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Evans, Chariene Taylor, Ph.D.
Rice University, 1988
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IN DEFENSE OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN: ANTI-RACISM MOTIFS IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND A REVIEW OF RACIAL CRITICISM IN TWAIN'S WORK

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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May, 1988
ABSTRACT

IN DEFENSE OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN: ANTI-RACISM MOTIFS
IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND A REVIEW OF RACIAL
CRITICISM OF TWAIN'S WORK

Charlene Taylor Evans

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has provoked controversy and invited censorship over its one hundred year history. Where once its detractors criticized its themes of violence and rebellion and protested the moral laxity in the language and characters of the novel, in the twentieth century the controversy has evolved into an issue of race.

This study examines the history of the censorship controversy and reviews the twentieth century charges of racism. The contemporary debate on Huckleberry Finn centers around a literal interpretation of the text. Since Twain's treatment of race in the novel is presented through irony, it is crucial that the reader understands the author's ironic intent. An intensive evaluation of Twain, the racial issue, and his novel in light of the now accessible textual and biographical materials reveals his use of anti-racism motifs. Twain creates characters that are imprisoned by their social milieu. Huck, Jim, and the society as a whole are trapped within the confines of the existing slave system and the other entrapments of culture, most notably--language. Huckleberry Finn is a dialectic in that Twain
uses the language against itself. Ironically, it is that very language that so upsets Black readers that the very essence of the true message of the novel is lost.

The multi-faceted nature of Twain's subject and his literary technique necessitate the reader's full awareness of Twain's use of irony, language, and point of view in Huckleberry Finn. The figure of Huck as a narrator is the revealing of a divided self, and his developing consciousness and innocence are linked with the social satire. Twain's use of language and point of view creates a double vision of race. Huck's intuitive self is juxtaposed to the conflicting internalized mores of the society, his acquired or "programmed" conscience. This duality represents the double consciousness that permeated nineteenth century America.

A textual analysis of Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'Nhead Wilson indicates a consistency in Twain's treatment of race, and both of these works suggest that social fictions create unalterable realities. The power of social fictions and the fear of isolation and social ostracism are recurring themes which illuminate the problem of race and morality, thus revealing the complexity of the racial situation in America.
DEDICATION

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
JOHN TAYLOR
1901-1983
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INTRODUCTION

Beginning with its publication in 1885, Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn has a history of censorship, and one hundred and three years later there is still disagreement about its appropriateness for various reading audiences. Initially, the controversy was based on Huckleberry Finn's suitability for "respectable," "intelligent" people; it was a break from "the genteel tradition" that characterized the literary mode of the nineteenth century. In March, 1885, the Concord Public Library Committee, in its protestations against the novel, labelled it "veriest trash" and banned the work from its collections. The exclusion of Huckleberry Finn by this committee was the beginning of a series of denunciations, particularly from New England, but from the West as well. The book was not without a few contemporary defenders, notably Thomas Sargent Perry, who commended its humor and invention, and Joel Chandler Harris, who endorsed Twain's depiction of character, but the majority of the critics claimed that it had a dangerous moral influence on the young and ignored its artistry. Only later in the 1890s and early twentieth century did modern critics sanction Huckleberry Finn's innovation and worth, and even this acceptance was not without objections. The earliest objections protested the
moral laxity in the language and characters of Huckleberry Finn as well as its themes of violence and rebellion. In the twentieth century, the controversy has evolved into an issue of race. Some critics point to an ambivalence in Twain's depiction of Blacks and are puzzled by the ending of Huckleberry Finn, in which Jim seems to be no more than a foolish stereotype. Others cite the repetitive use of the word "nigger" (over 160 times) as the basis for their charge of racism and protest that the irony in the novel is too subtle for the general reader. The Black perspective on this controversy is becoming more important since racism is the grounds for the most recent attacks on the novel. Richard Barksdale, a well known Black scholar, believes that many Americans have difficulty coping with the historical fact of slavery. Blacks would like to blot out the memory of enforced servitude and generally whites would rather take pride in America's written promises of equality and justice for all than recall the actuality of their pasts. Blacks, in particular, would have their offspring shielded from the "ignominious shame" of slavery since some children are traumatized by references to their former inferior status. Twain's novel and his use of racial designations elicit unpleasant memories for twentieth century Americans. However, it is the society that is racist in Huckleberry Finn, not Twain or the novel itself.
Specifically, through my research I propose to review the charges of racism against Huckleberry Finn and to generate a model for an illustration of its theme of race. I will survey major criticism on Twain and race and conduct an intensive evaluation of Clemens, the racial issue, and his novel in light of the now accessible textual and biographical materials, as well as recent linguistic/psychoanalytic approaches and methodologies. A detailed study of the problematic ending of Huckleberry Finn in addition to an analysis of Twain's use of language and point of view in the novel should provide materials for this paradigm that will reduce the pain and confusion that some readers experience in reading this great artifact of language. A survey of Mark Twain's other treatments of racial issues, especially Pudd'nhead Wilson, and a look at some of the works of his contemporaries and their treatment or lack of treatment will also support my study.

Most critics agree that Clemens was disturbed by the treatment of Blacks during post-Reconstruction years and that his personal anger increased after 1880. The fact that the novel was written in the 1880s about the 1840s suggests an inhibition on Twain's part as he chose to depict the issues in historical rather than contemporary terms. Twain is similar to Stephen Crane (Red Badge of Courage) in this way as both write novels that take place in an earlier era. They project certain dispositions into
the era that are contemporary for them. The intent of these works was obviously to address their own contemporaries. Both were unhappy living with the norms and mentality of the Gilded Age. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain brought up intense moral issues that were still alive; racial issues were important even after Reconstruction. Conditions for Blacks had deteriorated after the Civil War into "Jim Crowism" and many of the former anti-slavery advocates from the North hypocritically rejected the equality of the Black man and cringed at the prospect of the Black exodus from the South. There was little if any insight into Blacks, and most of the anti-slavery fiction writers had used the very same stereotypes of Blacks as the pro-slavery writers. Late nineteenth century writers such as Thomas Nelson Page had an antagonistic and condescending attitude towards Blacks. Page saw the comic aspects of Blacks and fostered the image of the contented slave. His most famous stories--"Marse Chan," "Meh Lady," and "Ole 'Stracted"--portray the allegedly congenial race relations that existed before the war. Theodore Gross in "The Negro in the Literature of Reconstruction" believes that there is an implicit racist note in all of Page's writings. Page felt that the only healthy solution to the race problems of Reconstruction was the return to the master-slave relationship which existed before the Civil War.
The Southerners insisted that the Negro problem was a Southern one and since they had more experience with Blacks, they could handle the problem more effectively. Many late nineteenth century Northern legislators agreed with this assertion for, after all, the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not a first hand presentation of slavery, but the creation of sentimentalized stereotypes based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's reading. Needless to say, all of the stereotypes were effective, and Stowe's figures were certainly to be pitied while Thomas Nelson Page and Thomas Dixon's "brute niggers" were certainly to be feared. Most of the local color or regionalist writers presented the freedman as villain or saint, and very few recognized his humanity. He was presented as a one dimensional or stock character. Joel Chandler Harris captured the humor and "animal cunning" of Blacks and contributed the most popular Black characters in American fiction (i.e., Uncle Remus), but his novel *Gabriel Tolliver* (1902) did not sympathize with Blacks who wanted immediate reconstruction after the war. Most Southerners at this time felt hatred for the Northern abolitionists and showed the corruption of their reform efforts. Sterling Brown contends that Blacks have met with as much injustice in American literature as they have with American life. Despite the commendable exceptions of Melville, Twain, Cable, and Faulkner, Brown lists "the contented slave," "brute nigger,"
"comic negro," "tragic mulatto" and "exotic primitive" as recurring Black character types. George Washington Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner treat the complex theme of miscegenation and give Blacks more humanity and individuality than any of their predecessors and contemporaries. In *The New Negro*, Alain Locke commends Stephen Crane's courage and artistry in presenting a Black man as a kind of hero in his short story, "The Monster."

Because a straightforward expose of racism would have been censored or ignored, Twain, like many Black writers, had to find an appropriate vehicle for communicating truths. Because of the patriotic spirit of this relatively new nation, all of the subversiveness of *Huckleberry Finn* had to be expressed through irony. Since the South was faced with a problem of widespread illiteracy, Twain could only have reached a certain group. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain, like Henry James, creates characters who are imprisoned by their social milieu. Huck, Jim, and the society as a whole are trapped within the confines of the existing slave system and other entrapments of culture, most notably that provided by language, and society must be recognized as coercive through language. *Huckleberry Finn* is a dialectic, in that Twain uses the language against itself. Ironically, it is in that very language that so upsets Black readers that the very essence of the true message of the novel is lost. Twain's use of Huck's
vernacular as a narrative medium constitutes a revolutionary step in literary technique, as he burlesques nineteenth century European influences on American society via his use of the debased language. Innocent readers must be aware of the exaggerations in this work, which are meant to be humorous as well as thought-provoking.

Henry Nash Smith has an interesting study of Twain's interest in social determinism. Twain affirms that morality is relative and shaped by historical forces. According to Smith in Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer, Twain had adopted an ideology of progress in which he had staked all of his hopes on history. He later discovered that this belief in progress was groundless. The "inevitable salvation of man by the course of history" seemed man's "inevitable damnation by the same power, operating as the training that perverted every member of society." Smith points to the shaping of the personality by society, a process that for Twain "embraced the cumulative social pressure he called heredity." Training threatens and often annihilates personal identity as exhibited in The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson and the switched babies or the nameless inhabitants in the river towns. This system of slavery in the United States could break anyone's spirit (white or black) and strip him of his personal identity. Huck's story is a bildungsroman in that he is initiated into the society and learns that he
is an outsider. This is in the tradition of Cooper's Natty Bumppo and Melville's Ishmael.

Initially, Huck cannot see the fallacies of his society because of his limitations with the language. Because Huck is represented as being far less sophisticated than the author and the reader, Twain gives a double perspective. Ralph Waldo Emerson and, more recently, Jacques Lacan, a French psychiatrist, make interesting assertions regarding the imprisoning power of language which one inherits as a set of cultural assumptions. Any sense of self is connected to having a name and belonging to an order. What culture dictates is assumed to be universally true and is equivalent to the conscience. Huck struggles with a heart/conscience conflict and his sense of self is limited and fragmented. This problem is associated with culture, and culture represents an internal division in a sense of ourselves which is part of Lacan's triad composed of nature, society, and culture. This internal division is inherent in Twain's protagonist.

Twain's use of point of view in Huckleberry Finn is also innovative and is one of the aspects of the novel which led Ernest Hemingway to say that all of modern literature stems from this work. Point of view is a tool for communicating some of Twain's ideas on race. He uses the naive character of Huck and Huck's point of view as ironic tools for conveying truths in the novel. Huck is
called "the vernacular hero" by Henry Nash Smith. The reader must recognize the two levels of experience in which Huck operates—the realm of the ideal and the realm of facts. He struggles to survive in a society based on lies. His helplessly rigidified use of the diction of ethics and morality reveals the legacy of his Protestant and Puritan genesis. Huck's intuitive self (realm of the ideal) is juxtaposed to the conflicting internalized mores of the society (realm of facts), his acquired or "programmed conscience." In chapter thirty-one, Huck's famous interior debate and the emotional climax of the novel, Huck reveals his training by literally abandoning himself to damnation or reprobation in Puritan terms. Huck is determined "to go to hell" rather than to betray Jim. Twain implements the use of indirect discourse and eliminates the authorial voice, thus reporting even Huck's thoughts in his own idiom. This crude vernacular evokes a powerful poetic force and indeed explores the possibilities of native American speech, much like the efforts of Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman.

In The American Vision, A. N. Kaul states that the moral energy in America, a nation liberated from old religious orthodoxy, was turning increasingly from the exploration of evil within the individual to the task of locating it in man's social environment. Mark Twain's novel criticizes numerous aspects of American society.
Huckleberry Finn is concerned not only with the institution of slavery but with a fundamental social ethic which includes but goes beyond the disapproval of slavery. Black readers would like to know a great deal more about Jim, but Huckleberry Finn is not the story of Jim. Twain's portrait of Pap Finn also leaves a great deal more to be desired as well as other characters in the novel. Twain uses the characters of Jim and Huck to embody a basic naivete and a goodness found in mankind. This is perhaps an echo of the "noble savage" motif which gives the reader a sense of optimism for the future. Readers should understand that Huckleberry Finn is not a simple adventure story, and that it operates on several levels; therefore, it should be read with supervision. It should definitely not be restricted from our children and will remain a topic for literary discussions for generations.
Chapter One

HISTORY OF THE RECEPTION AND CENSORSHIP OF TWAIN'S ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Huck Finn deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality; it is couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect, and all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions. It is also very irreverent. To sum up, the book is flippant and irreverent in its style. It deals with a series of experiences that are certainly not elevating. The whole book is of a class that is more profitable for the slums than it is for respectable people, and it is trash of the veriest sort.

This review of Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn contains the quote from one of the committee members of the Concord Public Library Committee and is an example of some of the strenuous objections raised against the novel in 1885. It summarizes some of the negative reactions that the novel received upon its publication. Because of Twain's deviations from the established literary traditions, most of the contemporary critics were offended by Huckleberry Finn's language and so-called immorality. The initial publication and reception of the novel were indeed diverse; however, its subsequent banning by the Concord Public Library Committee affected its overall reception throughout the United States. Interestingly, Huckleberry Finn has been plagued with censorship and
threats of censorship since its publication and this fact has prompted numerous reception studies and considerable controversy. The most recent study was done in 1983 by Victor Fischer and it reveals a diverse and not wholly negative initial reception as was previously believed. Rather ironically, a study of the censorship reveals that the novel that was once censored for its offensiveness to the white majority is now, in the twentieth century, being threatened with censorship because of its offensiveness to blacks.

