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# respect

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT LAW AND DIVERSITY

## Verdict Rendered in Rutgers University Bullying Case

by Jodi L. Miller

**In one of the most controversial cases dealing with issues of bullying, social media and hate crime law, Dharun Ravi, a former Rutgers University student, was convicted in March 2012 on 15 charges ranging from tampering with evidence to invasion of privacy to the most serious of the charges—bias intimidation.**

Ravi was indicted in April 2011 after using a webcam to spy on his roommate Tyler Clementi in an intimate encounter with another man. Clementi would later commit suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge.

The case sparked a national debate over bullying and many believed the passage of New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights, believed to be one of the toughest anti-bullying laws in the nation, was in response to Tyler Clementi's suicide. In fact, the legislation had been in development for more than a year prior to Clementi's death. Still, the Clementi case, once again, brought the vital issue of bullying to the forefront.

### What the jury decided

It is important to note that Ravi was not charged in any way with the death of Tyler Clementi and after the verdict was read, jurors who spoke with the press stated the suicide did not factor into their decision. What did sway the jury were Ravi's own words, in the form of his interrogation video and such electronic communication as "...he would be born

in January/what a gay month" and "...I saw him making out with a dude. Yay!" and one text message sent to a friend the day before Clementi's suicide, "Keep the gays away."

After 13 days of testimony, the jury deliberated for 13 hours over three days. The hardest charge for the jury to decide was the one of bias intimidation, but one juror said once the law was explained to them, it was clear.

Deborah Cummis Sandlaufer, a former New Jersey deputy attorney general, who [>continued on page 6](#)

## Eliminating the N-Word in *Huckleberry Finn*—Racial Sensitivity or Censorship?

by Phyllis Raybin Emert

**Should classic literature be changed to make the work more acceptable to a wider audience or is that censorship? What if only one word is changed? Does it make a difference? What if the classic work is Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and the one word is the n-word?**

In February 2011, NewSouth Books of Montgomery, Alabama, published a new edition of Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, which were printed together in one volume, as Twain had originally envisioned them. The new edition was edited by Dr. Alan Gribben, a Twain scholar and English professor at Auburn University.

At Dr. Gribben's urging, NewSouth Books eliminated two racial slurs that have often led to *Huckleberry Finn* being banned in the curriculum of numerous school districts over the last few decades. The NewSouth edition of these American classics replaced the "n-word," which appeared four times in *Tom Sawyer* and 219 times in *Huckleberry Finn*, with the [>continued on page 4](#)

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## Fear Propels Religious Attacks

by Cheryl Baisden

**A guarantee of religious freedom was what compelled the Pilgrims to risk their lives to cross the Atlantic Ocean and settle along the inhospitable Massachusetts coast in 1620. And yet it didn't take long for these new inhabitants of America to begin railing against individuals with different religious views and practices. Failing to follow the Puritan way of life could leave you condemned to a dark, dank prison cell; sentenced to a painful and public punishment clamped in the town square's stockade; or banished from the village altogether.**

In those early days of America's settlement, religious and civil law were one and the same. In fact, each community enforced its own laws, based on the dictates of their church leaders. With the passage of the U.S. Constitution, religious freedom became a right guaranteed to all citizens, explains Grayson Barber, a New Jersey attorney whose practice focuses on individual rights issues.

"The First Amendment says 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...,'" Barber says. "Notice that there are two main provisions, the establishment clause and the free exercise clause. The first makes the United States very unusual. Unlike most countries, the U.S. has no official or 'established' church. The free exercise clause provides that in the U.S. we are free to pray wherever and whenever we want, and the government cannot force us to participate in religious activities we disagree with. As a result, the U.S. is the best place in the world to be religious. You can practice any religion you want."

