of social selections as inevitable."<sup>146</sup>

These ideas, at the core of the affirmative action movement, have particular relevance to the question of what fictional characters should be admitted to the middle schools as heroes. Racism, says John Calmore, is "[g]enerated through culture."<sup>147</sup> Mythic tales affect children at a basic level; they are a primary source and reflection of culture. For that reason, it is essential that the choices made by those in power be deliberate and reflect true multiculturalism. The literature read by students needs to provide opportunities for all children to have heroes and internalize the values of their heroes.

#### F. A TIME FOR NEW HEROES AND NEW ROLES

There is no question that racism is a part of the American heritage and that America needs heroes who can help us work through the conflicts. The need for whites, as well as people of color, to have heroes who act courageously in the struggle for racial equality is obvious. One important step toward getting beyond a slave mentality would be to stop deifying characters — fictional or not — whose main claim to heroism is merely seeing the wrong that has been done to native peoples, to the earth, to blacks, or to people who do not have the means, the resources, and the opportunities to access the justice system.

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<sup>144</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *A Cultural Pluralist Case for Affirmative Action in Legal Academia*, 1990 DUKE L.J. 705, 712 (discussing cultural pluralism in relation to how racial and ethnic communities and social classes compete in markets, bureaucracies, and politics).

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* at 729.

<sup>146</sup> Harris, *supra* note 138, at 1777.

<sup>147</sup> Calmore, *supra* note 137, at 2221.

In looking at the heroic myths created by white American writers, one is struck by the good intentions of the authors as well as of their characters. Critics, including black critics, have often recognized the good with the bad. Randolph Stone, for example, writing about Atticus Finch, asks, "Did he harbor racist and sexist stereotypes? Yes, but for a fifty-ish white man in 1930s small-town Alabama, he was probably ahead of the curve. Like most of us, he was a work in progress."<sup>148</sup> Concerning Huck Finn, Victor Doyno notes that although the character does not completely transcend his childhood racism, he does learn to care about someone — Jim. "Perhaps that is a reasonable place to start," reflects Doyno.<sup>149</sup> Toni Morrison observes that Huck's "cooperation in Jim's dehumanization is not total."<sup>150</sup> It is, she says, "pierced with mumbling disquiet."<sup>151</sup>

Such good intentions are helpful, but good intentions and even objections "are not enough"<sup>152</sup> to overcome the ravages of Anglo-American history. Moreover, in all probability, it is the good intentions that camouflage the harm being done. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, myths "serve to resolve unwelcome contradictions, to avoid what a people finds arbitrary, incoherent, or alien so that a meaningful, harmonious whole be reestablished."<sup>153</sup>

The stories of Huck Finn, Atticus Finch and Hawkeye fit this pattern. Each Leatherstocking tale typically includes racial, economic, and sexual oppositions. Hawkeye is portrayed as a man caught between a "savage" world and civilization, between Jacksonian democracy and the bourgeois upper class of his readership.<sup>154</sup> From a white reader's perspective, he appears to open doors into separate cultures. But of course, the two societies are not rendered with equal accuracy; moreover, standing apart from both worlds, Hawkeye does not serve as the bridge between them. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the Phelps and Miss Watson represent the dominant culture; they embody all the prejudice and "polite lies" of white society. Huck, meanwhile, represents the conflicted conscience of "good" white Americans. This leaves Jim to be merely the device by which Huck comes to see the conflict. Toni Morrison writes that "[the] representation of Jim as the visible other can be read as the yearning of whites for forgiveness and love, but the yearning is made possible only when it is understood that Jim has understood his inferi-

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<sup>148</sup> Randolph N. Stone, *Atticus Finch, in Context*, 97 MICH L. REV. 1378, 1381 (1999).

<sup>149</sup> Doyno, *supra* note 38, at 22.

<sup>150</sup> Morrison, *supra* note 34, at xl.

<sup>151</sup> *Id.*

<sup>152</sup> *Id.*

<sup>153</sup> CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS, *STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY* 197 (1963).