The early publication studies of the novel concluded that *Huckleberry Finn* was either ignored or negatively received by an elite and rather small number of contemporary reviewers. Arthur Vogelback, author of one of the first and most influential of the novel's reception studies, believes that the American critical reaction to the novel illuminated the standards of the times. His study, "The Publication and Reception of *Huck Finn* in America" (1939), which influenced critical thinking for some time, was supported but augmented somewhat by a more recent study by Frederick Anderson in 1970. Vogelback contends that *Huckleberry Finn* received practically no critical attention in America at the time of publication and was reviewed only in the *Century*. He could find no reviews of it in any other available American magazines or any of three newspapers which he examined. Among the
magazines and newspapers consulted were:


Vogelback concludes that the reluctance of anyone to venture a defense of the novel shows that the critical denunciation was widespread and powerful:

. . . most critics received the book unfavorably, and for reasons unconnected with its artistic aspects. Few seemed aware of the great character painting in the book, its magnificent passages of description, its vigor of style, and the appropriateness of the picaresque structure to the material.3

Vogelback cites numerous reasons for this negative reception. He contends that it was due to the fact that Twain had read from the book while on tour with George Washington Cable and the public was too familiar with the material to make comment. He also cites the subscription publishing of the novel as a reason for its poor reception because the newspapers did not relish losing their advertising space to the serial literature. Finally, Vogelback feels that because of the "controversial" nature of the work, critics viewed it with disapproval. He does not elaborate what he means by the controversial nature of the work, but clearly he is referring to the artistic deviations that the novel makes from the established traditions and its offensiveness to the critics who were guided by the dictates of "the genteel tradition."
It is clear that Huck Finn challenged the most basic assumptions that the former critics had about novels. Critics schooled in the 'gentle tradition' looked for refined language, an elevating, exemplary hero, and a clear moral.  

However, an additional dimension of Huckleberry Finn's deviations from the established tradition is the problematic friendship between Huck and Jim and Twain's powerful condemnation of slavery. This dimension of the controversy was not specifically addressed by Twain's contemporary critics. In Mark Twain: Social Critic (1958), Philip S. Foner claims:

While the reasons (for banning) advanced by the authorities was 'the book's endemic lying, the petty thefts, the denigration of respectability and religion, the bad language, and the bad grammar, it was clear to anyone who read the attacks on the book thoughtfully, that the authorities regarded the exposure of the evils of slavery and the heroic portrayals of the Negro characters as hideously subversive.'

In his autobiography, Twain realizes that Huck's allegiance to Jim is offensive to the members of the Concord Library Committee:

When Huck appeared 21 years ago, the public library of Concord, Massachusetts flung him out indignantly partly because, after deep meditation and careful deliberation he made up his mind on a difficult point, and said that if he'd got to betray Jim or go to hell, he would go to hell—which was profanity, and those Concord purists couldn't stand it.

Ironically, the "immoral" Huck makes a decision against society's norms. Twain himself realized that in addition
to the other offenses the novel makes upon traditional society, one additional charge of immorality was in his indictment of slavery via the relationship between Huck and Jim and Huck's acceptance of Jim as a human being rather than Miss Watson's property.

Because of the racial situation in America at the time of the novel's publication, the majority of the population must have been uncomfortable with Huck and Jim's friendship. This is perhaps a more significant issue than it is usually assumed to be, for after all, either before or after Reconstruction, few whites sanctioned the relationship Huck had with Jim. The noble ideals set forth in the Bill of Rights juxtaposed to the actualities of nineteenth century American life fostered a pervasive and yet unspeakable guilt about the treatment of blacks, but after the Civil War even the abolitionists were weary of the race problem. As Ralph Ellison observes in *Shadow and Act*:

Huckleberry Finn knew, as did Mark Twain, that Jim was not only a slave but a human being, a man who in some ways was to be envied, and who expressed his essential humanity in his desire for freedom, his will to possess his own labor, in his loyalty and capacity for friendship and in his love for his wife and child. 

Assigning these characteristics to a black person was undoubtedly contrary to the popular opinion of blacks held by the white majority. Although blacks were no longer
slaves at the time of the novel's publication, the misconceptions about race were still prevalent and the negative stereotypes were crucial for maintaining white hegemony.

However, the genteel society seldom elaborated on the racist views of white supremacy. It was a subject to be ignored and hidden away for as long as possible. The misconceptions about the inferiority and inhumanity of blacks were a litany that became an integral part of America's song, but it was a silent song, that most members of the educated classes were ashamed of singing. It manifested itself in the mistreatment of blacks even after the Civil War and in the propagandist writings of authors like T. N. Page, Thomas Dixon, J. C. Harris, and others who created negative stereotypes of childlike subhuman blacks. Perhaps the exclusion of Huckleberry Finn by the Concord, Massachusetts Library Committee on the grounds that it was a dangerous moral influence on the youth referred in part to Huck and Jim's friendship.

Huck and Jim's relationship along with the numerous affronts and criticism the novel heaps upon traditional society could certainly be labelled controversial. Of course the factors that Vogelback and other scholars have isolated contributed to the novel's controversial reception, but the issue of race was not specifically addressed by the nineteenth century censors. However, the moral implications of the novel and Twain's partial deviation from
a black stereotype in his portrait of Jim presented something quite revolutionary in the nineteenth century world of letters. With the notable exception of Herman Melville, no other American author had shown so much insight into the racial situation in America. Melville contributed greatly to the destruction of the inaccurate stereotypes that whites held about blacks with his "Benito Cereno." The difference, of course, is that Mark Twain is a Southern writer who had to outgrow the indoctrination of his environment.

In "Huck Finn: The Book We Love to Hate" (1984), Leslie Fiedler agrees with Vogelback regarding Huckleberry Finn's negative reception at publication but believes that a major reason for it was that the novel was not "packaged and distributed like a 'serious book' at all—but published by 'subscription,' which is to say, peddled like the sleaziest 'commodity' literature of the time." Unlike Vogelback, Fiedler believes that Huckleberry Finn

... seems to have disappointed the kind of genteel readers who had been encouraged by Twain's previous novel, The Prince and the Pauper, to believe he was shedding the bad habits he had acquired as a Western journalist, contemptuous of elegance and good taste, and learning at long last to produce books suitable for family reading in the civilized East. In Huck Finn, however, he seemed to be reverting to inadvertent vulgarity and deliberate irreverence, farce and shameless burlesque... to make matters worse he had written his new book in colloquial back-country American, with the deliberate misspellings
and grammatical lapses on which newspaper humorists depended for easy laughs. 9

Most of Twain's works for the first thirty years of his literary career were sold by subscription, and although critics snubbed his works and thought them worthless because of his method of publication, his works were generally well received by the public. With the notable exception of William Howells, most of Twain's contemporary critics were slow to realize and accept the artistic innovation and real significance of Huckleberry Finn. After all, their criteria for excellence were borrowed from the British, although they were steadily realizing that their American experience dictated an entirely different literature.

Philip Foner adds yet another reason for the critical disapproval of the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. He believes that critics shunned the novel because of its immense popularity.

It is one of the ironies of the history of literature that to the literary critics the very fact that the general public admired Twain's writings was proof of its lack of real worth. As one of them put it: 'Whatever is widely liked must . . . appeal to the general public, which is a vulgar body with crude tastes, and, generally speaking, anything which satisfies it is bad.' 10

It is important to note, however, that the Century review of Huckleberry Finn was a highly positive one and because of this "as well as its solitary nature, the review is unique." 11 Writing for the Century, Thomas S. Perry
praised the book for its humor, description, and characterization. According to Perry, *Huckleberry Finn* comprised a vivid picture of American life in the 1840's.

His (Huck's) undying fertility of invention, his courage, his manliness in every trial, are an incarnation of the better side of the ruffianism that is one result of the independence of Americans.\(^\text{12}\)

Perry also notes:

*Huck Finn* has the great advantage of being written in autobiographical form. This secures a unity in the narration that is most valuable; every scene is given, not described.\(^\text{13}\)

Vogelback also mentions positive criticism by Joel Chandler Harris and J. C. Hanna, but suggests that these expressions of praise were the exception and that most critics reviewed the novel unfavorably. *Huckleberry Finn*’s negative reception by the critics was not that significant, however, because many "great" works such as *Leaves of Grass*, *Moby Dick*, and *The Ambassadors* were unfavorably reviewed.

Frederick Anderson's study in 1970 confirmed Vogelback's findings about *Huckleberry Finn*’s reception but extended them with another positive review; this one was written by Professor Brander Matthews in 1897. Matthews compared Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* to Cervantes's picaupon romances of Spain:

I do not think it will be a century or take three generations before we Americans generally discover how great a book *Huck Finn*
really is, how keen its vision of character, how close its observation of life, how sound its philosophy.\textsuperscript{14}

Anderson concluded that by 1896 major literary figures from Europe like R. L. Stevenson, Andrew Lang, and Walter Besant joined Matthews and thought that \textit{Huckleberry Finn} was by far Twain's best work. Slowly, critics ventured to disagree with the establishment and followed suit with the positive reviews of the novel.

In 1983, Victor Fischer completed a thorough and interesting study on the reception of \textit{Huckleberry Finn} in America from 1885 to 1897. His findings do not coincide with the contentions held by Vogeibäck and Anderson. Fischer believes that the "negative reaction in Boston was so strong and so widely publicized that it has been mistakenly represented as typifying the book's American reception."\textsuperscript{15} He also states that the reviews of \textit{Huckleberry Finn} were not as overwhelmingly unfavorable as believed nor was the novel ignored, and he insists further that:

More than twenty contemporary reviews and well over a hundred contemporary comments on the book have now been found, and more than that certainly appeared and may yet be found in American newspapers and magazines. Although this number is small when compared with more than fifty reviews that greeted both \textit{The Innocents Abroad} (1869) and \textit{The Gilded Age} (1873), the modest size of the critical arena was not the result of timid critics, bad publicity, and subscription publishing; it can be traced almost wholly to the author himself.\textsuperscript{16}
Twain attempted to manipulate the initial critical audience by sending out a small number of review copies. By doing so, he could hand pick the reviewers and receive favorable reviews, and these early favorable reviews could influence others and increase sales. Twain writes in his autobiography:

A generation ago, I found out that the latest review of a book was pretty sure to be just a reflection of the earliest review of it. That whatever the first reviewer found to praise or censure in the book would be repeated in the latest reviewer's report, with nothing fresh added. 17

Through his research, Fischer concludes that this strategy yielded both good and bad reviews. By inadvertence, Twain failed to get the early, influential Atlantic and Century reviews he thought necessary, although both magazines later reviewed his work favorably. Fischer uncovered the Atlantic review which had not been previously identified, and although it is briefer than the Century review and unsigned, it is also favorable:

Mark Twain's new book for young folks, the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (C. L. Webster & Co.), is in some sense a sequel to the Adventures of Tom Sawyer, though each of the two stories is complete in itself. Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer's old comrade, is not only the hero but the historian of his adventures, and certainly Mr. Clemens himself could not have related them more amusingly. The work is sold only by subscription. 18

Twain did receive four strong, favorable reviews in Hartford and New York newspapers within a month of sending
out the first review copies; he also received three additional favorable reviews from San Francisco. However, Twain abandoned his plan to increase his acceptance by sending out three hundred additional copies partly because:

(1) the book was selling well anyway;
(2) the widespread reaction to the Concord Library ban may have convinced him that the newspapers would not now consider the book on its own merits, and in any case he could no longer hope to influence reception by sending out copies of good reviews along with the books; and (3) his time was increasingly taken up with other business matters, in particular the Grant memoirs.

The early criticism that Fischer uncovered vacillates between 1885 and 1890, positive and negative. It is quite difficult to determine which articles were more influential. Fischer places Huckleberry Finn's critics in two categories: those who took the book seriously and reviewed it, favorably or unfavorably, as a literary work; and those who wrote about it as a scandal or an episode in Mark Twain's life. An example of a personal attack on Twain as well as his book is found in the March 2, 1885 issue of the New York World:

> Were Mark Twain's reputation as a humorist less well founded and established, we might say that this cheap and pernicious stuff is conclusive evidence that its author has no claim to be ranked with Artemus Ward, Sydney Smith, Dean Swift, John Hay, or any other recognized humorist. . . .

Another personal attack on Twain can be found in The Boston Advertiser which reprimands him for his "flippant
attitude" and calls Huckleberry Finn a failure. In his Notebook, Twain refers to reviews from The Boston Advertiser as the most severe:

The severest censor has been The Boston Advertiser. I am sorry to impute personal motives to him, but I must. He is merely taking what he imagines is legitimate revenge upon me for what was simply and solely an accident. I had the misfortune to catch him in a situation which will not bear telling. He probably thinks I have told that thing all around. It is an error. I have never told it, except to one man, and he came so near absolutely dying with laughter that I judged it best to take no more chances with that narrative.22

Although the record of the incident found in Twain's Notebooks and Journals is full of ambiguities, and researchers have a difficult time trying to determine whether the accident happened to a Boston Advertiser employee or Springfield Republican editor, it seems that one of these men "got his nusse (nuts) caught in the steel trap of a sitz-bath."23 It is also not clear how Twain came to witness the incident or if it really happened. At any rate, Twain seemed to think that his bad press from The Boston Advertiser was based on this misfortunate incident. An example of a harsh article from the Advertiser is its response to Twain's comment in the Chicago Tribune which laughs off the Concord Library ban and thinks of it purely in terms of advertisement. The Boston Advertiser's review is quite condescending and insists that Huckleberry Finn fails as a novel:
... we are unwilling to believe that his (Twain's) impudent intimation that a larger sale and larger profits are a satisfactory recompense to him for unfavorable judgment of honest critics is a true indication of the standard by which he measures success in literature.24

Vogelback, as well as Fischer, isolates a review from the Springfield Republican as the most "emphatic record of disapproval" of Huckleberry Finn. The reviewers claim that Twain and Huckleberry Finn are dangerous influences, morally and intellectually:

The Concord Public Library deserves well of the public by their action in banning Mark Twain's new book, Huckleberry Finn, on the grounds that it is trashy and vicious. It is time that this influential pseudonym should cease to carry into homes and libraries unworthy productions. Mr. Clemens is a genuine and powerful humorist, with a bitter vein of satire on the weaknesses of humanity which is sometimes wholesome, sometimes grotesque, but in certain of his works degenerates into a gross trifling with every fine feeling. The trouble with Mr. Clemens is that he has no reliable sense of propriety. His notorious speech at the Atlantic dinner, marshalling Longfellow and Emerson and Whittier in vulgar parodies in a Western miner's cabin, illustrates this, but not in much more relief than the Adventures of Tom Sawyer did, or these Huckleberry Finn stories do... They are no better in tone than the dime novels which flood the blood-and-thunder population.25

Clearly, the reviewers criticized Twain and his work in the context of the genteel tradition and the acceptable literary and social norms of nineteenth century America.