### One religion singled out

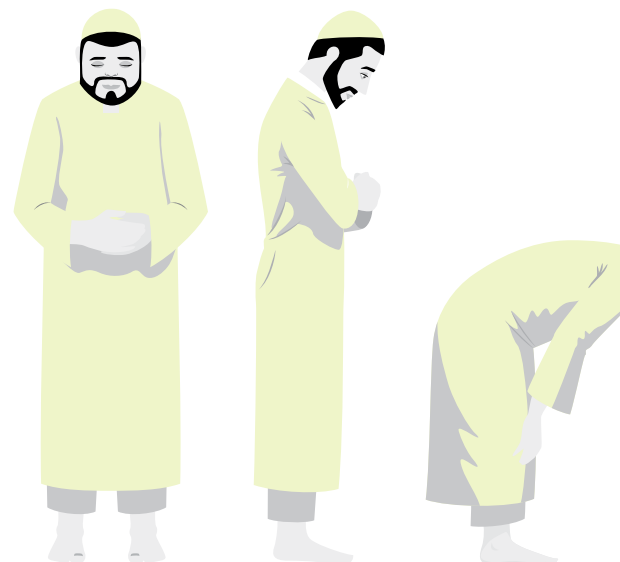
In the past few years, however, several states have passed or are considering legislation that would restrict the way followers of one specific religion practice their faith. The legislative movement was launched following

a 2010 family court ruling involving a Moroccan couple in New Jersey, where a Hudson County judge denied a wife a restraining order against her husband because he claimed his alleged sexual assaults on his wife were justified under Islamic religious law, known as sharia law. The ruling was later overturned by the appellate court, which found that the original decision in the case of *S.D. v. M.J.R.* was based on a misunderstanding of sharia law and its place in the court system. But by then, anti-Islamic groups like the Society of Americans for National Existence were strongly pushing lawmakers around the country for a ban on sharia law.

### What is sharia law?

For followers of just about any religion there are certain rules that apply to their faith, from kosher laws among Jewish people to the disapproval of divorce among Catholics. In the same way, sharia is the law that governs certain aspects of everyday life for Muslims.

In an interview with *Salon*, Abed Awad, a New Jersey attorney who regularly handles Islamic law cases and is an adjunct professor at Rutgers Law School—Newark, explains that sharia is based on the Quran, which is the Muslim Holy Scripture, much like the New Testament is for Catholics and the Old Testament is for Jewish people.



Just like the religious laws in those faiths, sharia focuses on the ways and times followers pray and observe their faith, as well as rules regarding marriage, divorce, child rearing, business dealings and estate matters. These religious laws help followers live within the guidelines of their religion, but don't take the place of the civil and criminal laws applied by our courts. Awad points out that the appellate ruling in the New Jersey case of *S.D. v. M.J.R.* was actually "consistent with Islamic law, which prohibits spousal abuse."

While most people have some familiarity with Jewish and Catholic religious laws because they have been exposed to them for so many years in American culture, sharia is still unfamiliar to many. With an estimated eight million Americans now practicing Islam, sharia is becoming more visible, according to Awad.

"Islam is a major world religion," explains Barber, "but largely unfamiliar in the U.S. Fear of the unknown is probably lurking behind the hostility to sharia. Of course the shadow of 9/11 is behind much of this, as the hijackers claimed to be Muslim. As we become more familiar with Islam, we will learn that every large group is comprised of a wide variety of people.... Apart from a radical criminal element, Muslims are peaceful, law-abiding people with the same variety of personalities and characteristics you would find in any other population."

**The movement against sharia** The first state to propose legislation against sharia law was Oklahoma, where in November 2010, 70 percent of voters approved an amendment to the state

constitution dictating that the Oklahoma courts "shall not consider international law or sharia law" when making judicial decisions.

Oklahoma State Representative Rex Duncan, one of the bill's two sponsors, told CNN before the proposal received voter approval, that part of the legislation's purpose was to ban religious forms of arbitration. "Parties would come to the courts and say we want to be bound by Islamic law and then ask the courts to enforce those agreements," he said. "That is a backdoor way to get sharia law into courts. There...have been some efforts, I believe, to explore bringing that to America, and it's dangerous."