<sup>154</sup> MICHAEL REZE & RALPH BOWEN, *THE AMERICAN WEST: HISTORY, MYTH AND THE NATIONAL IDENTITY* 89 (1998).

ority (not as a slave, but as black) and despises it."<sup>155</sup> Without Jim's certain inferior status, Huck could not achieve heroic stature. The result is that, in each of these stories, "the appearance of change . . . substitutes for substantive change."<sup>156</sup>

An important question is why whites cling to the images of heroes portrayed in these stories even in the face of strong and persistent criticism from those who do not share white privilege. One of the basic reasons I would venture that Huck Finn, Atticus Finch, and even Hawkeye remain in the canon is that without them, whites would not know what to do. People of goodwill have been trained to believe that doing good requires a particular kind of action, action that consists of engaging in the classical trials and adventures of the hero's journey. If the white person is not the hero of the story, what is his role?

I would like to propose two deliberate courses for whites of goodwill. First: Get over it. Whites do not have to be the heroes. Step aside. Let in — better yet, *bring* into the classroom — stories of fictional heroes who are not white. Change will come if white children, along with black children, begin to identify with the heroism of characters such as Tige Jackson,<sup>157</sup> Phyllisia Cathy,<sup>158</sup> Cassie Logan,<sup>159</sup> John Henry,<sup>160</sup> Nia Jones,<sup>161</sup> and *Motown and Didi*.<sup>162</sup>

Second: We need to redefine what a hero is. Although myths have a way of coming to life on their own, it is still possible to talk about what makes someone extraordinary in this time, in this place. For centuries, we knew nothing but male heroes, leaders in wars. Myths both reflected and perpetuated this brand of idealism. Today there is at least some realization that there are other ways to face death, as the thousands who

<sup>155</sup> MORRISON, *supra* note 14, at 56–57.

<sup>156</sup> Calmore, *supra* note 137, at 2221.

<sup>157</sup> Tige is a black boy who, like Huck Finn, runs away and is befriended by an adult male of a different race. See FRANKCINA GLASS, *MARVIN AND TIGE* (1978).

<sup>158</sup> Phyllisia moves to Harlem from the Caribbean and struggles with conflicts involving friendship, parental authority, and class difference. The story is told in the first person. ROSA GUY, *THE FRIENDS* (1973).

<sup>159</sup> Cassie Logan is the hero of a trilogy written by Mildred Taylor. In the first book of the series, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), Cassie confronts racism squarely, as well as other coming of age issues.

<sup>160</sup> John Killens retells the legend of John Henry, the giant man who stopped the steam engine. In Killens's version, Henry is portrayed as a classic hero, a man of the people, courageous and humble, as well as ultimately the achiever of great deeds. See JOHN O. KILLENS, *A MAN AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A MAN* (1968).

<sup>161</sup> In Valerie Wilson Wesley's *Where Do I Go from Here?* (1993), teenage narrator Nia struggles with racism and classism as one of ten students of color in a wealthy private school. Like Huck Finn, Nia is a witty and perceptive observer.

<sup>162</sup> Two Harlem teens, one homeless and struggling to survive, the other upwardly mobile, *Motown and Didi* forge a relationship when *Motown* intervenes in an attempted rape of *Didi* by drug dealers. Both confront serious moral issues. WALTER DEAN MYERS, *MOTOWN AND DIDI* (1984).

followed Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. showed us; there is increasing recognition that women are heroes, too. History has shown us that there are fates and great sacrifices that may be comparable to death — permanent isolation, loss of family, complete denial of self — and that these qualify as heroism. Our stories — our works of fiction — need to reflect these truths and create out of them heroic ideals.

### CONCLUSION

In the end, I arrive at the same conclusion Professor Rush does: It is time to remove *Huckleberry Finn* from the canon of adolescent literature. I embrace this conclusion not solely because of the actual and potential damage inflicted on black children but because of the damage inflicted, if less directly, on all American readers.

The question for me is perhaps more a matter of pedagogy and ethics than of law. The process by which we absorb our understanding of heroism, by which we internalize the ideals to which we aspire, begins with the hero tales we read and hear as children. If Huck Finn is the best our educational system can do for a fictional American hero, the work of antiracism is certain to fail. However admirable Huck's behavior might be, it does not rise to the level of godlike. The glorification of white consciousness-raising serves to overemphasize white empowerment; simultaneously, it masks the continuing subordination of other groups. This undermines efforts to inculcate values of true equality. Bringing literature of nonwhite fictional heroes into the schools and creating new, if less classically heroic, roles for white allies are affirmative actions that can make a difference.