Several other events occurred at the time of the novel's publication and perhaps, inadvertently, increased
sales and heightened the controversy. First, after the Concord Public Library ban, Twain was honored by the Concord Free Trade Club's decision to make him an honorary member. He wrote an open letter, published on April 2 in The Boston Daily Advertiser, which graciously accepted the membership but also referred to the Library Committee members as "moral icebergs." The newspapers quickly picked up the responses and reactions to this letter and the controversy grew. Second, the Estes and Lauriat lawsuit stimulated and heightened interest in the novel. The Boston publishers Estes and Lauriat listed Huckleberry Finn in a catalog at $2.25, a price below the standard agent's price of $2.75. Twain unsuccessfully initiated a lawsuit to restrain this advertisement, and the newspapers monitored the dispute closely. The effect of the lawsuit was possibly negative for Twain, for many readers may have sided with the publishers and the cheaper price. Next, there was the problem of a mutilated plate for one of the illustrations in the novel. The suggestive title of the plate was "In a Dilemma: What Shall I Do?" It seems that one of the engravers placed an erected penis on a picture of Silas Phelps. Luckily, this only affected the copies of the novel going to sales agents, and these copies were hastily recalled, much to the chagrin of Charles Webster, Twain's nephew and head of his publishing company. The November 1884 issue of the New York World
carried the story of this embarrassment, and ascribed it to the coarseness of Twain or his workers; here was yet another blemish affecting the reception of the novel.

Henry Nash Smith believes that the critics who attacked the novel were more articulate than the critics who endorsed it. After all, opponents of the novel assumed an established literary tradition that *Huckleberry Finn* had violated and they could easily point out deviations from an accepted norm. On the other hand, supporters of the novel could applaud the novel's innovation, description, humor, and other rather "unfocused" elements, but had to ignore the established criteria for excellence. In "The Publication of *Huck Finn*: A Centennial Retrospect," Smith lists the specifically literary questions that were raised about the novel at its publication:

1. To what genre could *Huck Finn* be assigned?
2. Was it a collection of humorous sketches, or a novel?
3. Was the book written for boys, or for adults?
4. Was humor acceptable as literature?
5. Had Mark Twain violated decorum?26

However, the literary questions that were raised by *Huckleberry Finn* and its deviations from the artistic norms did not lessen the artistry of this work; the reviews
and criticism of *Huckleberry Finn* are remarkably diverse. In view of Fischer's findings, it is difficult to say that all of the reviews are basically negative.

A closer look at the guiding principles of "the genteel tradition" explains the negative reception that *Huckleberry Finn* received from most of the contemporary critics. Prior to *Huckleberry Finn* and other works by so-called local color writers and backwoods humorists, American writers were greatly influenced by "the genteel tradition" and imitative of the writers of the Old World. In a famous address delivered before the Philosophical Union of the University of California in 1911, George Santayana coined the term "genteel tradition" and described it as an "old mentality inherited from Europe."

According to Santayana,

> the ideals of the nineteenth century may be said to be all belated; the age still yearned with Rousseau or speculated with Kant, while it moved with Darwin, Bismarck, and Nietzsche. . . .

Santayana describes nineteenth century America as:

> a country with two mentalities, one a survival of the beliefs and standards of the fathers, the other an expression of the instincts, practice and discoveries of the younger generations. In all the higher things of the mind---in religion, in literature, in the moral emotions---it is the hereditary spirit that still prevails.

Early nineteenth century Americans had made an attempt to slough off their European constraints; however,
after the external manacles were loosened, the internal manacles remained. There was a narrow provincialism and social remoteness in nineteenth century New England literature. Writers such as Poe, Hawthorne, and Irving wrote with an almost total disengagement from America. Hawthorne's diaries characterize America as having an extraordinary blankness with an absence of culture that left writers devoid of materials for their novels. It was as though they were writing in a vacuum with no tradition to follow.

If we understand the needs that men of letters were obliged to satisfy in a country otherwise violently separated from stable traditions... we can begin to account for the extraordinary popular devotion to a group of New England writers who, by their very existence, seemed to provide a beneficent and stable tradition, and thus to compensate for the institutions of church, aristocracy, and ritual that the Americans lacked.29

This hereditary spirit, "the genteel tradition," influenced the literary tastes of the so-called "cultured" in America, although, as Henry James notes in his biography of Hawthorne, there was very little of any sort of culture to be absorbed in America in the nineteenth century. This relative newness of the American situation and its shortage of history made it almost impossible for the literature to be anything other than a bit narrow and self-conscious.
History, as yet, has left in the United States so thin and impalpable a deposit that we very soon touch the hard substratum of nature; and nature herself, in the Western World, has the peculiarity of seeming rather crude and immature.  

This minimal supply of history or absence of literary possibility gave rise to a natural gift called "American humor." It was not well received by the genteel intellectuals who felt that the European culture should prevail.

Because of Twain's background as a humorist and his deviations from the established literary and social norms, his work as well as the work of other humorists was not accepted as a part of the genteel literature.

To the upholders of the genteel tradition, the keepers of the cherished flame of Eastern culture, a humorist was a jester and buffoon, not of the same breed of men as the gentle Whittier, the scholarly Longfellow, the urbane Lowell, the cultured Emerson, the polished Holmes. Even after Twain had become a figure of world renown, the genteel critics looked down their noses at him as simply a good practitioner of an ungenteel and inconsequential type of writing. To them Twain remained synonymous with California gold fields, jumping frogs, bucking Mexican plugs, farcical duels, mild buffoonery, and practical jokes. The jokes were good, it was conceded, but not even good jokes should be confused with good literature.

Southwestern humor, which was popularized in the American West beginning in the 1830s, has been referred to as a sub-literary tradition. It was quite different from the traditional literature and was highly democratic,
characterizing the Age of Jackson; it celebrated the common man and self-reliance. The Southwestern states of Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Missouri, and Alabama were the birthplaces of this literature, and it is important to note that the illiteracy rate was high in these states. It is reported that sometimes only one out of thirteen could read and write, and many of the practitioners of this literature had very little formal schooling. George Washington Harris, one of the most well known humorists, had completed two years in school. The idea of the practical joke was central to this literature, and the infliction of pain was the object of life in the literature of the Southwest. Harris felt that these cruel jokes were good clean fun, and civilized people were regarded as easy targets. In this perverted form of democracy, blacks were to be tortured and abused. Local-color details, thick dialect, exaggerations, and a trickster-hero were the main ingredients of the humorist literature. Stagecoach and riverboat life had made the Southwest a natural place for the exchange of tall tales. Most of the humorist writers were not just crude, but also sadistic and nihilistic in opposition to the sentimental piety of Longfellow and others. In Patriotic Gore, Edmund Wilson writes about George Washington Harris's famous creation of the "malignant Tennessee cracker," Sut Lovingood, who insisted
on being known as a "nat'ral born durn'd fool";

... as far as my experience goes, it
(Sut Lovingood) is by far the most re-
pellent book of any real literary merit
in American literature.32

Wilson says further that:

He (Sut Lovingood) is neither a soldier nor
a pioneer enduring a cruel ordeal; he is
a peasant squatting in his own filth. He
is not making a jest of his trials, he is
avenging his inferiority by tormenting
other people. His impulse is avowedly
sadistic. ... 33

All that was lowest in the lowest of the
South found expression in Harris's book,
and Sut Lovingood, like A. B. Longstreet's
Georgia Scenes, with its grotesqueries of
ear chewing, eye-gouging fights and
yokelish hunts and balls, is needed,
perhaps, to counterbalance those idyls of
the old regime by Kennedy, Caruthers, and
Cooke and the chivalrous idealism of
Sidney Lanier.34

Wilson points out similarities between Mark Twain's
early Far Western sketches and George Washington Harris's
humor but insists that Harris's works do not have the
"dignity" of Twain's. Henry Nash Smith also cites simi-
larities between Twain and other humorists. He notes that
the title of Twain's novel, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,
is similar to the title of backwoods humorist Johnson J.
Hooper's Some Adventures of Simon Suggs (1845), and that
some newspaper's reference to Huckleberry Finn was similar
to its reference to Sut Lovingood Yarns. Both were re-
ferred to condescendingly as "these Huck Finn stories" and
"these Sut Lovingood stories." Smith does not see these
similarities as mere coincidence, and believes that the similarity of reference was significant in influencing the novel's reception.

However, Twain's works do not place him neatly in the ranks of the humorists, for his works display some of the features of the traditional literature of his milieu. Many of his works are set in the past and carry strong messages for the present and future. This is a dominant characteristic of nineteenth century American literature. Twain could not have criticized the American society of the 1880s as freely and extensively as he did in Huckleberry Finn had he not set his story in the recent past, the 1840s. In addition, all of the subversiveness is expressed through irony. Although the novel represents a break from the literary tradition, particularly in its use of language, point of view, and subject matter, it also exhibits some of the characteristics of the times. Santayana contends:

> Everywhere in the nineteenth century we find a double preoccupation with the past and with the future, a longing to know what all experience might have been hitherto, and on the other hand to hasten to some wholly different experience... The imagination of the age was intent on history; its conscience was intent on reform.35

Obviously, Huckleberry Finn was experimental and did not fit well into either the humorist or genteel tradition.

The influence of the West on Twain's artistry is also
noteworthy. Two twentieth century American critics, Van Wyck Brooks and Bernard DeVoto, engaged in a famous and rather extensive dispute over whether or not the West is a positive or negative factor in Twain's development as a writer. Brooks sees him as a writer tormented by the duality of both traditions. On the one hand, he was a buffoon or clown, and on the other, he was a serious philosopher/satirist. In *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920), Brooks depicts Mark Twain as having been emasculated into timidity, compromise, and mere entertainment by his mother and his wife, Livy, and by forces of gentility, commerce, and tradition which could be observed in a frontier setting of Hannibal as well as in Elmira and Hartford.

> If Mark Twain had been enabled to stand on his own feet, had been helped to discover himself as an artist, it would have resulted naturally from the growth of his own consciousness, his own critical sense. As it was, undertaken in behalf of a false, external ideal and by persons who had so little comprehension of his true principle of growth, persons who were themselves subservient to public opinion, it destroyed the last vestiges of his independence. 36

Bernard DeVoto challenges this view and comes to Twain's defense in *Mark Twain's America* (1932); he claims that frontier America was a rich environment conducive to Twain's artistry. A controversy about this issue has continued for years, and notable scholars have joined the ranks of Brooks and DeVoto. This duality in Twain and his
artistry represents the same duality existing in the
nineteenth century American experience and the seeming im-
possibility of shedding the remnants of the European tra-
dition. Although Twain was a harsh and formicable critic
of the tenets of these inappropriate and antiquated tra-
ditions, he too managed to be caught up in them. His pre-
occupation with the past and future is pervasive in
Huckleberry Finn.

Twain's nostalgic longing for a time much better than
the chaos and contradictions of America in 1885 is
epitomized in Huckleberry Finn, yet he criticizes the
sanctity of outworn traditions and rituals in the 1840s
with the hope of rectifying some of these same evils that
permeated the 1880s. By setting his novel in the past, he
was freer to criticize his present. The slavery/freedman
issue was a complex and overwhelming issue which was
protean-like in nature and almost impossible to resolve.
Clearly, the problems stemming from racial differences
must be addressed, and neither the "ignorant" Southerners
nor the weary Northerners seemed equipped to handle them.
Free from the confines of civilization, Twain's Huck and
Jim found a way to handle their differences and formed a
remarkable friendship while traveling on the raft. This
friendship could not have existed in nineteenth century
America, nor could Huck live within the guidelines dictated
by "civilized" society. According to Santayana, to
criticize and fail to offer a workable solution or replacement for the problems Twain attacks is not acceptable.

Santayana criticizes Twain and points out that to reform means to shatter one form and to create another and that "the two sides of the act are not always equally intended nor equally successful." Santayana's criticism of Twain and other humorists is that:

They (humorists) only half escape the genteel tradition; their humour would lose its savour if they had wholly escaped it. They point to what contradicts it in the facts; but not in order to abandon the genteel tradition, for they have nothing solid to put in its place.

The Concord Library Committee, an advocate for "the genteel tradition," had condemned Huckleberry Finn as ungrammatical, vulgar, immoral, and coarse. Huckleberry Finn had indeed attacked the values of genteel America with its pseudo-aristocratic pretensions, its hypocritical religion, its empty traditions and rituals, and its cruelties against other human beings. But Mark Twain apparently did not have a solution for these problems. In The American Vision, A. N. Kaul contends that the novel does not have to provide any solutions to the problems it uncovers:

... a novel is neither a plan of action nor a treatise on sociology. Its aim is not to secure rational conviction: Addressed to the human sensibility, it works on those strata of man's personality which are beyond the reach of intellectual argument. Its effectiveness derives from the realignment of sympathies which is caused by the experience of reading it. Its thematic content is not a matter of systematic and rational exposition
of a problem, but is to be found rather in the pattern of aroused and redistributed sympathies which it creates. Thus, though the novel achieves all its effects through a concretely presented situation, its moral or social truth does not depend on the exactness of the correspondence with present or historical facts. Insofar as the human sympathies it alters, extends, and creates achieve a wider reference, the novel itself acquires a more universal and enduring quality.39

Kaul states further:

... no artist can be held accountable for not drawing up a program adequately suited to practical realization of his vision. Twain's concern here is with an alternative concept of human society, and it is a concept that derives its power from the emotively charged concreteness of the presented image as well as from its projection against the background of the established order.40

Whether Twain presented a solution to the social problems he reveals is not an important consideration. The fact that his artistry compels the reader to examine these moral and social truths gives the novel its endless vitality.