But as Barber explains, religious laws have always been taken into account in arbitration and other matters, if both parties have chosen at one time or another to abide by those rules. A legal dispute involving a business that was established using the rules of Jewish law or a marriage agreement established under sharia law, for example, would have to be evaluated with an understanding of those rules before a proper ruling could be made.

In an op-ed for *The Los Angeles Times*, Michael Helfand, a professor of law at Pepperdine University and associate director of its Glazer Institute for Jewish Studies, wrote, "Legislation banning religious arbitration is deeply misguided. The decisions of religious tribunals are unenforceable unless they comply with public policy. In the end, allowing state and federal courts to 'consider' the findings of religious tribunals for the purposes of 'confirmation' doesn't violate cherished religious freedoms, it enhances them." Helfand goes on to write, "Laws like Oklahoma's 'Save our State' amendment **pander** to unfounded fears. Instead of saving the nation, they merely add to its problems."

Barber agrees, "Sharia presents no threat whatsoever to the laws of any state. In my opinion, efforts to ban

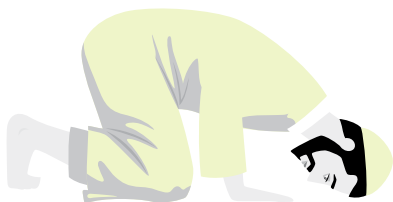
sharia constitute an official expression of hostility toward Islam. If a state were to ban kosher laws or Roman Catholic canon law it would be taken as an effort to disfavor Judaism or Catholicism," she said. "In the U.S., all religions (including non-religion) must be treated the same by the government. To single out one religion, like Islam, is probably unconstitutional."

### Court weighs in

That is exactly what a federal appeals court declared in connection with the Oklahoma ban on sharia. In January 2012, the appeals court upheld an injunction preventing the law from going into effect until a lawsuit brought by the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is resolved. CAIR contends the law violates the First Amendment establishment and free-exercise clauses. The three-member appeals panel agreed.

"The proposed amendment discriminates among religions. The Oklahoma amendment specifically names the target of its discrimination. The only religious law mentioned in the amendment is sharia law," the 37-page ruling said. Ballot supporters "do not identify any actual problem the challenged amendment seeks to solve. Indeed, they admitted at the preliminary injunction hearing that they did not know of even a single instance where an Oklahoma court had applied sharia law or used the legal precepts of other nations or cultures, let alone that such applications or uses had resulted in concrete problems in Oklahoma."

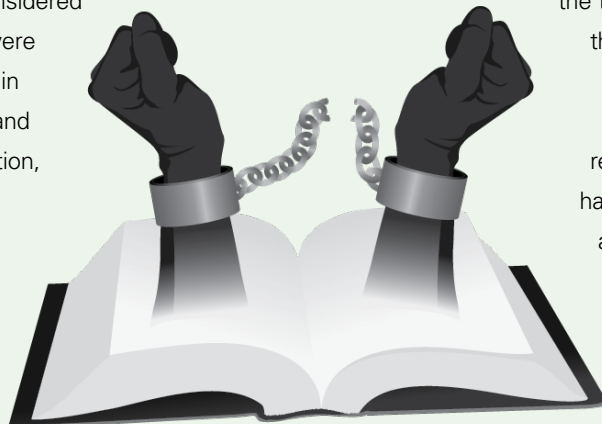
Until the Oklahoma case is resolved, legislative measures against sharia law in at least 13 other states remain on hold. Among them is a bill in Tennessee that would make any adherence to sharia law, which includes religious practices like prayers and rituals such as feet washing, a felony as an act of **treason**, punishable by up to 15 years in prison. "The threat from sharia-based jihad and terrorism presents a real and present **>continued on page 7**



## Racial Sensitivity or Censorship *continued from page 1*

word “slave.” In addition, the word “Indian” replaced “Injun.” NewSouth Books and Dr. Gribben are hopeful that this Twain volume will be placed back in the school curriculum and read widely by students and teachers, who otherwise would not have them available because of their objectionable content.

