Negative Critiques of the novel:

San Francisco Evening Bulletin, March 14, 1885
“It is an amusing story, if such scrap-work can be called a story. The author rarely fails when he sets out to tickle the ribs of young or old. [...] The funny book will always be read in this world of dryness and dearth. [...] Many fastidious people hide their scruple, because they want to be amused.”

Also March 5, 1885
“Huckleberry Finn is, in a restricted sense, a typical character. Yet the type is not altogether desirable, nor is it one that most parents who want a future full of promise for their young folks would select without some hesitation. [...] It must also be admitted that not a little of the ‘assisted wit’ is of a more dreary sort.”

The Boston Evening Traveller, March 5, 1885
“It is little wonder that Mr. Samuel Clemens, otherwise Mark Twain, resorted to real or mock lawsuits, as may be, to restrain some real or imaginary selling of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as a means of advertising that extraordinarily senseless publication. Before the work is disposed of, Mr. Mark Twain will probably have to resort to law to compel some to sell it by any sort of bribery or corruption. It is doubtful if the edition could be disposed of to people of average intellect at anything short of the point of a bayonet. This publication rejoices in two frontispieces, of which the one is supposed to be a faithful portrait of Huckleberry Finn, and the other an engraving of the classic features of Mr. Mark Twain as seen in the bust made by Karl Gerhardt. The taste of this gratuitous presentation is as bad as is the book itself, which is an extreme statement. Mr. Clemens has contributed to some humorous literature that will hold its place, but his Huckleberry Finn appears to be singularly flat, stale, and unprofitable. The book is sold by subscription.

The San Francisco Daily Examiner, March 9, 1885
“As to the work itself, it is well described by the author, as being without a motive, a moral, or a plot.”

The Boston Evening Transcript, March 17, 1885
“Huckleberry Finn Barred Out. The Concord, Mass. Public Library committee has decided to exclude Mark Twain’s latest book from the library. One member of the committee says that, while he does not want to call it immoral, he thinks it contains but little humor, and that of a very coarse type. He regards it as the veriest trash. The librarian and other members of the committee entertain similar view, characterizing it as rough, coarse, and inelegant, dealing with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to the intelligent, respectable people.”

The Boston Herald, Pre-publication review of select chapters on Feb. 1, 1885
“It is pitched in but one key, and that is the key of a vulgar and abhorrent life.”
“Mark Twain makes the hero of his new book tell the story in what is supposed to be a boy’s dialect. On the very second page this ‘low-down,’ uneducated urchin is made to say ‘commence,’ where any boy, especially if he hadn’t been to school, would have said ‘begin.’ The less education, the more Anglo-Saxon, and generally, the better grammar. Mark ought to know this.”

“Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn had a certain relishable flavor when mixed up with the miscellaneous assortment of magazine literature; but in a book form, and covering more than 350 pages, they are wearisome and labored. It would be about as easy to read through a jest book, as to keep up one’s interest in the monotonous humor and the dialectic variations of Huck Finn’s narrative. Here and there are spatches of Mark Twain’s best work, which could be read over and over again, and yet bring each time an outburst of laughter; but one cannot have the book long in his hands without being tempted to regret that the author should so often have laid himself open to the charge of coarseness and bad taste. The illustrations are admirable in their way. As to the general character of the book, it may be sufficient to remind the reader of the author’s notice, that “all persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.”

“The sage censors of the Concord public library have unanimously reached the conclusion that Huckleberry Finn is not the sort of reading matter for the knowledge seekers of a town which boasts the only ‘summer school of philosophy’ in the universe. They have accordingly banished it from the shelves of that institution. The reasons which moved them to this action are weighty and to the point. One of the Library Committee, while not prepared to hazard the opinion that the book is ‘absolutely immoral in its tone,’ does not hesitate to declare that to him ‘it seems to contain but very little humor.’ Another committeeman perused the volume with great care and discovered that it was ‘couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect’ and that ‘all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of inelegant expressions.’ The third member voted the book ‘flippant’ and ‘trash of the veriest sort.’ They all united in the verdict that ‘it deals with a series of experiences that are certainly not elevating,’ and voted that it could not be tolerated in the public library. The committee very considerately explained the mystery of how this unworthy production happened to find its way into the collection under their charge. ‘Knowing the author’s reputation,’ and presumably being familiar with the philosophic pages of The Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Jumping Frog, & c., they deemed it ‘totally unnecessary to make a very careful examination of Huckleberry Finn before sending it to Concord.’ But the learned librarian, probably seizing upon it on its arrival to peruse it with eager zest, ‘was not particularly pleased with it.’ He promptly communicated his feeling to the committee, who at once proceeded to enter upon a critical reading of the suspected volume, with the results that are now laid before the public.”
Positive critiques of the novel:

*The San Francisco Chronicle*, March 29, 1885

“The action of the Concord Public Library in excluding Mark Twain’s new book, *Huckleberry Finn*, on the ground that it is flippant and irreverent, is absurd. The managers of this library evidently look on this book as written for boys, whereas we venture to say that upon nine boys out of ten much of the humor, as well as the pathos, would be lost. The more general knowledge one has the better he is fitted to appreciate this book, which a remarkably careful sketch of life along the Mississippi River forty years ago. If one has lived in the South, he can appreciate the art with which the dialect is managed, exactly as he can in Joel Chandler Harris’ *Uncle Remus*, or in Craddock’s Tennessee mountain tales. If he has not, he will be forced to take it on trust. so with the characters. They are peculiarly Southern, but only those who have lived south of Mason and Dixon’s line can thoroughly appreciate the fidelity to nature with which they have been drawn. When the boy under 16 reads a book, he wants adventure and plenty of it. He doesn’t want any moral thrown in or even implied; the elaborate jokes worked out with so much art, which are Mark Twain’s specialty, are wasted upon him. All the character sketches go for nothing with this eager reader, who demands a story. To be sure, here is a story in the astonishing series of adventures of ‘Huck’ Finn and the runaway negro, but it is so overlaid with this embroidery of jokes, sketches, and sarcasm, that the story really forms the least part of it. Take the whole latter part of the book, which is given up to the ludicrous attempt to free the negro, Jim, from this imprisonment in the Arkansas plantation. This is a well-sustained travesty of the escapes of great criminals, and can only be fully appreciated by one who has read what it ridicules. Running all through the book is the sharpest satire on the ante-bellum estimate of the slave. *Huckleberry Finn*, the son of a worthless, drunken, poor white, is troubled with many qualms of conscience because of the part he is taking in helping the negro to gain his freedom. This has been called exaggerated by some critics, but there is nothing truer in the book. The same may be said of the ghastly feud between the Shepperdsons and the Grangerfords, which is described with so much dramatic force. The latter depicts a phase of Southern life which the advance in civilization has had not power to alter. The telegraphic reports of periodical affrays in the South and Southwest show that the medieval blood-feud is still in force there and receives the countenance of the best society.

These are only a few instances which go to show this is not a boy’s book and does not fall under the head of flippant and worthless literature. Of it humor, nothing need be said. There is a large class of people who are impervious to a joke, even when told them by as consummate a master of the art of narration as Mark Twain. For all these the book will be dreary, flat, stale, and unprofitable. But for the great body of readers it will furnish much hearty, wholesome laughter. In regard to the charge of grossness, there is not a line in it which cannot be read by a pure-minded woman. There are too few books of genuine humor produced nowadays to have one of them stigmatized as unfit for general reading, and it is on this ground only that the absurd attack of these New England library authorities is worth notice.”
The Hartford Courant, March 18, 1885
“The public library committee of Concord, Mass., have given Mark Twain’s new book, Huckleberry Finn, a wide advertisement by refusing to allow it to be put on their shelves. The result will be that people in Concord will buy the book instead of drawing it from the library, and those who do will smile not only at the book but at the idea that it is not for respectable people.”

Athenaeum, Dec. 27, 1884
“For some time past Mr. Clemens has been carried away by the ambition of seriousness and fine writing. In Huckleberry Finn he returns to his right mind, and is again the Mark Twain of old time. It is such a book as he, and he only, could have written. It is meant for boys; but there are few men (we should hope) who, once they take it up, will not delight in it. It forms a companion or sequel, to Tom Sawyer. Huckleberry Finn, as everybody knows, is one of Tom’s closest friends; and the present volume is a record of the adventures which befell him soon after the event which made him a person of property and brought Tom Sawyer’s story to a becoming conclusion. They are of the most surprising and delightful kind imaginable, and in the course of them we fall in with a number of types of character of singular freshness and novelty, besides being schooled in half a dozen extraordinary dialects—the Pike County dialect in all its forms, the dialect of the Missouri negro, and ‘the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect,’ to wit. Huckleberry, it may be noted, is stolen by his disreputable father, to escape from whom he contrives and appearance of robbery and murder in the paternal hut, goes off in a canoe, watches from afar the townsfolk hunting for his dead body, and encounters a runaway negro—Miss Watson’s Jim—an old particular friend of Tom Sawyer and himself. With Jim he goes south down the river, and is the hero of such scrapes and experiences as make your mouth water (if you have ever been a boy) to read them. We do not purpose to tell a single one; it would unfair to author and reader alike. We shall content ourselves with repeating that the book is Mark Twain at his best, and remarking that Jim and Huckleberry are real creations, and the worthy peers of the illustrious Tom Sawyer.”