A common misconception about the reactions to the novel is that the reactions are relegated according to geographical region. Because of the geographic nature of America and the social and cultural differences of its inhabitants, a strong sense of regionalism developed, particularly after the Civil War; however, regionalism had little effect on the reception of Huckleberry Finn. New England and the East were the centers of the genteel
tradition, and Americans in the Eastern states looked down upon the Southerners and Westerners as well. In Victor Fischer's study, "Huck Finn Reviewed: The Reception of Huck Finn in the United States, 1885-1897," he uncovers previously uncollected criticism of the novel and concludes that

Although it is tempting to associate critical bias with region—viewing Boston as the defender of the genteel tradition, New York and Hartford as more liberal centers, San Francisco as representative of the frontier, for example—such association would be clearly an oversimplification. The Boston papers differed among themselves, and were clearly at odds with the Atlantic Monthly. The New York Sun and New York World were in different camps. Although one might expect the San Francisco papers to share a unique Western perspective...they too were divided about Mark Twain's book. Moreover, attitudes traveled.41

Fischer concludes then that the notion of a regional alignment of critics is not supported by the evidence he has uncovered. Henry Nash Smith suggests

...there is a cleavage between older, established newspapers of relatively sedate tone and newer metropolitan papers that were pushing aggressively for mass circulation. The only exception to the uniform condemnation of Huck Finn by the Boston papers was the first editorial in the Globe deriding the remnants of Transcendentalism in Concord. Later even the Globe took the side of the conservatives.42

This diversity in the response to Huckleberry Finn epitomizes the heterogeneity of the American people. It also points to a more open-minded liberality foreshadowing
an end to the caste system of intellectuals who snubbed the common man and his folklore, and it is the beginning of an acceptance of a truly American literature. After all, *Huckleberry Finn* criticized all aspects of society and, to an extent, glorified the merits of the human heart and good common sense. These were the characteristics that were in sharp contrast to the outworn European traditions that were becoming increasingly inappropriate for Americans.

*Huckleberry Finn* continues to offend and delight readers in the twentieth century and although the reasons for censorship have changed, the threats of censorship remain. A look at the history of the controversy shows a constant process of reinterpretation at once applauding and condemning the work. The reader's response to the novel that is, his individual analysis and perceptions of the language, characters, and plot determines how well this or any novel is perceived.

Extrapolating from the individual to the culture, new schools of criticism reveal new cultural identities...a history of critical attitudes toward a given work often constitutes a history of the predominant intellectual positions held by that culture, or at least by the intellectual subculture which reinterprets the work in question.43

This reinterpretation seems to refuel the controversy, and it has not nor perhaps ever will be totally resolved. In the nineteenth century Americans were grappling at the
notion of culture and because of the lack of a national consciousness, the diversity in the responses to *Huckleberry Finn* could be anticipated. Most twentieth century critics agree that the novel is an American classic but another issue has come to the forefront, namely the problem of race in the novel. The problem of race which prevailed and festered during Reconstruction and continues in present day America has evolved into a significant issue in the controversy surrounding *Huckleberry Finn*.

As early as the 1950's Black educators from school districts throughout the United States have called the book racist. Generally, the twentieth century media, unlike their nineteenth century counterparts, have come to the aid of the novel, and most recently have introduced letters which document Twain's anti-racist position. However, the letters address themselves to Twain and not *Huckleberry Finn*. Some Blacks cite the repetitive use of the word "nigger" (160-200 times in the novel) as the basis for their charge of racism and protest that the irony in the novel is too subtle for the general reader. Kenny J. Williams in "Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*: or Mark Twain's Racial Ambiguity," states:

While scholars may speak eloquently of the various themes to be found in Twain's work, to suggest the novel is a condemnation of the institution of slavery or that Jim represents the triumph of the human spirit
over the most degrading attempts to subdue it might seem to be an optimistic begging of the question when others deplore the apparent elements of racism. That there is much concern with the presence of an objectionable word is perhaps unfortunate because to focus on an epithet seriously limits one's perception of other aspects of the novel. But such a concern is understandable and cannot be dismissed. It is also symptomatic of those latent attitudes that are so difficult to discard. Ultimately *Huck Finn* as a classic may tell more about the nation than many Americans want to know.44

The fact that scholars explain that the use of the word "nigger" was not as pejorative as some modern readers believe because it was the "commonly used designation for slaves in the 1830s and 1840s does little to lessen its impact." According to Williams, the novel presents a problem for children who have not had time to think through the subtleties of racial epithets. Therefore, there is an implied racism that does not disappear even though the work is labelled an American classic.

Many critics, including blacks, do not see the novel as a racist tract but as an attack on racism. In *Shadow and Act*, Ellison defends Twain and contends that behind Jim's minstrel mask is his dignity and human capacity, and Twain's complexity emerges. In his essay, "Huck, Jim and American Racial Discourse," David Smith asserts that the society and not Twain or *Huckleberry Finn* is racist. The novel suggests that real individual freedom cannot be found in America and that "American civilization enslaves
and exploits rather than liberates." Smith states further:

Given the subtlety of Mark Twain's approach, it is not surprising that most of his contemporaries misunderstood or simply ignored the novel's demystification of race. . . . If we, a century later, continue to be confused about Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, perhaps it is because we remain more deeply committed to both racial discourse and a self-deluding optimism than we care to admit. 45

The subject of race had been one of society's taboos, and the majority of the Southerners tried to avoid any discussion of it. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1851) was a powerful propaganda novel, but she had no first hand experience with blacks or slavery. Mark Twain represents his own reality in Huckleberry Finn. His depiction of America presented in the vernacular touched society's conscience and brought to light the tragic realities of numerous facets of nineteenth century America. Twain's writing ushers in the hard to characterize literary movement called American literary realism. In a preface to his critical anthology entitled American Realism, Eric Sundquist discusses the difficulty one has in defining realism and realist writers:

The problem lies in part in the central difficulty of describing the program of a group of writers who virtually had no program but rather responded eclectically, and with increasing imaginative urgency, to the startling acceleration into being of a complex industrial society following the Civil War. 46
Twain's work mirrors the new found complexity of American society. Huckleberry Finn's diverse reception constantly in flux reflects the diversity of America. The spontaneity and optimism of the Age of Jackson had been slowly destroyed by the selfishness and lack of morality of the American people. Twain's hope in Huckleberry Finn was to light out for new territory, and that new territory could be a new America cognizant of the impending corruption that collective society wields.
NOTES

1St. Louis Globe-Democrat, p. 1.


3Vogelback, 269-270.


8Leslie A. Fiedler, "Huckleberry Finn: The Book We Love to Hate," Proteus 1 no. 2 (Fall 1984) 1.

9Fiedler, 1.

10Foner, 42.

11Vogelback, 267.

12Century, XXX, 171 (May, 1885).

13Century, XXX, 171 (May, 1885).


15Fischer, 17.
16. Fischer, 2.


19. Fischer, 34.

20. Fischer, 35.


25. Critic, VI, 155 (March 28, 1885).


28. Santayana, 187-188.


31. Foner, 40-41.

33 Wilson, 510.
34 Wilson, 517.
35 Santayana, 8.
37 Santayana, 8.
38 Santayana, 46.
40 Kaul, 293.
41 Fischer, 35.
42 Smith, 28.
44 Kenny J. Williams, "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: or Mark Twain's Racial Ambiguity," Mark Twain Journal 22 (Fall, 1984) 2: 42.
Chapter Two

MARK TWAIN, RACE, AND NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA
(Literary and Historical Influences)

Huckleberry Finn is much like a mirror that reflects the soul of an individual or society. This quality of the novel has given rise to an indictment of the members of American society both personally and collectively. Huckleberry Finn portrays an authentic time in the history of the United States and reveals numerous problems confronting the young nation. Because of the experimental nature of the work and its controversial subject matter, Huckleberry Finn was destined for a tumultuous future, and its true meaning was destined to be ambiguous and misunderstood. To complicate matters further, at the beginning of the novel Twain, however jokingly, warns readers not to look for a moral in his story. But the satire of past, present, and even future generations of American society is so strong that the majority of readers and Twain scholars find that it is difficult not to find morals and gain some insight into the deeper social, moral, and philosophical questions that confronted nineteenth century America and twentieth century America as well. One complex and important problem that the novel focuses on is the problem of race; Huckleberry Finn is not a diatribe on race, but it reveals and satirizes the racial situation in nineteenth
century America. Twain evolved from a member of a slaveholding family to an advocate for the oppressed in his later years. This is evidenced not only in *Huckleberry Finn* but his later works, letters, and lectures. To begin to understand the very colorful Mark Twain, his personal evolution, and his controversial novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, one must first take note of Twain, the individual, and analyze the impact of certain historical and literary events on his life and art. Hippolyte Taine, French critic, historian, and philosopher, contends that the writer is the product of three factors: his race and the characteristics which he inherits from it; his milieu, or the culture in which he lives; and the moment, or the point in time in which he lives. Twain himself seems to be totally in agreement with this:

'... The influences about [the human being]',

. . . 'create his preferences, his aversions, his politics, his tastes, his morals, his religion. He creates none of these things for himself.'

Because Twain is unquestionably a product of his society, it is important to note his social and literary milieu. To label *Huckleberry Finn* or Twain as racist because of their historical context seems a bit unfair, for indeed both were products of an ethnocentric society that existed in nineteenth century America. Mark Twain’s awareness and position concerning the race issue evolved with age, and it is difficult to categorize him because of the complexity
of his being. And so the enigmatic figure of Mark Twain emerges, with contradictions, inconsistencies, and a myriad number of inexplicable facts that present themselves to critics, biographers, and scholars in search of a "definitive" statement about the man, his work, and his final position about the black man.

From relatively humble beginnings in Florida, Missouri, Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835. It was not until his fourth birthday that the Clemens family moved to Hannibal where he spent his youth. His family consisted of his mother and father, Jane Lampton and John Marshall Clemens, two brothers, Henry and Orion, and a sister, Pamela. Although his family experienced numerous financial ups and downs, the Clemenses were considered a part of the Hannibal aristocracy because they were of Southern white origin and slaveholders. John Clemens could never earn the money to stabilize their economic situation. Thus the family endured the humiliation of forced moves and the constant threat of poverty coupled with the constant hope of striking it rich and becoming well-to-do.

Clemens' experiences in Hannibal were instrumental in shaping the content and themes that would later characterize his writings.

Before 1848, the spirit of Hannibal . . . was that of a commercial democracy with an 'aristocratic taint; which (along with the
institution of slavery) none of the whites there questioned or even recognized as a contradiction. The class lines were quite clearly drawn, and the familiar social life of each class was restricted to that class; ... The village took pleasure in circuses, revival meetings, and minstrel shows; in performances by the local Thespians and the Debating Society; in visits from touring ventriloquists, mesmerists, phrenologists, and assorted frauds and scoundrels; in steamboat excursions, parades, torchlight processions and patriotic holidays. ... Hannibal showed its other side to him as well. Clemens remembered pranks and practical jokes brutal enough to unhinge their victims, insanity, the beaten life of squatters and derelicts, hangings, drownings, rapes, lynching, terminal alcoholism, murders.2

As a young boy, Clemens was influenced by the predominantly bigoted world around him:

No one, at least to young Sam's knowledge, 'seemed conscious that slavery was a bald, grotesque, and unwarrantable assumption.' Doubters would have kept silent in any case; in the rural Missouri of the 1840's or 50's, to criticize slavery would have been to invite lynching. Denying the existence of God would have been safer.3

Although in *My Mark Twain*, William Dean Howells, Clemens's friend and confidant, states that Clemens's father "... like so many other slaveholders, abhorred slavery--silently, as he must in such a time and place. ..."4 Historical facts indicate that Clemens's father had had no problem with the institution of slavery, and in 1841 served on a jury that sentenced three abolitionists to twelve years in prison for encouraging slaves to escape from their masters. The young Sam had witnessed several
brutal acts perpetrated against helpless black victims by his father:

The Clemenses owned one slave - a girl named Jennie - during Sam's early childhood, and he remembered once seeing his father beat her with a bridle for insolence; Judge Clemens cuffed, too, the small black boy whom they hired from his master 'for any little blunder or awkwardness' and occasionally gave him a lashing 'which terrified the poor thing nearly out of his wits.'

Living in Missouri, which was a slave state, the young Clemens witnessed numerous other acts of violence inflicted upon blacks, acts that he, even if he wanted to, was helpless to do anything about.

At age nine, standing on Hannibal's main street, Sam Clemens watched an overseer crush a slave's skull with a piece of iron ore. Two years later, while rowing around the foot of the island in the Mississippi that became Jackson's Island in Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, he happened upon a black corpse, disembowelled and sunk in the river by slavehunters. When he was fourteen, a slave who was accused of raping a white woman was lynched on the outskirts of Hannibal, before one of the largest crowds ever assembled for a social function in that part of Missouri.

Certainly the impact of these atrocities affected the young Sam Clemens, and almost anyone with a sense of moral justice would be plagued by and need some guiding principle about how to deal with the brutality of slavery. The horrible dehumanization design that the United States system of slavery followed was one of the crudest and most severe forms of slavery in the world. The selling of
family members away from each other, the beatings, rapings, torturings, and numerous injustices inflicted upon the slaves were a horrible experience for everyone. Twain speaks of slavery in his Autobiography as a fact of life, for indeed it was. Initially, he did not have an overly concerned view and felt that slavery in Hannibal was different from the brutal plantation slavery that the Northerners were so critical of:

In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind . . . if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing.7

And so the adage of "whatever is is right" prevailed for most of the Southerners. Clemens would later say in response to a conclusion that slavery had made all Southerners hardhearted, that it "merely stupefied everybody's humanity as regarded the slave."8 The notion of slavery was, on the whole, universally acceptable as a part of the Southern economy and the way things were in the South.

In The Making of Mark Twain, John Lauber's biography lists an experience that triggered an awareness of the inhumanity associated with slavery. After reading one of his father's letters about the sale of a slave for profit:
.. Twain was struck by the contrast between his (John Clemens) humanity toward the white man and the casual indifference of his reference to the slave, 'as if he had been an ox - and somebody else's ox.'

The question about the black man's humanity had led to much disagreement among the southerners, and many were ambivalent about it. During a conversation that the young Clemens had with his mother about a mischievous slave boy, she had and shared an interesting revelation with him:

We had a little slave boy whom we had hired from some one, there in Hannibal. He was from the eastern shore of Maryland and had been brought away from his family and friends halfway across the American continent and sold... All day long he was singing, whistling, yelling, whooping, laughing - it was maddening, devastating, unendurable... I lost my temper and went raging to my mother and said Sandy had been singing for an hour without a single break and I couldn't stand it... The tears came into her eyes and her lip trembled and she said... 'Poor thing, when he sings it shows that he is not remembering and that comforts me; but when he is still I am afraid never see his mother again; if he can sing I must not hinder it, but be thankful for it. If you were older you would understand me; then that friendless child's noise would make you glad.'

This incident shows a burgeoning awareness of the evils of slavery and the existence of an enormous guilt that burdened some of the Southerners. In his biography of William Lloyd Garrison (1913), John Jay Chapman speaks of this tremendous, unspeakable guilt that weighed so heavily on the American consciousness. This guilt that tormented some whites seemed to disappear after the Civil War, and the oppression of blacks continued.
The young Sam Clemens had a love of freedom which perhaps made him sensitive to the situation of Blacks in the United States. His career as a riverboat pilot signals this love of freedom and his awareness that no one in society is really free.