This new edition of Mark Twain’s classics unleashed a controversy dealing with political correctness and whether publishers should edit an author’s original work. The works can be legally changed because they are considered to be in the “public domain.” Both were published before 1923, *Tom Sawyer* in 1876 and *Huckleberry Finn* in 1885, and are no longer under copyright protection, meaning they may be used freely [and in this case changed] without permission. So, should classics be edited to make them less offensive? Or, is the offensiveness what



should drive classroom discussions on racism in the 19th century and the lingering effects of racism today?

In his introduction to the new edition, Dr. Gribben explained why he edited the new version of the Twain books. “Race matters in these books,” he wrote. “It’s a matter of how you express that in the 21st century...Unquestionably both novels can be enjoyed just as deeply and authentically if readers are not obliged to confront the n-word on so many pages...Although the text loses some of the caustic sting that the n-word carries, that price seems small compared to the revolting effect that the more offensive word has on contemporary readers.” Dr. Gribben noted that the n-word had become too hurtful for many students and prevented pupils and general readers to “appreciate and enjoy all the book has to offer.”

## Scholars and Authors Weigh in on Huck Finn

In Room for Debate, a regular feature on the Opinion Page of *The New York Times*, several authors and scholars were asked “Do Word Changes Alter *Huckleberry Finn*?” Below are excerpts from some of those responses.

*“If some teachers have the audacity to believe that Mark Twain’s work is still meaningful, even absent the words ‘nigger’ and ‘injun,’ more power to them. If other teachers think keeping those epithets in is worth the pain they will cause students of color, I understand that too. This isn’t about censorship, it’s about choice. Either choice will have unfortunate consequences.”*

— Paul Butler, former federal prosecutor and associate dean at George Washington University

*“...it is precisely this abominable history—that of racism, slavery, and the violation and dehumanization of black people over centuries—which must be made clear to schoolchildren, high school students, and university students—to everyone—if they and we are to become responsible, clear-thinking citizens who will ultimately be unafraid of confronting and grappling with the truth of this country’s bitter, byzantine history.”*

— Thomas Glave, professor at Binghamton University

*“School kids should be able, at their teacher’s discretion, to read modified editions of classic works. We are, after all, talking about young people, and about many educators who would feel more comfortable teaching Mark Twain’s adventure stories with the NewSouth text. ...In today’s wasteland of ‘gaming’ and other electronic distractions, I applaud any effort to perpetuate the reading and enjoyment of great fiction.”*

— James Duban, professor at the University of North Texas

*“We all wish our literature was less riddled with racism, not to say anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, and other less than noble manifestations of the human spirit. In the end, though, it is up to the reader to bring context to the page. The reader’s failure is not remedied by changes to the text; it is remedied by education and its happy result, perspective.”*

— Gish Jen, author of *World and Town*

*“Cleaning up literature is never a solution. We should inform children and prepare them to make their own decisions about information.”*

— Timothy Jay, professor at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

## Origin of the n-word

It is just a single word, but it has been described as one of the most offensive in the English language, proving that words, in fact, do hurt, which is why many people use the term “n-word” instead of the actual word.

In his article, *A Note on the Word “Nigger,”* published in *Harper’s Weekly*, Professor Randall Kennedy of Harvard University, wrote, “Leading etymologists [those that research word origins] believe that ‘nigger’ was derived from an English word ‘neger’ that was itself derived from ‘Negro,’ the Spanish word for black. Precisely when the term became a slur is unknown. We do know, however, that by early in the 19th century ‘nigger’ had already become a familiar insult.”

Radio host Brandt Williams of Minnesota Public Radio spoke to Professor Robin Lakoff, a sociolinguistics professor at the University of California-Berkeley, for a piece he did on the n-word in 2004. Professor Lakoff told Williams she believes the word is “a deliberate mispronunciation of the word ‘negro,’” which gives the word negative power.

