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Final Project: Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as a Cultural Icon

1. Topic Selection
   When I first began to research ideas for my final project back towards the beginning of the semester, I had a difficult time trying to focus on what I wanted to do and how I wanted to present the information. It wasn't until later in the semester when we covered the book as a cultural icon that I became greatly interested in this topic in general. One of the books that struck me personally as being what I consider to be a true cultural icon was Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. I remembered having read it in high school, but it had been so long ago that I honestly couldn't tell you exactly why it should serve as a cultural icon: I just remembered the book being praised as 'the great American novel,' and Huck Finn being an 'iconic literary character.' I decided to re-read the book to look for evidence of why this book is so important as a historical marker of changing social beliefs and values in American history.

2. Problem Statement and Research Questions
   Once issue that I encountered straight away was that there was virtually no literature available connecting the title to the term 'cultural icon.' I decided to write down ideas as I read through the book again that I would then answer through extensive reading and research on how the book serves as a cultural icon. Such questions included:

   a.) How was the book perceived upon its initial release?
   b.) How has that changed over time, and how is it perceived today?
   c.) Is the book satirical in nature?
   d.) Is the book in fact racist, or is it merely depicting attitudes and actions towards African Americans in a pre and post slavery world?

3. Statement of Need for Study
   As I could find nothing that straight out connected the book to the term 'cultural icon,' I decided that it was important to create a space on the web dedicated to outlining how the book serves as an important cultural icon. The more and more scholarly articles, book reviews, and public opinion pieces that I read regarding the book and the controversy surrounding it did I feel that it is imperative, now more so than ever, that the book be defended as a cultural icon. While it has been defended in the past, I am fearful that future generations will forget why this book had and still has made a significant impact on readers everywhere.

4. Descriptions of Strengths and Limitations of Approach
   I decided to create my final project as a web page so that I could easily organize my thoughts and ideas for readers to explore as they wished. If they

did not want to read a particular piece of what would have been a paper, that could easily skip over that part and get right to the information they required. This approach allowed me to incorporate video interviews and hyperlinks that users could access quickly and easily from my site. One of the limitations of presenting the information in this way was that as the information on individual pages grew larger and larger, the user must scroll and scroll or use the 'find' feature to locate specific information or passages if they are using the site for research purposes. By exploring multiple viewpoints on the controversies surrounding the book, including those of contemporary African American authors who feel that the book is in fact a work of racism, I was able to more fully comprehend and incorporate differing opinions on the work as it pertains to the title's status as cultural icon.

4. Process in Completing the Study
   To create and complete the study, I followed the following steps:
   1. Brainstorm ideas – what constitutes a cultural icon? How is this title a cultural icon? Formulate questions.
   2. Review current and past literature – answer research questions and form my own opinions as to why this book is a cultural icon.
   3. Write up findings – Compile thoughts, quotes, primary sources, such as illustrations, photographs, and text together to prove argument that the book is a cultural icon.
   4. Create website – create graphic header for site, plan out organization and number, titles of pages, format layouts of pages, type up information and findings.
   5. Review final project – get feedback from friends, co-workers and family on their thoughts on the book as cultural icon, their views on the controversy surrounding the book, and if they found the site helpful.
   6. Share with class.