Twain affirmed that he loved the profession (riverboat pilot) far better than any I have followed since and I took a measureless pride in it. The reason is plain; a pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived on the earth... In truth, every man and woman and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude; but in the day I write of, the Mississippi pilot had none. The pilot, alone among men, was not ruled by the laws of civilization; he had achieved organic harmony with the river and was guided by its laws. Intuitively he sensed his course. He did not impose his will on the river but lived by accepting its demands.

The influence of the river on his life and works should not be underestimated because there are traces of its influence throughout his works. Although Twain does not fail to portray the inimical sides of the river, the freedom from societal constraints that the river provides is the same freedom that consoles Huck and Jim in Huckleberry Finn. Twain's observation that "every man, woman, and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude" rings especially true for the Black slave. Seeking freedom from servitude, the slave used the Mississippi River as one of his vehicles of escape from bondage. Philip Foner, a renowned Twain critic, believes that the influence of the greatest of the American rivers permeates
every phase of Twain's development.

The outbreak of the American Civil War brought an end to Clemens's career as a riverboat pilot and to the Southern lifestyle that he knew.

The commercial navigation of the lower Mississippi was stopped by a line of fire, and black, squat gunboats, their sloping sides plated with railroad iron, took the place of the gorgeous white sidewheelers, whose pilots had been the envied aristocrats of the river towns.\textsuperscript{12}

'The war came, Clemens later wrote, commerce was suspended, my occupation was gone. I had to seek another livelihood.'\textsuperscript{13}

The war divided not only the nation but border states like Missouri, families like the Clemenses, individuals like Sam. 'There was a good deal of confusion in men's minds during the first months of the trouble,' he said in 1885, 'a good deal of unsettledness, of leaning first this way, then that, then the other way.'\textsuperscript{14}

Sam's last trip up the river was from New Orleans to St. Louis in 1861; this was one week after the firing on Ft. Sumpter. He enlisted on the side of the Confederacy; but his service lasted between one and three weeks. Clemens commented that all he learned to do during his service was to retreat. His brother Orion had been an abolitionist for years and was a loyal Unionist. He was appointed Secretary of the Nevada Territory by President Abraham Lincoln and was joined in July 1861 by his brother Samuel who served as his secretary, "with nothing to do and no salary."
The influence of the West and whether it was a positive or negative issue with regards to Twain's artistry and his treatment of race has stimulated a good deal of literary scholarship and debate. The most famous dispute about the effects of the West on Twain was between Bernard DeVoto and Van Wyck Brooks. In *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920), Brooks calls Mark Twain a "tragic failure" as an artist, believes that he did not fulfill his potentialities as a great social satirist, and was a "mere buffoon." Brooks feels that the Mississippi River experience and Twain's boyhood years in Hannibal were positive influences on his creative talents, but the West stifled and hindered him artistically. This view was challenged by Bernard DeVoto in *Mark Twain's America* (1932), which contends that the American frontier was a rich and nurturing environment for an American artist. Justin Kaplan believes that Brooks's conclusions were drawn from frail data and that his conclusions demanded answers. Consequently, scholars sided with Brooks or DeVoto and numerous volumes of criticism were generated. The consensus seems to be that:

> The resulting impressions and experiences of that Western sojourn enriched Samuel Clemens' stock of materials for future writing, sharpened his literary skills, leavened his native Missouri humor, broadened his horizons, and decided him on a literary career.15

Even before Ms. Brashear's conclusion about the influence of the West on Clemens, William Dean Howells had forcefully
asserted that:

The West, when it began to put itself into literature, could do so without the sense, or the apparent sense, of any older or politer world outside of it; whereas the East was always looking fearfully over its shoulder at Europe, and anxious to account for itself as well as represent itself. No such anxiety as this entered Mark Twain's mind, and it is not claiming too much for the Western influence upon American literature to say that the final liberation of the East from this anxiety is due to the West, and to its ignorant courage or its indifference to its difference from the rest of the world. 16

Clemens's move westward to Nevada (silver mines) exhibits more of the restlessness and journeying that marks his early life. His decision to become a writer was made during his five and a half years in the frontier West and after his unsuccessful attempts of achieving wealth through mining. Clemens seems to be, quite literally, pulled by the tides and changes in his environment. Thus far in his life he appears to be a follower rather than a leader or trendsetter in society, and he too chases the illusive phenomenon called "success." Getting rich quickly and leaving the land barren was the order of the day and many men had their dreams shattered in the West. Clemens's life took on a new dimension:

In the same way the flop journalist Walter Whitman put aside his frock coat and became Walt Whitman, "one of the roughs," Sam Clemens put aside his river outfits in favor of 'a damaged slouch hat, blue woolen shirt, and pants crammed into boot-tops,' and he was on his way toward becoming something other than what he had been. His change of
occupation from pilot to Nevada speculator and miner mirrored a shift in the economic climate from the earning of a livelihood to the quest for enormous wealth, the prospect of boom or bust. The mining camps themselves, as he saw them, epitomized a related change, the coming of the plutocracy; out of the Hobbesian turmoil of miners and saloonkeepers, provisioners, speculators, promoters, politicians, and men who worked with picks and shovels, came the lasting divisions of society in the Gilded Age.

Here we see Clemens, with a courageous eagerness of spirit and the recklessness of youth, epitomizing the mood of his country as he so often did. Clemens optimistically invested into various mining enterprises, with his brother Orion and others, but was hit with bad luck. His brother could fall back on his position as Secretary to the Nevada Territory, but Sam had very little to support himself as secretary to the secretary and decided that he must write to earn additional income.

Obviously feeling comfortable with his writing ability, Sam sought a living, not his fortune, with pen in hand. He found a job as local reporter for the territory's leading newspaper, the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise. Joe Goodman, editor of the Enterprise, hired Clemens as a temporary replacement for William Wright, alias Dan De Quille, a famous and well respected journalist. When De Quille returned, Goodman kept both of them.

In search of new forms to express a new idea of himself, Twain experimented in his Western period with a variety of humorous devices. Caricatures, puns, burlesques, hoaxes, and
editorial badinage were the stock and trade of Washoe journalism. In one of his most significant experiments, he produced a sort of literary ventriloquist's act, wherein the writer debated various questions with the uninhibited alter ego named the 'Unreliable.'

Sam felt a need to unleash a rather outspoken part of himself, and it was here that his pen name was first used and here that his creative genius emerged. He tried his hand at a bit of sensationalist journalism that was reflective of the times and was liberated somewhat by the newspaper's satiric bent. In this we can see that satire intrigued him, especially the derisive aspects of it. Clemens rather accidentally became a deadpan storyteller and quite early gained the reputation as a humorist. In 1863 at twenty-eight, he met Artemus Ward on Ward's Western Lecture tour. Clemens had already begun to imitate contemporary humorists such as Ward, Orpheus Kerr, and Josh Billings, and he was greatly influenced by this meeting. One of the major literary devices of these humorists was the deadpan presentation in which the storyteller tells an enormously funny story with a straight face, and Twain became a master at this technique. He praises the deadpan presentation along with the other techniques employed by these humorists in his essay "How to Tell a Story" (1895). Huckleberry Finn exhibits many of the characteristics of the humorous story that Twain speaks of in "How to Tell a Story." Oral storytelling was the foundation for his
writing and was tremendously useful to him as a writer.

Mark Twain, Clemens' alter ego, was greatly influenced by the Southwest humorists. The literature of the Southwest humorists is characterized by a coarseness typifying the riverboat and frontier atmosphere that stood in contrast to the stilted and unrealistic New England tales that could not quench the tastes of the Americans of the 1850's. It flourished briefly in the mid-nineteenth century in the American Southwest, and oral tales and newspaper sketches were embodiments of the symbols it created:

These symbols were destined to survive the Civil War and to have important consequences for American literature. . . . But Southwestern humor was of little or no use politically because while it depicted a society containing slaves, it dealt with slavery only incidentally and had no case to make for the institution. The boisterous mood of this writing veers toward satire rather than toward apologetics; it makes no appeal to sentiment, which proved to be the most powerful weapon of both defenders and attackers of slavery.19

Many critics, rather condescendingly, believe that the humorists not only depicted the backwoods mind but exemplified it. After all, one of the most pressing issues facing Americans in the mid-nineteenth century was the issue of slavery, and the humorist literature was not political at all. Thus being a practitioner of the humorist techniques, Twain, at this time, was categorized as an author of a kind of sub-standard literature. He was
also labelled a local color writer or regionalist because in addition to his humor, his works illuminated the southern landscape and lifestyle. Being snubbed by the intellectuals did not damage the popularity of this literature, however, and it continued to flourish. When the oral tales were transcribed into written tales, they appeared in William T. Porter's *The Spirit of the Times* which was a weekly newspaper which circulated between 1831 and 1861 and had a reading audience of approximately 40,000 in the mid 1840's. Some consider T. B. Thorpe's *The Big Bear of Arkansas* as the most popular frontier humor tale. But Thorpe was joined in his writing by William T. Thompson (*Major Jones's Courtship*), Augustus Longstreet *Georgia Scenes* (1835), and George Washington Harris *Sut Lovingood* (1867). Twain's works reflect the influence of these humorists, and he emerged as the foremost writer of them all.

Twain's popularity continued to grow and he gave public talks and told dialect stories like his famous "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." Most scholars agree that this story was the spark that started his success, and some speculate that his success was partially due to his southern drawl and his colorfully unique physical bearing. He had a rather beak-like nose, a shock of thick, wavy hair, and bushy eyebrows. He had an eye so eagle-like, according to Bret Harte, that a
second lid would not have surprised him. Later he enhanced these looks by wearing his famous white three piece suits which became his trademark. Twain was now a part-time journalist, writer, and public speaker; his acceptance seemed almost immediate. He was one of the most popular post-Civil War writers of the South and his work exhibited the influences of the Southwestern humorists.

The problems associated with slavery were like specters that inevitably must be faced, and the Southwestern humorists with their raucous humor, a coarse lifestyle, and characteristic literary form were not totally isolated from the problems that lay ahead. They chose to present blacks as "happy-go-lucky" and as somewhat less than human in their fiction. Most were not advocates for or against slavery, but used slaves as the victims of many of their jokes. The underlying message in most of the literature (if there is a message at all) is that blacks were less than human.

In Georgia Scenes, Longstreet told the grimly pointed story of a silly young bride who refuses to discipline her slaves. Her kindness is repaid in badly prepared meals, robbery, and open contempt. Unable to convince his wife that the household is falling apart, the distraught husband falls ill and finally dies. The moral of this tall tale was abundantly clear. The Negro was an animal which had to be kept in close rein. . . . 20

Longstreet's depiction of slaves was mild in comparison to their treatment in some of the Southwestern humor of the
1850's. Slaves were victims in many of the cruel jokes in
George Washington Harris's Sut Lovinggood stories:

In the decade of Dred Scott and bleeding Kansas, Southwestern jokes at the black man's expense reached an apotheosis of fury. George Washington Harris's Sut Lovinggood delighted in humiliating and frightening slaves; while black men yelled with pain or terror, Sut stood by and snickered. But even Harris's vindictiveness was eclipsed by the ferocious humor of Henry Clay Lewis, a Louisiana physician. To Lewis, the female Negro was a carnal animal whom it was fun to torture under the guise of medical treatment. In a story called "Cupping the Sternum," he told of applying a "scarificator" to a slave woman's breasts and buttocks. . . . But no blood flowed, nothing but grease, which trickled out slowly like molasses out of a worm hole." Elsewhere, Lewis delighted his readers with the story of his attempt to steal a Negro baby in order to dissect it: . . . . That Lewis's book, The Swamp Doctor's Adventures in the Southwest, was considered a humorous work is amazing, but true. Published in 1858, it furnishes a significant insight into the psychology of the slaveocracy on the eve of the Civil War. 21

Arthur G. Pettit has written several essays concerning Mark Twain's attitude toward blacks, and he concludes in "Mark Twain's Attitude Toward the Negro in the West, 1861-1867" that the time Twain spent in the Far West was a "watershed period" in his attitude towards blacks.

The five and a half years that Samuel Langhorne Clemens spent as a young man in the Far West constitute both the climax of his personal race prejudice, and the first use of the new narrative persona, "Mark Twain" as spokesman for the foolish, half-witted, slaphappy "darky" of longstanding minstrel tradition. 22

Pettit charges that Twain used the Western Press to expand his repertoire of "nigger jokes" using the black man as
literary foil in much the same way that George Washington Harris and other humorists did but devoid of the cruel, sadistic bent that some of them exhibited.

In one article written by Twain in 1864, for example, a man named Wilson tells an anecdote about a Negro who, while being baptized, slipped from the minister's clutch, rose "considerably strangled," and "spouting water like a whale," observed that "one o'dese days some gen'lman's nigger gwyne to get killed wid jis' such dam foolishness as dis."23

Always in a humorous vein, Twain used blacks to illustrate objects of inferior value. In reaction to the name change of Lake Bigler to Tahoe, Twain wrote: "Why, if I had a grudge against a half price nigger I wouldn't be mean enough to call him by such an epithet as that."24 Although quite early in Twain's Western period, he changed his political allegiance from the South to the North, according to Pettit, his "racist" attitude toward blacks was relatively unchanged. Pettit's article seems to suggest that all Southerners, including Southwesterners, were racist or Negrophobes.

... unlike some of his (MT's) other southern traits, his Negrophobia coincided with, rather than deviated from, the Western norm. Fleeing from a terrible war, and not very interested in the survival of the Union beyond whatever impact that survival might have on his own existence, Clemens found the Far West an ideal temporary society, and a most congenial environment in which to practice his first extensive experiments with the Negro as the comic butt, the minstrel stooge, the inane, foolish "yassah" man of long standing minstrel tradition.25
The pioneers in the West believed that pro-Northern and pro-Negro sentiments did not and need not coexist, and Twain, like other humorists, felt it unnecessary to refrain from capitalizing on the physical and cultural differences of blacks as fuel for his jokes. Years later in letters to his sisters, Twain recognizes the reckless egotism of his youth and the shallowness of some of his humor during his period in the West.