“There’s something about deliberately, knowingly mispronouncing someone’s name,” said Professor Lakoff. “That conveys, ‘I don’t even care what your name is, you have so little power you matter to me so little.’ So, it wasn’t just the phonetics of the word, it was all that it conveyed about the power of one person to not even care about the other person.”

## Always controversial

This is not the first controversy surrounding *Huckleberry Finn*. In fact, according to the American Library Association (ALA), it is one of the most banned and/or challenged books of all time, appearing at number four on ALA’s list in the 1990s and falling to number 14 for the years 2000 to 2009. According to Facts on Files News Service, accusations of racism against *Huckleberry Finn* began in the 1950s with the emergence of the civil rights movement in the South and New York City schools banned the book from all elementary and junior high libraries because it was “racially offensive.”

*>continued on page 8*

*“The word ‘nigger’ should sting. It’s part of the bloodied soil of America, yet another legacy of slavery still with us a hundred-plus years after the fact. ...Removing that single word from the text, while sparing those too sensitive to get past it, relieves the reader of doing any heavy lifting. ...These books—and others like them—should not be retrofitted to make modern readers comfortable. Modern readers are already too comfortable. Lazy, even. If the word ‘nigger’ keeps one from reading Huck Finn, then one lacks the critical skills to appreciate all the book has to offer.”*

— David Matthews, author of *Ace of Spades*, a memoir, *Kicking Ass and Saving Souls: A True Story of a Life Over the Line*

*“Knowing the history of censorship in our libraries, knowing how often Huck Finn has been removed from a school’s curriculum because of the word ‘nigger,’ I’m almost inclined to say that if it takes censorship to insure that the book is still widely read, it might not be the worst thing. Let students experience Huck’s consciousness and discover the cruel realities that his culture took for granted. After that they may be inspired to read what Mark Twain actually wrote.”*

— Francine Prose, author of *Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife*

*“What would [Frederick] Douglass think of a man who closed his book because of that word? ‘I’ve been torn from my mother, beaten regularly, and I’ve witnessed rape and murder,’ he might say. ‘You can’t take the ordinary label of the day?’ ...Stop being so fussy. Political correctness is bad tutelage, validating thin skins and selective inquiries. The more students read sanitized materials in high school, the more they enter college inclined to dispel things they don’t want to hear.”*

— Mark Bauerlein, professor at Emory University, fellow at the James Madison Program at Princeton University

*“Like it or not, and you know, that’s another conversation, the word is part of our public and private **lexicon**, and the notion that contemporary readers of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* are surprised or offended by the word seems questionable. Yet even if they are, one of the intentions of art is to provoke and unsettle. Surely, Mark Twain did not intend the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to have the equivalent effect on readers of Margaret Wise Brown’s lovely and lulling children’s classic, *Goodnight Moon*.”*

— Jill Nelson, author of *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience* and *Finding Martha’s Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island*

## Verdict Rendered *continued from page 1*

prosecuted the state's first bias-intimidation case in 2003, told the *New Jersey Law Journal*, the question that needs to be asked in bias-intimidation prosecutions is, "But for the victim's membership in the protected class, would this crime have occurred?"

Sandlauer said, "In this situation, if the victim had been straight and [had] a tryst with a female, this would not have happened." She contends that Ravi shared that video "solely because Clementi was gay."

### Youth not a defense

Ravi's lawyers attempted to portray him as a young, inexperienced kid who did not know any better, but had no ill will toward Clementi. The jury was not swayed by this argument. The prosecutor in the case called Ravi's actions "mean-spirited, malicious and criminal."

"This verdict sends the important message that a 'kids will be kids' defense is no excuse to bully another student," Steven Goldstein, the chairman of Garden State Equality, an LGBT civil rights group, told *The New York Times*. This excuse is an often-heard refrain when dealing with bullying situations in school and the Ravi verdict emphatically dispelled this notion.

"It's a watershed moment, because it says youth is not immunity," former federal prosecutor Marcellus A. McRae told *The New York Times*.

