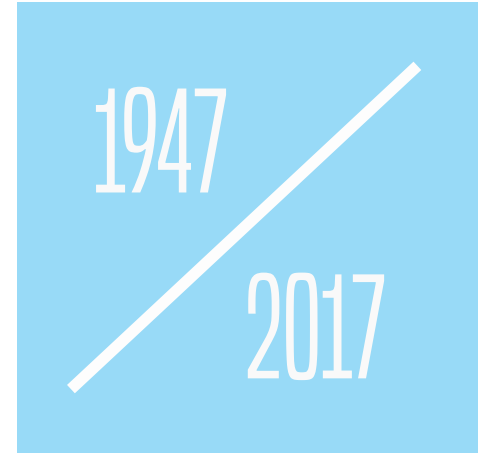


THE REVELATION

STUDENT LIFE OPINION SPORTS LIFESTYLE



TO SAY OR NOT TO SAY: THE N-WORD EDITION

Shocked, disgusted, and horrified: all words that describe how I feel when I hear a non-Black person say the N-word. I ask myself why I cringe when my white friend says it, but bob my head when Drake or Kanye say it. Is this some double standard we've created, or is the word really just off-limits to those who lack a melanin component in their genes?

The controversy surrounding this word ties to its horrific history. The word was derived from words in Spanish, French, and Latin, all denoting the color black, and was not originally derogatory. It was brought to the United States around the early nineteenth century and used as a pejorative in the era of enslavement.

According to PBS, "the words 'nigger' or 'black' were inserted in front of a common American first name (e.g., John), given to a slave to distinguish the slave from any local white person with the same name." This history shows how the word eventually came into American culture as an attempt to divide whites and blacks.

"I've heard from various sources that the word itself is derived from the name of the country 'Niger,' which was only faintly known by European colonizers and slave traders," Senior Gillian Raley said. "It was a word used by white slave-owners in America to address their black slaves and further dehumanize them. The word was kept alive by white supremacists even after slavery was abolished, earning more heavy meaning during the Civil Rights Era when black people demanded that their rights be recognized immediately while white people began to work harder to suppress them".

This part of history makes the usage of the word so extremely controversial. There are many different opinions surrounding the use of the word as well as different reactions from those who hear the word used, all of which have led to the complex discussion of who can and cannot use this word as a part of everyday language.

Some consider it acceptable for you to use the n-word if you are black, but it is unacceptable if you are white or a non-black person of color. While some people will accept this belief, there are many who follow different variations of this rationale, the most common example is saying the n-word while singing a song.

Rap music has become extremely influential in American culture, and people see these rappers wearing certain clothes and saying certain things, and they want to emulate them, including adding their words to our everyday vernacular. While this may seem like a valid reason to many non-blacks to let an n-word slide every once in awhile, it is not. Despite whether the word is in the song or there's an "a" not an "er," there is no excuse.

"Right now our country, as we've heard countless times, is deeply divided, and one of the issues that currently sets people apart is free speech," Raley said. "Many Americans argue that

making an effort to be politically correct does nothing to infringe upon one's freedom of speech, while others will say that any word or phrase that is "banned" from one's vocabulary, no matter how insensitive, violates our First Amendment right to say whatever we please. The n-word falls right into this category of insensitive, for it is incredibly racist and ugly."

While there are many reasons not to use the n-word other than just the fact that the n-word is incredibly insensitive and was used for many years to dehumanize an entire race, it still holds extremely important historical significance.

As many of us have gone through St. Andrew's, we have had the opportunity to be introduced to and familiarized with some

of the greatest pieces of American literature. The main examples being *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, both pieces of literature that contain the n-word because, realistically, the word was used freely during the time periods.

This use of the n-word in historical literature has caused a lot of controversy because of the disconnect between time periods and the evolution of the noun as an extremely offensive word rather than a word part of everyday slang. Because of this disagreement, many schools have been skeptical about allowing students to read literature that contains such strong language, and some schools have even opted to teach censored versions of the original texts.

According to Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times*, "A new effort to sanitize *Huckleberry Finn* comes from Alan Gribben, a professor of English at Auburn University, at Montgomery, Ala., who has produced a new edition of Twain's novel that replaces the word 'nigger' with 'slave.'"

Gribben's reasoning is that he believes by censoring the n-word, it will keep *Huckleberry Finn* from falling off of reading lists around the nation. While censoring literature seems like one of the more reasonable ways to keep the iconic literature on library shelves, some still believe that books with racist themes should be eradicated from modern curriculum.

John Foley of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* believes that it is time for novels such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Of Mice and Men* should all be removed from high school's curriculum because "those books are old, and we're ready for new." He emphasizes that these books should remain in libraries and available to the public as they are extremely influential to American literature, but they should be removed from school curriculum.

Censorship and complete eradication of the novels including strong language are both opinions that some have, but the most common opinion is that these novels are much too influential to remove from classrooms around the nation.

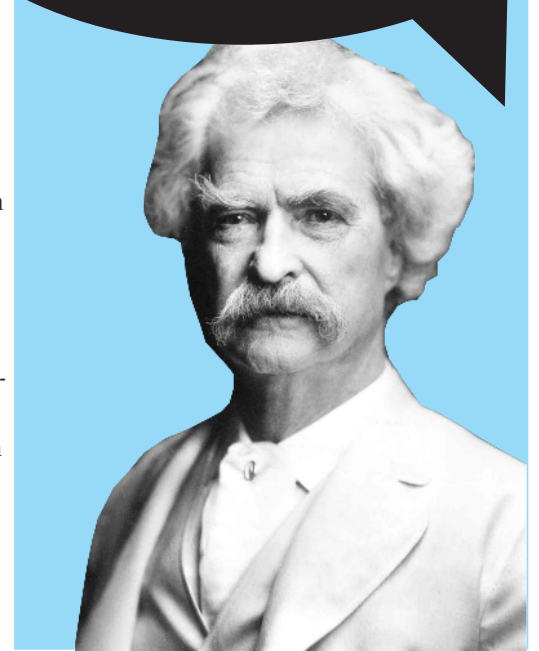
"I don't believe in reading a 'cleaned-up' or sanitized version, however, because that is not what the author intended," Honors 11th grade English teacher Carolyn Brown said. "*Huckleberry Finn* is an important work of literature; Ernest Hemingway called it the source of 'all modern American literature.' Therefore, as a teacher, I believe in talking about the controversy, and then handling it with sensitivity in class."

Many individuals share Brown's view and believe that in order to understand the reality of the time period, the original text must be read because without it a lot of the rawness and reality of the story is lost.

"By no means do I think we should forget that the n-word exists," Raley said. "That's why it's necessary to be exposed to literature like *Huckleberry Finn*, throughout which the n-word is used without hesitation."

The answer to our original question is that no, this is not some double standard where blacks are unfairly allowed to use a word implemented for centuries with the sole purpose of dehumanizing us, but instead it is a standard that people should be expected to follow. While it is not fair to ask for the censorship or erasure of historical literature, we must remember the power behind this word and its ability to dehumanize an entire race.

"MISS WATSON'S BIG N*****, NAMED JIM"



"THAT'S THE MOTTO N***** YOLO"



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