Little wonder that ten years later Samuel L. Clemens in retrospect would find the young Western journalist "Mark Twain," to have been little more than a 'callow fool, a self sufficient ass. . . . Indeed, Clemens admitted readily, by the 1870's, that during the 1850's and 1860's he had possessed few qualities of character other than 'ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckle-headedness--and an almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all.' Furthermore, from an essentially reconstructed perspective, Clemens by 1876 was sure that 'that is what the average Southerner is . . . today.'

Meanwhile, before all of these wonderful revelations, blacks continued to be the butt of "nigger jokes" and suffer continuous persecution from their former white masters after the Civil War. Relations between blacks and whites during the post-Civil War years were more tenuous than ever. The qualities of patience and suffering which seemed to be the only ones that were rewarded by the masters were now under scrutiny. The figure of

. . . a white toothed dehumanized buffoon, impervious to pain, incapable of anger--a harmless empty-headed figure of fun who
didn't have the sense to revolt even if he cared to, which he didn't. ... somehow lost ground. Southern whites before the war began to realize that they had created this stereotype of blacks and more and more they realized that it was not an accurate representation. Using Melville's image of the "slumbering volcano" to represent blacks and the racial situation in the South, Kenneth S. Lynn believes that the Nat Turner and Toussaint L'Ouverture uprisings gave substance to the pre-Civil War whites and their suspicions about blacks hiding viciousness and resentment behind their wide grins. This gave rise to the origin of the "brute nigger" stereotype, and out of this fear came more and more oppression for blacks. This basic fear of blacks, particularly the male, was present before and after the war.

Considering the negatives associated with war, many might assume that Twain's escapades in the West served as an escape from the ravages of the Civil War. After all, he spent the war years far away from the battlefields. He did not seem an ardent confederate nor was he a champion for the oppressed. Twain was young at this time and was very much in search of himself. He was not outspoken about the problems involving race because like the other southerners he was caught up in its confusion. Ironically, his departure from Nevada was predicated on an issue concerning race. It seems that in a drunken stupor, which was relatively common for him in his association with
Artemus Ward and other humorists, he jokingly wrote an article suggesting that money raised by the ladies of Carson City for the relief of the sick and wounded Union soldiers was being used to aid a Miscegenation Society in the East. According to Kaplan, rather than make an apology or try to explain that he was intoxicated when he wrote it and did not mean for it to be published, "he was willing to have the ladies appoint someone to avenge them on the field of honor." In his autobiography, Twain illuminates this story of the duel and its postponement, but Kaplan believes that Twain fictionalized these events in his autobiography and says that:

Clemens left Nevada, it now seems clear, because it was suicide for a humorist to make a public fool of himself. The 'miscegenation' fiasco, compounded of accident, intention, and a degree of truth . . . is related to other mortifying instances sprinkled through Mark Twain's life and subject to 'correction' as well as regret.

Kaplan goes on to say:

Far from being a casual topic, miscegenation appears to have been a good deal on Clemens's mind throughout his life. As a young printer's apprentice he understood that by the customs of slave-holding societies, it was a man's right to make love to a black girl 'if he wanted to'. . . . Miscegenation was a central topic of Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) and of a remarkable dream that Clemens recorded in detail in his notebook early in 1897. An allied concern: in a notebook of 1885 [the same year that Huck Finn was published] he predicted that the next one hundred years would bring black supremacy to America—'whites under foot.'
Directly addressed or not, the issue of race and the problems that accompanied it were pervasive and were inextricably ingrained in the very fabric of American society and in Twain's personal and literary life as well. Even in Twain's wanderings, the issue of race confronted him and it was perhaps in these sojourns along with his marriage to Livy (because of her abolitionist influence) that his view of slavery, blacks, and race relations evolved into a more actively liberal one. Arthur Pettit pinpoints 1867 as the date of Twain's conversion to a basically liberal view of blacks. This was shortly after his arrival East with his new wife Olivia Langdon, daughter of Jervis Langdon, a strong abolitionist who had helped slaves to freedom through the New York underground. Twain's marriage to Olivia as well as many other forces affected his views of blacks.

Quite clearly, outside pressures forced Clemens, occasionally against his will, to conform to certain environmental conditions. . . . Clemens's clash with New England and Midwestern 'pilgrims' on the Quaker City tour in 1867, followed by his position as a newspaper reporter in the nation's capital in 1868, doubtless convinced him that a certain amount of reform was in order. He was helped along the way by the fact that the Stalwart faction of the Republican Party, whose favor Clemens consciously curried, was rapidly losing interest in the Negro anyway, thus enabling Clemens to meet the majority of Northern Republicans on common, compromised ground regarding the Negro. 31

It would be ridiculous and quite erroneous, however, to suggest that his opinion toward blacks was based solely on
public expedience. Pettit adds:

... His (Twain's) exposure to men of wider intellectual horizons in Europe, the Middle East, and the Eastern states made it inevitable that he would revise some of his more outspoken racist views.32

Clearly, Twain was maturing and his views toward many subjects were being revised. His attitude toward blacks wavered back and forth it seems, but after 1867 the use of the word "nigger" disappeared from his writings as well as from his speech. He even edited the word "nigger" from The Innocents Abroad (1869).

Throughout the 1850's and into the 1860's, he (Twain) ranted against 'niggers' and told a long series of popular jokes about 'nigger odor,' 'fried nigger steaks,' black sexual promiscuity, and the evils of miscegenation. Yet from the 1880's to his death, he befriended Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington, financed several black students through Yale Law School, wrote blistering essays about atrocities committed against blacks, and created two of the outstanding black characters in American literature: Nigger Jim and Roxana.33

To assume that Twain is racist because of his use of the word "nigger" or because he told "nigger" jokes does not seem well-founded. Racism usually manifests itself in more extreme forms and was accompanied by violence or some other overt action to the detriment of blacks. An analysis of Twain's early experiences with blacks shows that he had not learned of their humanity and that he, like most of his contemporaries, was enslaved by the dictates of the Southern society in which he lived. One should not overlook
his derogatory comments and negative stance toward blacks, but one must also note that the social norms of the nineteenth century dictated his negative stance.

Similarly, the influence of the Civil War and Reconstruction on nineteenth century Americans is immeasurable. The period of the 1880's was quite turbulent, and it was during this time that Huckleberry Finn was created. The southern born Samuel Clemens who became Mark Twain, a southern author who lived before and after this period of United States history, was left with indelible markings from this experience, markings that he and other southerners were very uncomfortable about revealing. It is a notable aspect of our literary history that, except for Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain is the only great American writer who derived his consciousness of slavery from being reared in a Southern slave-holding community.

After the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves, the enmity between blacks and whites escalated and became even more insurmountable and complex. In Shadow and Act, Ralph Ellison eloquently describes nineteenth-century America after the Civil War as:

... of mirrorlike reversals in which the victors were the defeated and the defeated the victors; with the South, its memory frozen at the fixed moment of its surrender, carrying its aggression to the North in the form of guerrilla politics, and with the North, compromising as it went, retreating swiftly into the vast expanse of its new industrial development, eager to lose any
memory of those values for which it had gone to war.\textsuperscript{34} Northerners were drained and overwhelmed by this war, and after establishing military governments in the South to maintain order and smooth the transition, they encountered a more resistant obstacle than the physical battle they had been engaged in. Wanting to rid themselves of this protean-like problem of race relations, the Northerners decided to give this problem back to the Southerners to resolve. After all the Southerners had lived among blacks and perhaps had a better understanding of their habits and limitations and could better determine how they should be treated. How ironic it seems to deliver the blacks back into the very hands of their oppressors, but the Northerners wanted to move on with the advanced pace that the Industrial Revolution had set for the United States. The plight of blacks would certainly regress and their quality of life was worse than before.

The Southerners refused to change their laws and their customs and turned to an insidious and vicious form of control over blacks. Albion W. Tourgee, a "carpetbagger" who came to the South during Reconstruction and became a spokesman for the rights of the freedman, is the author of A Fool's Errand (1879). This controversial work condemns the brutal methods the whites used in their efforts to keep blacks in their "place." Tourgee depicts the brutality of the Ku Klux Klan and gives an account of the deplorable
situation between blacks and whites in the South. The novel attests to the South's failure to grant justice to its black citizens, and cites the Ku Klux Klan as being one of the major vehicles for denying justice to blacks. The rise and dominance of the Ku Klux Klan terrorized blacks and abolitionists (predominantly the former) through:

... blackmail, bullying, flogging, rape of women, castration of men, contemptuous violence to children, burning of Negro houses and shootings, drownings and hangings of anybody who offered serious resistance. Thousands, both black and white - though less, of course of the latter - were slaughtered by the Ku Klux Klan.35

As many Northerners pointed out, another important dimension to this problem of unification of the states after the Civil War and equality of the freedman was the widespread problem of illiteracy in blacks as well as whites in the southern states.

Tourgee had thought much about this, and had arrived at the conclusion ... that what the Southerners needed was education; they could not alter their old habits of behavior, nor consequently, their institutions, without becoming better informed as to what was going on in the rest of the world ... they did not even ... have very much real knowledge of what was going on in their localities - and it was, the sixteen former slave states, which then comprised only a third of the population of the country, made up two-thirds of its total illiteracy, and among the white voters there only twenty-five out of a hundred able to read their ballots. ... 36

By 1881 the sale of A Fool's Errand had greatly declined, for people in the North and West no longer wanted to be
plagued by these painful "intractable problems." After Rutherford B. Hayes' election, the Republican party adopted a laissez-faire policy of non-interference. After 1876 the Supreme Court most often reinterpreted the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments in ways that weakened the protection of blacks. Gradually, the abolitionists and Northern politicians gave back to the South the responsibility to govern itself and, incredibly, the problem of how to incorporate the freedman into the mainstream of society. Conditions of blacks became worse if not as bad as during the days of slavery. The number of black politicians decreased to zero and the oppressive Jim Crow laws and the KKK prevailed in the newly united United States. Any literary artist or sensitive person with vision could foresee the chain of events that was sure to follow. Blacks, as before the Civil War, would again have to struggle and die for the same equal rights that had been spoils of the Civil War.

Certainly one of the major reasons for the failure of the Reconstruction efforts was the prevailing belief in the biological inferiority of blacks. This concept served as one of the bases for slavery as well as for the segregation laws of the South. In "Flaws in a Victorian Veil," Stephen Jay Gould discusses the nineteenth century "scientific" justification of white supremacy. According to Gould, Louis Agassiz, originally from Switzerland but
America's premier naturalist until his death in 1873, spoke as a scientist but had strong prejudices "based primarily on immediate visceral reactions and deep sexual fears."\textsuperscript{38} Agassiz was a polygenist, one who held that each major race had been created as a truly separate species. Gould reports that there were no American polygenists who did not assume that whites were separate and superior. In 1863, Agassiz, a member of President Lincoln's Inquiry Commission, argued that races should be kept separate. He presented his positions on race "as sober and ineluctable deductions from first principles."\textsuperscript{39} Gould concludes that "Racism has often been buttressed by scientists who present a public facade of objectivity to mask their guiding prejudices."\textsuperscript{40} Many Europeans also held this ethnocentric belief, and the idea of the "white man's burden" as applied to the partitioning of Africa was referred to by white members in the Solid South as further justification for the oppression of blacks. The "master race" doctrine which dominated the South was an extension of the European idea of blacks being "the white man's burden."

Negroes remained less than equal, even when possessing full political and civil rights for a few short years after the Civil War. Then new writers appeared on the southern scene to further undermine Negro progress, inflaming passions with the prewar doctrine of inferiority.\textsuperscript{41}

Although a reconstructed southerner at this time, it is very likely that Twain, like the majority of whites during
this period in American history, was ambivalent about this
issue or held the belief that blacks were somehow less than
human. Louis J. Budd points out that Twain's sympathy for
the freedman had a rather "condescending base."

So far as the Negro is concerned Twain's grounding
in his time and place had less admirable
results, both in the quality of his realism and
the impact of his humaneness. A number of the
anecdotes in Life on the Mississippi carelessly
pandered to the sense of innate white
superiority still felt in almost every quarter.
At the same time that he praised Cable's
fiction, he praised Joel Chandler Harris for
revealing the 'negro estimate of values by his
willingness to risk his soul and his nightly
peace forever for the sake of a silver
sev'rmence.' 42

In "Mark Twain and the South: An Affair of Love and
Anger," Arlin Turner discusses Twain's view of blacks in
Life on the Mississippi, which was first published in 1874:

The evidence of Life on the Mississippi is
clear: the author's view of the former
slaves differed little from the dominant view
in the South at the time; he had given no
consistent thought to the negro character or
to the role of the negro in American life; he
drew the conventional negro portrait for
humorous effect; his thrusts at Southern
society were unstudied replies to promptings
of the moment. 43

Turner goes further in his criticism of Twain:

Life on the Mississippi as published avoids
the questions which had revolved about the
negroes since emancipation. In fact it
pictures the ex-slaves along the Mississippi
in 1882 as shiftless, mendacious darkies,
conventionally taken to be appropriate
objects of the white man's laughter, practical
jokes and scorn. Families who came by steam-
boat, taking advantage of the freedom to
migrate they never enjoyed as slaves,
invariably have 'six or eight base-born and spiritless yellow curs, attached to the family by strings. . . . Sometimes a child is forgotten and left on the bank; but never a dog.' According to a bartender who is quoted, 'a nigger will go to H for a watermelon. . . .' 44

Louis Budd and many other critics cite the mistreatment of Jim in the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* as an example of Twain's condescension and claims that the total effect of the novel is seriously weakened by this lapse. Other critics have come to Twain's rescue, however, and insist that the ending does not destroy the beauty and full effect of the novel.

Twain had come far from Hannibal's attitude toward the Negro but not far enough, even if almost anybody today would rather travel with Jim on a raft than Uncle Tom on a steamboat. 45

In "Twain's 'Nigger' Jim: The Tragic Face Behind the Minstrel Mask," Bernard Bell poses a very significant question, one that is asked by numerous Twain critics and scholars. He asks whether or not historical and literary evidence supports the idea that Twain escaped or outgrew the influence of the racial prejudice and discrimination endemic to his social milieu. Bell feels that in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain never fully accepts the equality of blacks and that the complex humanity of Jim and Twain can be seen behind an understanding of the "tragic face behind Jim's minstrel mask." Ralph Ellison had already alluded to the idea of a tragic face behind Jim's minstrel mask in
Shadow and Act (1950). Basically, the real tragedy behind the minstrel mask is the reality of race relations and the basic human condition in nineteenth century America. Twain's ambivalence regarding Blacks is reflective of the ambivalence of nineteenth century and many twentieth century White Americans about Blacks. In this highly democratic society, people were indeed persecuted about their feelings toward Blacks. Paul L. Dunbar's poem, "We Wear the Mask," illustrates that both Blacks and Whites had to conceal their inner selves.