Ravi never took the stand in his own defense; however, he did grant an interview to *20/20*, which ran a week after his conviction, effectively allowing him to testify without being cross-examined.

### Society shares blame

Unlikely supporters of Ravi include some gay activists, who believe that by using him as a scapegoat, society is losing the larger message of the case.

Dan Savage, gay activist and creator of the It Gets Better Project, voiced his reservations about the Ravi verdict in the *20/20* special. "We don't know what ultimately broke Tyler," Savage said. "We need to look at other events in his life to prevent more cases like this from happening." Savage contends that blaming Ravi is not helpful when it "is really our entire culture at fault."

In an article for *Slate Magazine*, J. Brian Lowder,

who writes on gay issues, stated, "The impulse to paint Ravi as some kind of unprecedented hate-driven monster is a cop-out, considering that his brand of homophobic posturing is pervasive in our culture. Exiling him to prison won't absolve us of our complicity in that fact, and it won't heal the lack of empathy."

Etzion Neuer, acting New Jersey regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, agrees. As a guest columnist for the *Star-Ledger*, Neuer wrote of the need to educate youth in the wake of the Tyler Clementi suicide and Ravi verdict. "While the verdict offered some measure of justice for Clementi and sends a powerful message to those who would engage in cyberbullying that there will be serious legal consequences for such behavior, the systemic problems of prejudice and bullying are best addressed in society through comprehensive anti-bias education."

Neuer asks in his column whether Ravi and his peers ever learned about the history of LGBT persecution and discrimination in school and maintains that if they had, "they might have thought twice about using such denigrating language."

### Too harsh?

There has been some debate since the verdict over whether it was appropriate to elevate the charges against Ravi to a hate crime. In *The New York Times* Room for Debate section of its Opinion Page, several legal scholars and activists responded to the question of whether hate crime laws protect against bigotry or are overly **punitive**?

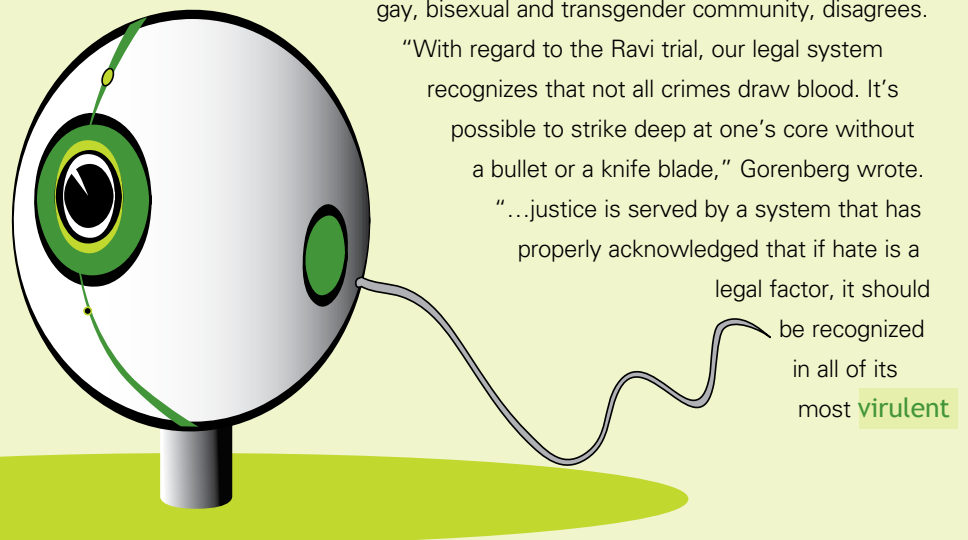
Wade Henderson, president of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, wrote, "Although the tragic case of Tyler Clementi clearly demonstrates the need for greater awareness of cyberbullying and digital privacy and safety, it does not present the typical hate crime paradigm."

Hayley Gorenberg, deputy legal director of Lambda Legal, a civil rights organization dedicated to those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, disagrees.