George Washington Cable was an important influence on Mark Twain during the 1880's. Writing during the time of the Southern propagandists who advocated their position of Black inferiority, Cable was the friend, colleague, mentor, and travelling companion of Mark Twain. It took much courage for a Southerner to reopen a sore issue like the rights of Blacks to a population of southerners and northerners as well who were content with the doctrine of the basic inferiority of Blacks. Cable was born in New Orleans, and was an important novelist and advocate for the freedman's rights:

He (Cable) was incapable of idealizing the Negro; in his 'practical daily experiences,' he had acquired an unfavorable impression of the freedman 'in all his offensiveness--multitudinous, unclean, stupid, ugly, ignorant, and insolent... If the much feared 'war of the races' should come... I was going to be in the ranks of the white
race fighting for the subjugation of blacks. 46
And yet he felt that there was something terribly wrong
about not treating Blacks as human beings or granting them
the rights that were theirs as human beings. He believed
in the Socratic principle that all men are equal in their
capacity to know, and that with education, Blacks could im-
prove themselves. Cable made it clear that social
equality and interracial marriage were out of the question
and that the educational gap between the two races was so
wide and the living habits were so different that it was
unthinkable that the races would have any affinity for each
other at all. However, he felt that it was a travesty of
justice to deny Blacks their basic human rights. Twain and
Cable were on a reading and lecture tour from November 1884
to February 1885 covering several northern and border
states. While on tour with Twain, Cable maintained in his
essay, "The Freedman's Case in Equity," which appeared in
Century magazine with excerpts from Huckleberry Finn, that
the conditions of Blacks were worse than before the war.
Cable also claimed that the presence of Blacks in the
United States was, as it had been for a hundred years, the
most urgent social problem that confronted all Americans.
Cable received a response to his essay from Henry W. Grady,
editor of the Atlanta Constitution. His essay was also
published in Century magazine; Grady affirmed that Whites
were superior to Blacks and that this was healthy, natural,
and the key to a stable society. Grady represented the voice of the South and vehemently concluded that the South should be left alone to solve the race problem. The courageous effort by Cable speaking out against the injustices heaped upon blacks undoubtedly affected his friend and travelling companion, Mark Twain. "Although Twain did not join in the public debate, there can be little doubt that Cable influenced his thought on Southern issues from the early 1880's onward." 47

Cable and Twain were billed as "Twins of Genius" on their reading tour and Twain recognized the superior intellect that Cable possessed. Arlin Turner goes so far as to say that Huckleberry Finn was written to please Cable. Although Twain was not as blatant as Cable about his views regarding blacks, there are numerous ironies in Huckleberry Finn that indict the Southerners' stance about the issue of slavery and blacks in the 1840's. These same issues were present in 1885. To show that the indictment applied to American society in 1885 no less than in the slave era, Turner points out:

In spite of Jim's presence, however, and the danger that he may be returned to his owner, slavery is seen only obliquely; not slavery but slave doctrine is presented. The view reflected in Pap Finn's drunken tirade against the government that allows a 'white-shirted free nigger' to vote in the state across the river has no focus on a slave or slave conditions, and the distortion which the slave society has produced in Pap Finn's mind is one of the lesser aberrations he has
... the first, if not the only man of his section to betray a consciousness of the grotesque absurdities in the Southern inversion of the civilized ideals in behalf of slavery, which must have them upside down in order to walk over them safely. No American of Northern birth or breeding could have imagined the spiritual struggle of Huck Finn in deciding to help the Negro Jim to his freedom. ...
Diametrically opposed to the liberal writings of Cable, Tourgee, and Twain, Thomas Nelson Page and other writers wrote novels defending slavery during Reconstruction and continued throughout its aftermath. They perpetuated the myths of the "happy and devoted" slaves. Most of these writers extended and modified the plantation myth of the 1830's, and used it to counteract the sympathetic and liberal writing that began to emerge from the South. Century magazine documented the modulating attitude that the Northerners formulated about the South.

The stories of the Virginian Thomas Nelson Page began appearing in the magazine (Century) in 1884, at the moment when the resentment against Cable in the South was reaching its most rabid point. 50

T. N. Page and Thomas Dixon, well known nineteenth century Southern propagandists, are blatantly racist. 51 Page strongly supported and advanced the position of black inferiority and white superiority.

... the Negroes as a race have never exhibited much capacity to advance; that as a race they are inferior to other races. ... Here and there we find a lawyer or two, unhappily with their practice in inverse ratio to their principle. Or now and then there is a doctor. But almost invariably these are men with a considerable infusion of white blood in their veins. 52

Page was by far one of the leading "literary reactionaries of the period, unwilling to note the extreme economic and social deprivation of the Negro." 53 He had an antagonistic and condescending attitude toward blacks and had only been
twelve years old at the end of the Civil War as Edmund Wilson points out in *Patriotic Gore*. Page felt that "slavery in America had given the negro the only resemblance of civilization he had possessed since the dawn of history." With rampant illiteracy in the South, Page would not have known about ancient African civilizations nor would any of the other southerners who had little knowledge of any culture other than their own. So they further denied the existence of an African culture and created myths of "infantile" and less than human blacks to polarize the black and white races rather indefinitely. Page was by profession a lawyer who later became Ambassador to Great Britain. It is a pity that his knowledge was relatively limited and that he was opinionated in his views; he was largely ignored by critics. Page had very little firsthand knowledge of the genuine Old South and "really invented for the popular mind Old Massa, Mistis, and Meh Lady, with their dusky-skinned adoring retainers." Page saw the comic aspects of blacks and created the image of the "happy slave" as well as the stereotype of the "brutal or ferocious" black who was to be feared. He treats Reconstruction in his novel *Red Rock* (1898), and his most famous stories are *Marse Chan*, the story of a grief-stricken slave overwhelmed by the death of his "massa," and *Ole Stracted*, the story of a deranged and infantile black who needed the "massa" to tell him his
name and take care of him. All of these stories portray the allegedly congenial and fanciful race relations that existed before the war.

Page's superior attitudes toward the Negro, his absolute commitment to Negro inferiority, is shared openly by only the most militant racists in the country today. Tacit agreement is, however, widespread; and white people have not advanced, in many practical ways, very far beyond their ancestors at the turn of the century. Historically, Page's essay represents a position that can be traced throughout the nineteenth century in the writings of John P. Kennedy, John Esten Cooke, William Caruthers, William Gilmore Simms, and many others; it is the apotheosis of that reactionary attitude, and it is mirrored in the tales of Joel Chandler Harris, and the less effective fiction of Thomas Dixon.56

The Southerners used the myth of the southern plantation to pacify the Northerners and assure them that the South had no malice against the black man. The myth was created before the Civil War in the 1830's with John P. Kennedy's Swallow Barn, published in 1832, and it gave a rather idyllic picture of the master/slave relationship.

Originating within the nostalgic and sentimental mode of Washington Irving, and first applied to the South in John P. Kennedy's Swallow Barn. . . . the picture of aristocratic masters, brilliant and charming heroines, and devoted slaves reached full development in the historical fiction of the Virginian John Esten Cooke in the middle 1850's. So compelling to the imagination was this group of symbols, bathed as they were in the charm of pastoral tradition and feudal romance, that they longed survived the destruction of the plantation system itself.57

Having a need to justify this abominable and oppressive
system, the South was really hard-pressed to create a myth that would explain its actions. To portray the plantation system as paternalistic, pastoral, and idyllic would somehow counteract the South's misgivings about what it had done and was doing to blacks. This pseudo-aristocracy could demand loyalty and service from the "unworthy dependent black savages" it nurtured. According to Henry Nash Smith:

The fiction dealing with the plantation emphasizes the beauty of harmonious relations in an orderly feudal society. It presupposes generations of settled existence and is inimical to change. Literary plantations are almost always in the older South, and when they are situated in the new, developing Southwest, they are unhistorically depicted as duplicates of Virginia and Carolina estates on which the convention was first based. Such symbols could not be adapted to the expression of a society like that of the West, either South or North, where rapidity of change, crudity, bustle, heterogeneity were fundamental traits.58

The Southern propagandist writers used the plantation system myth to fuel their literature and to justify the further oppression of blacks during and after Reconstruction. Records of slave insurrections along with the atrocities of slavery were minimized to create the illusion of a stable relationship that existed between the masters and the slaves before the Civil War, and the Civil War was depicted as destroying the peace and order that had existed previously. Page and other propagandists advocated the "white superiority" doctrines in their literature, and Americans joined sides or again chose to ignore the issue entirely.
At this time Mark Twain, the writer and lecturer, had a more informed and, to borrow Howell's term, "reconstructed" view of race. He apparently had felt the baseness of the white Southerner's racist actions and began to take a personal interest in the problem. Twain became inflamed by violent injustices to black freedman, Chinese, and other oppressed peoples in the United States and began chronicling and denouncing some of their oppressors in various newspapers:

It was Mark Twain's habit to respond quickly and emotionally, and often with scorn or derision or irony, when an instance of sham came to his attention, or a blamable injury or a perversion of justice. It was not his habit to think a subject through or to mount an extended argument. Writing brief, explosive notes on aristocracy, feuding, dueling, lynching, and racism was congenial to his mind and manner.

Any quick emotional reaction to a situation is a prime target for a change of heart, and Louis Budd maintains in Mark Twain: Social Philosopher that Twain was still pretty much controlled by the dictates of the American majority.

Critics who see Twain as a mental butterfly are misled by the variety of his interests, which made for sudden darts back to any spot that showed life. As long as popular opinion kept pushing negroes down to their lowest status since the days of slavery, he quietly compromised on a minstrel show version of the 'shiftless, worthless, lovable, black darling.' But when the lynching earned dark headlines again he wrote his trenchant essay on 'The United States of Lyncherdom' (1901) . . . he made his anger public, growling to the press that the South would soon need a law against lynchings on Christmas day and describing a fast yacht as having 'a reach like a Christian mob with a nigger in sight.'
The pendulum of Twain's social consciousness seemed to be swinging back and forth insofar as his involvement with the problem of race relations was concerned, but he had maintained by the end of the nineteenth century a consistently anti-racist position. Howells believed that:

... he held himself responsible for the wrong which the white race had done the black race in slavery, and he explained, in paying the way of a Negro student through Yale, that he was doing it as his part of the reparation due from every black man.61

Howells speaks further about a discussion he had with Twain about a black cadet who was expelled from West Point for unbecoming conduct, and the newspaper commented further that a black could never "feel the claim of honor." Twain responded:

The (black) man was fifteen parts white, but, 'Oh yes,' Clemens said, with bitter irony, 'it was that one part black that undid him.' It made him a 'nigger' and incapable of being a gentleman. It was to blame for the whole thing. The fifteen parts white were guiltless.62

The complications produced by the intermingling of the black and white races in America gave rise to an ambiguous, or to borrow Ralph Ellison's term, an invisible person, the American Negro, whose heritage was to be despised and denied for centuries. Both Cable and Twain spoke to the problem of miscegenation, and later William Faulkner effectively addressed this theme in his fiction. More and more the inclination whites had of hating blacks amounted,
to a large extent, to hating themselves. Since greater numbers of blacks were no longer of pure African descent, the whites' reaction to blacks was more strained and ambivalent. Posing greater problems than ever before, the race problem was something that could not be brushed under the rug.

The issue of race manifested itself in other ways for many of the Southern writers. Psychologists identified a doubleness or dual personality present in many Southern artists. Critics point to a duality in Twain's nature which may be compared to a similar duality in Joel Chandler Harris. Generally, this duality relates to an "inhibited" and an "uninhibited" self. Because of the ostracism that a native Southerner would receive by taking a stand for freedman's rights, most Southern artists lived a repressed existence. Joel Chandler Harris, not an advocate for blacks, and Mark Twain, who accepted the title as an advocate for the oppressed, have been cited as having these dual personalities. Rather simplistically, one could look at Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus tales and assume that his stories are an imaginary slave's pleasant memories about slavery. However, a closer examination of his work reveals an artist, much like Mark Twain, whose work has several levels of meaning and criticizes numerous aspects of the society in which he lived. In his everyday life, Harris was a quiet, shy, reserved man who shunned
public life and reading tours, but he had another more explosive underside that emerged in his fiction. Harris
acknowledges his dual nature in a letter written to his teenage daughters in 1898:

Harris acknowledged the ongoing struggle between his two selves: 'Now, I'll admit that I write the editorials for the paper [Atlanta Constitution]. The 'other fellow' has nothing to do with them, and, so far as I am able to get his views on the subject, he regards them with scorn and contempt. ... He is a creature hard to understand, but so far as I can understand him, he's a very sour, surly fellow. ... Now, my 'other fellow,' I am convinced, would do some damage if I didn't give him an opportunity to work off his energy in the way he delights."

Harris's duality is much like the duality that Twain scholars have assigned to him, and the characters both create are forces of subversion. Most of Twain's subversiveness is through irony while Harris's is of a symbolic nature. In "Uncle Remus and the Malevolent Rabbit," Bernard Wolfe points out that

Harris appears to have been trapped in a permanent rebellion against his own skin. He was a man filled with the racial obsessions that plagued many Southerners and, indeed, many white Americans; a writer whose genial fictional creation told stories which could be read as acts of symbolic aggression against Southern racial and sexual taboos. Brer Rabbit, the quintessential trickster, constantly overturns the established hierarchy of the world in which he is forced to live.