"With regard to the Ravi trial, our legal system recognizes that not all crimes draw blood. It's possible to strike deep at one's core without a bullet or a knife blade," Gorenberg wrote.

"...justice is served by a system that has properly acknowledged that if hate is a

legal factor, it should be recognized in all of its most **virulent**



forms, including those leveled at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people for who they are.”

### What are the lessons?

Chris Cuomo, anchor of *20/20*, interviewed Steven Goldstein for the special on the Ravi verdict. When Cuomo, who has been sympathetic to Ravi in his coverage of the trial, inferred that perhaps this was the “Right message. Wrong case,” Goldstein emphatically said, “Sorry. Right message. Right case. Dharun Ravi was a bully. He did make Tyler Clementi’s life horrible.” Goldstein also pointed out that the case got parents around the country to talk to their kids about bullying and that is the lesson that the case will have for society. “No parent wants to see his kid be the next Dharun Ravi and spend time in jail,” Goldstein said. He also stated in the interview that the judge should show leniency to Ravi and believes he should only serve one or two years in prison.

Ravi, who turned down a plea bargain where he would have received probation and 600 hours of community service in exchange for pleading guilty, now could face up to 10 years in prison on the most serious charge of bias intimidation. While prosecutors had been willing to help Ravi avoid deportation to his native India with the plea bargain, he now faces that possibility as well. Ravi’s lawyers have already begun work on his appeal. At press time, he was scheduled to be sentenced May 21.

Perhaps the lesson to take away from this case can be summed up by Tyler’s father, Joe Clementi. In a press statement read after the verdict was rendered, he addressed his comments to middle and high school students. “You’re going to meet a lot of people in your lifetime,” Clementi said. “Some of these people you may not like. Just because you don’t like them doesn’t mean you have to work against them. When you see somebody doing something wrong, tell them: ‘That’s not right. Stop it.’ The change you want to see in the world begins with you.” ■

## Fear *continued from page 3*

danger to the lawful governance of this state and to the peaceful enjoyment of citizenship by the residents of this state,” the bill says.

A proposed bill in New Jersey, which did not specifically mention sharia law but instead sought to ban all religious law from being considered in the courts, never made it to a vote in the Legislature, and in March was withdrawn by its sponsor. The decision to remove the proposal from consideration followed meetings between Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi and Muslim community members who had voiced opposition to the bill.

### Legal experts agree

Religious law experts view laws like the one proposed in New Jersey as unnecessary as well as potentially unconstitutional. They all agree that religious law, whether Jewish law, canon law or sharia law, would never override the U.S. Constitution. Although religions may spell out the rules they expect members

to abide by, these remain separate from the federal, state and even local laws that govern our lives.

As Charles Haynes, a senior scholar with the First Amendment Center, explains, religious laws are a set of voluntary rules a person of a specific faith is asked to follow, while **secular** (non-religion-based) laws must be followed by everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs. “Civil law and the Constitution of the United States trumps religious law,” he told *The Tennessean*. “The government can’t label religious laws as wrong or treasonous or evil. The government may not take sides in religion. It may not say what is a good religion or a bad religion.”

In his *Salon* interview, Awad said, “In the past 12 years as an attorney, I have handled many cases with an Islamic law component. U.S. courts are regularly required to interpret foreign law—including Islamic law—to everything from the recognition of foreign divorces and custody decrees to the validity of marriages,

the enforcement of money judgments, probating an Islamic will and the damages element in a commercial dispute. Sharia is relevant in a U.S. court either as a foreign law or as a source of information to understand the expectations of the parties in a dispute.”

As Mark Stern, a religion law expert at the American Jewish Committee, notes in an NPR interview, the courts are obligated to honor agreements made under religious law, as long as they do not violate the rights of citizens, for example, the right to an attorney, issues related to evidence and court procedure, acceptable punishments, and safety and child protection issues.

“...[J]ust as the Catholic Church didn’t take over law when large numbers of Catholics [came] to the U.S., and Jewish law doesn’t govern Jewish citizens,” Stern said, “sharia law is not going to govern, except voluntarily, the rights and responsibilities of Muslim citizens of the United States.” ■

## Racial Sensitivity or Censorship *continued from page 5*

In the 1980s, John Wallace, a staff member at, ironically, Mark Twain Intermediate School in Virginia, published his own edited edition of *Huckleberry Finn*. Wallace called Twain's original text "poison, anti-American, and the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written." In his revised edition, Wallace eliminated, not only the n-word, but also the word "hell" and all references to slaves and slavery.

With the 1998 Arizona lawsuit, *Monteiro v. Tempe Union High School District*, an African American mother sought to have *Huckleberry Finn*, along with a William Faulkner short story, removed from the required-reading list at her daughter's high school, claiming the "assignment created a racially hostile environment." A federal appeals court ruled, "it is simply not the role of courts to serve as literary censors or to make judgments as to whether reading particular books does students more harm than good."

### Whitewashing racism?

Randall Williams, co-owner of NewSouth Books, contended in a *60-Minutes* interview that his publishing company was simply offering an alternative to teachers that would like to teach *Huckleberry Finn*, but were uncomfortable with its language, specifically the n-word.

The n-word may be offensive or uncomfortable for some people, but it was the reality in the time about which Twain wrote. Opponents of the new edition contend that changing even one word can change the overall meaning of a work.

Professor David Bradley, an African American author who teaches at the University of Oregon, believes that *Huckleberry Finn* is "one of the greatest books in American literature" and argues that the word slave is not interchangeable with the n-word.

"'Slave' is a condition. I mean, anybody can be a slave. And it's nothing for anybody to be ashamed of," Professor Bradley told *60-Minutes*. "But 'nigger' has to do with shame. 'Nigger' has to do with calling somebody something. 'Nigger' was what made slavery possible."

One student that was interviewed for the *60-Minutes* piece said, "If you replace that word with the word slave, of course people would be less bothered, but I think Twain wants people to be a little bit bothered."

Still, as an African American student it may be a different experience. Another student interviewed by *60-Minutes*, who is African American, admitted feeling uncomfortable when the word was read out loud. Writer Allison Samuels in her article *Rethinking Race in the Classroom*, published in *Newsweek*, quoted a young African American mother from Florida who said, "I'm not really interested in my sons [ages 4 and 6] learning that black men were being called 'n-r' 100 years ago because they're likely to get called it now."

Although the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) had criticized Twain's books in the past, by the 1980s the organization's view had changed. "You don't ban Mark Twain—you explain Mark Twain," the NAACP now argues. "To study an idea is not necessarily to endorse the idea. Mark Twain's satirical novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, accurately portrays a time in history...and one of its evils, slavery."

In his essay, Professor Kennedy wrote, "Cultural literacy requires detailed knowledge about the oppression of racial minorities. A clear understanding of 'nigger' is part of this knowledge. To paper over that term or to constantly obscure it by euphemism [rewording] is to flinch from coming to grips with racial prejudice that continues to haunt the American social landscape."

### Is it worth it?

According to *Facts on Files News Services*, supporters of editing Mark Twain believe "it is worth removing one word to make the novel accessible to a new generation of readers who otherwise would not be exposed to it." Supporters generally conclude that it is better that the students read the book, even if it is a revised edition, than never to have read it at all. Overall, however, according to a *Facts on File News Services* opinion poll, 77 percent of those responding opposed the revision of *Huckleberry Finn* and believed that the n-word should remain in the text. ■

## Glossary

**byzantine** — devious or underhanded. **epithet** — a word or phrase meant to demean someone. **lexicon** — a word list pertaining to a particular subject. **pander** — to seek to satisfy someone's uninformed desires. **punitive** — inflicting punishment. **secular** — non-religious. **treason** — the offense of attempting to overthrow the government. **virulent** — extremely harmful or deadly.