Using his pseudonym, Samuel Clemens could vent his views about the society in which he lived. Although veiled in irony, his criticism is far reaching and he speaks
vociferously against the American society's repressed existence. Being freed somewhat from the constraints of formal usage by his innovative use of language (the vernacular), Twain reports important truths through the mind and mouth of Huck Finn, his narrator. Huck Finn, the restless and wandering misfit whom society labelled "white trash," was actually the forever youthful, restless, and wandering Sam Clemens. Mark Twain, the author, could speak through the voice of Huck and condemn the hypocrisy of nineteenth century America. Samuel Clemens, Livy's husband, public figure, and family man, must cater to the restrictions that society placed on him. Ralph Ellison speaks of this phenomenon of the divided nature of Southern artists in Shadow and Act:

Social division is forced upon the Negro by the ritualized ethic of discrimination, but upon the white man by the strictly enforced set of anti-Negro taboos. The conflict is always with him. Indeed, so rigidly has the recognition of Negro humanity been tabooed that the White Southerner is apt to associate any form of personal rebellion with the Negro. So that for the Southern artist the Negro becomes a symbol of his personal rebellion, his guilt and his repress of it. The Negro is thus a compelling object of fascination.65

Thus the Southern artist, having to accept blacks as part of his social and literary milieu, groped with various realities and misconceptions about himself and the black man. The latter part of Twain's life is usually referred to as the dark side or pessimistic period in his life.
Perhaps his cynicism became more blatant with age. Twain's view of the human race can best be summarized in his often used expression "the damned human race." Twain believed that history was destined to repeat itself and that man was enslaved by a mechanistic determinism. His later works hint of a natural depravity in man. The dark nature of the Southern system of slavery and the problems of race veiled the South with an unspeakable sadness. Twain, sensitive to this sadness or "curse" from his forefathers, tried to relieve this pain with his humor. He attempted to awaken the masses to this reality as painlessly as possible. William Dean Howells speaks of Twain's creative complexity in *My Mark Twain:*

There is no real telling how any one comes to be what he is; all speculation concerning the fact is more or less impudent or futile conjecture; but it is conceivable that Mark Twain took from his early environment the custom of clairvoyance in things in which most humorists are purblind, and that being always in the presence of the underdog, he came to feel for him as under him. If the knowledge and vision of slavery did not tinge all life with potential tragedy, perhaps it was this which lighted in the future humorist the indignation at injustice which glows in his page. His indignation relieves itself as often as not in a laugh; injustice is the most ridiculous thing in the world, after all, and indignation with it feels its own absurdity.
NOTES


2 Justin Kaplan, Mark Twain and His World (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) 22-23.


5 Lauber, 25.


8 Lauber, 25.

9 Lauber, 29.

10 Clemens, 6-7.


12 Samuel Langhorne Clemens, How To Tell a Story and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899) 322.

13 Kaplan, 37.

14 Kaplan, 38.

16. Howells, 177.

17. Kaplan, 43.


20. Lynn, 103.

21. Lynn, 104.


29. Kaplan, 58.


33 Pettit, "Mark Twain and His Times: A Bicentennial Appreciation," 204.


36 Wilson, 546.


39 Gould, 172.

40 Gould, 176.


44 Turner, 505.

45 Budd, 105.
Wilson, 552.

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Budd, 201.

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James A. Miller, "The Other Fellow," The Nation (May 9, 1987) 616.

Miller, 617.
65 Ellison, 42.
66 Howells, 180.
Chapter Three

THE IMPRISONING POWER OF LANGUAGE IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN
(History of the Word "Nigger")

Mark Twain's revolutionary use of language in Huckleberry Finn is at once one of the agents for the novel's greatness and the target for a good deal of its criticism. Early detractors protested the moral laxity in the language, and visionaries applauded Twain's use of language as a tour de force. One of his major tools of subversion in Huckleberry Finn, besides his use of irony, is his use of language. Whether intentionally or not, Twain makes a very important statement about the possibilities or lack of possibilities one has as a result of language. Language is defined as one of the entrapments of culture, and society is coercive through language. The use of language creates social fictions that determine our sense of reality. Twain effectively exposes the evils of slavery, black and white, via his use of language, and he develops an anti-racist theme in the novel. A careful analysis of Twain's use of language reveals that Huckleberry Finn is in fact a dialectic. Twain uses the language against itself. Ultimately he shows, as the title of this chapter suggests, the imprisoning power of language.

In 1840, blacks were not allowed to learn to read and write. They had been intentionally cut off from their
native language and were "trapped" attempting to communicate within a new and different language. Jim's conception of "self" is largely controlled by the language of the larger society in which he lives.

It seems axiomatic to us that the social milieu helps one to define his self-concept, and the self-concept that evolves affects the manner in which one person communicates with another.¹

In "Discourse in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the world of "authoritative discourse" which is represented in Huckleberry Finn as the nineteenth century White society:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independently of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. . . . It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are equal. It is given . . . in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special . . . language. . . . It is akin to taboo. . . . It demands our unconditional allegiance. . . . It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it or totally reject it.²

Obviously, Blacks are different from their White counterparts in cultural and physical characteristics. Unfortunately, Whites decided that the differences make Blacks inferior. Jim has been programmed to believe that his blackness is a negative trait, and these values are reflected in the language that he must speak. Jim's
interpretation of Huck's future in the hairball is an excellent example of Jim's negative interpretation of his blackness:

Dey's two angels hoverin' roun' 'bout him.
(Pap) One uv 'em is white en shiny, en 'tother one is black. De white one gits him to do right, a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up. . . .

Jim has successfully assimilated the Euro-American values of good and evil which are represented by his labelling of the white angel as good and the black angel as bad. Since Jim cannot read or write and the word symbols that he picks up from the white culture dehumanize him, he can assume very few positives about himself.

Because of Jim's condition of servitude and his blackness, he sees himself as a subordinate to all whites, young or old, rich or poor. Using nineteenth century decorum, he addresses Huck as "master" upon their first encounter on Jackson Island:

'Why, how long you been on the island, Jim?''
'I come heah de night arter you's killed. . . .'
'And ain't you had nothing but that kind of rubbage to eat?''
'No, sah - nuffin else.'

He refers to his young superior, Huck Finn, as "sah" and in another instance as "boss" and assumes his servile position. In Jim's reluctant confession to Huck about why he ran away from Miss Watson, he accepts the fact of his mistreatment but can not endure being sold "down the river." He speaks of his servitude and possible sale as a
fact of life:

Well, you see, it 'uz dis way. Ole Missus-dat's Miss Watson—she pecks on me all de time, en treats me pootty rough, but she awluz said she wouldn' sell me down to Orleans. But I noticed dey wuz a nigger trader roun' de place considerable, lately, en I begin to git oneasy. . . .

Jim must speak of himself in the language of his master, as a commodity rather than a person. Because they are on the island or adrift on the Mississippi, Huck and Jim can temporarily abandon society's dictates. However, even as their friendship evolves, Jim is imprisoned by his race to be "only" the equal of a young white boy. In "Mark Twain's Jim in the Classroom," Donald Gibson supports this position, and goes further to suggest that the child/adult roles are reversed:

Opponents of the novel believe that the relation between Huck and Jim is essentially demeaning . . . he (Jim) could only assume the role of leader, protector, and provider . . . . All other adults in Huck's world embody authority and, indeed, masculinity by social consensus, appears to himself and to Huck as less than an adult.  

Gibson contends that even on the raft, the general conception of the proper relation between white and black in regard to authority is maintained. As a black slave or freedman, Jim is by circumstance of birth limited in his use of language. He knows his position in society and participates by virtue of his language in the degradation of himself. Jim is enslaved not only by the written laws of the slaveholding society, but by the spoken language as
well. The manacles of slavery are inherent in his label as "Nigger." In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," Ralph Ellison points out:

... Twain, standing closer to the Reconstruction and to the oral tradition, was not free of the white dictum that Negro males must be treated either as boys or "uncles" — never as men. Jim's friendship for Huck comes across as that of a boy for another boy rather than as the friendship of an adult for a junior; thus there is implicit in it not only a violation of the manners sanctioned by society for relations between Negroes and whites, there is a violation of our conceptions of adult maleness.5

Being black excludes the possibility for Jim's freedom, particularly in the South but in the North as well. At one point, Huck understands Jim's predicament:

Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was, as long as he'd got to be a slave.

The idea that "niggers" had "got" to be slaves permeated the South.

The imprisoning effect of language in Huckleberry Finn is conveyed most effectively by the use of the word "nigger." Since "nigger" is an offensive word in our vocabulary, many twentieth century blacks cite its repetition as one of the reasons why Huckleberry Finn should be banned from contemporary schools and libraries. Black educators, like John Wallace, feel that the word traumatizes young blacks. The stigmas created from a label like "nigger" are as degrading to twentieth century blacks
as they were to their ancestors. The emotional impact that this label has on an individual is devastating, and its use is something that most would not like to perpetuate. The word is an active rather than a passive entity, and it places blacks within an inferior and inescapable group because of the negatives that it evokes. A vivid example of the emasculating effect this word has on an individual is Tom Driscoll's reaction to discovering that he is black in Twain's *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

Why were niggers and whites made? What crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why is this awful difference made between white and black? . . . How hard the nigger's fate seems, this morning! -yet until last night such a thought never entered my head.⁶

The word "nigger" does not signify a real person, but rather a disembodiment or a cruel joke in which no one wants to become the butt or object. After finding out from his mother that he is really a "nigger," Tom begins acting a certain way:

. . . If he met a friend, he found that the habit of a lifetime had in some mysterious way vanished—his arm hung limp, instead of involuntarily extending the hand for a shake. It was the 'nigger' in him asserting its humility, and he blushed and was abashed. . . . He found the 'nigger' in him involuntarily giving the road, on the sidewalk, to the white rowdy and loafer. When Rowena, the dearest thing his heart knew, the idol of his secret worship, invited him in, the 'nigger' in him made an embarrassed excuse and was afraid to enter and sit with the dread white folks on equal terms. The 'nigger' in him went shrinking and skulking here and there and
yonder, and fancying it saw suspicion and maybe detection in all faces, tones, and gestures. So strange and uncharacteristic was Tom's conduct that people noticed it, and turned to look after him when he passed on. . . . He presently came to have a hunted sense and a hunted look, and then he fled away to the hilltops and the solitudes. He said to himself that the curse of Ham was upon him.

The impact that the word symbol, "nigger," has on an individual is more profound than one would expect. But does the use of the word in the novel actually perpetuate a kind of incarceration or serve as a tool for racism? One cannot argue the negative connotations that accompany the use of the word "nigger." However, Twain uses this negative along with others to expose frightening realities about both Blacks and Whites. Twain shows that everyone is imprisoned by the word. Nineteenth century Whites labelled Blacks "niggers" to dehumanize them; they used it repeatedly and as part of a Black person's name (ex. Nigger Jim). They overtly referred to Blacks as property (ex. Miss Watson's nigger) to convince themselves that the enslavement of Blacks was the just and proper thing to do. The repeated use of the word in the novel drills home the enormity of the race problem and the fact that Whites were attempting to establish the negative fiction about Blacks being less than human into law. Repetition had a way of making it so. In "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," David L. Smith points out:
... the conception of the 'nigger' is a socially constituted and sanctioned fiction. ... and the purpose of this social fiction is to justify the abuse and exploitation of blacks by substituting the essentialist fiction for the actual character of individual blacks. 8

According to Susan K. Gillman in "Dickens: Doubles: Twain: Twins," social fictions assume not the pose but the power of unalterable realities. 9 The impact of these fictions should not be underestimated. In "Language and Identity in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," Brook Thomas elaborates on the connection between language and social fictions:

To write and to speak is always second hand. Language separates man from direct experience and forces him to adopt roles that he does not always want to play. The only way that he can approximate a truth is to write a fiction, which is a recognized lie. That lie, divorced from direct experience, often seems a superfluous elaboration. 10

The history of the word "nigger" traces the negative fictions about Afro-Americans to the same negative connotations generated by the word "Black."

The word "nigger" itself was one of the major instruments for the complete subjugation and dehumanization of Blacks. Its use helped create fictions of inferiority, and the negative associations assigned by the ruling culture were meant to brainwash even Blacks into believing that they were the "accursed" and that they deserved to be servants. In Lacan and Language, Jacques Lacan points out
the importance of the word:

... it was certainly the word (verbe) that was in the beginning, and we live in its creation, but it is the action of our spirit that continues this creation by constantly renewing it.

The spirits of many Blacks had been broken by this word. In what is considered by some critics as Twain's finest exposition on race, Roxana, his mulatto heroine in The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, is quite vocal about the relative worthlessness of Blacks. Although she switches the identity of her son with that of a White child, he is nonetheless a murdering, thieving, lying coward. Roxy feels that her son's failure is because of the small drop of Black blood that he has in his veins. The Oxford Dictionary traces the use of "nigger" in 1786, but it is almost certainly older than this, according to the Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins. It appears as early as 1700 in Samuel Sewall's Diary although it was spelled with a single 'g'. "Nigger" is defined as a variant of Negro which goes back to the Latin "niger" for Black. "Except in Black English vernacular ... it is virtually restricted to contexts of deliberate and contemptuous ethnic abuse." Interestingly, Twain uses the expression, "He laid into his work like a nigger" in Tramps Abroad (1880). Here the meaning seems to connote working exceptionally hard or like an animal. Coupled with the negative aesthetic values assigned to the color black which
are that black is associated with evil, filth, wrongdoing, and death, a "nigger" is black and construed as a worthless subhuman object of little value other than to work.

The imprisoning power of language, and specifically the labelling of Blacks as "niggers," helped to destroy the possibility for any Black to be truly free in America and especially in the Southern river towns. Being called "nigger," in addition to the myriad political, economic, and social maneuvers Whites made to disenfranchise Blacks, dehumanized them to the extent that misconceptions about Blacks continue to exist in twentieth century America and the world. As Twain infers in Huckleberry Finn, any form of negative behavior was blamed on Blacks. Nigger Jim was blamed for Huck's supposed murder, and, of course, Huck and the reader know that Jim is innocent. The woman from the river town reports:

... before night they (townspeople) changed around and judged it was done by a runaway nigger named Jim... The nigger run off the very night Huck Finn was killed. So there's a reward out for him. . . . (p. 49)

Jim is black and in the vicinity; naturally he would be the suspect. Huck and Jim are in numerous tight places because of the label that Jim wears. Because Jim is a "nigger" and a runaway, Huck has to fabricate a lie to mislead two men on a skiff who are curious about his companion. When asked whether his man is Black or White, Huck reluctantly lies:
I didn't answer up prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn't come. I tried for a second or two, to brace up and out with it, but I warn't man enough — hadn't the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says—He's white. (p. 75)

Being a Black man living in nineteenth century America made things quite difficult for Jim and Huck. Huck is trapped by language and is offensive without intending to be so.

Initially, Huck cannot see the fallacies of his society because of his limitations with the language. But the erroneous portrait that society has painted of Jim is one of the most striking contradictions that Huck faces. Because of his interaction with Jim on the river, he "... sees, without realizing it, that 'nigger' is a misnomer, an empty signifier, an alibi."¹³ Huck learns quickly that Jim is not like society's portrait of a "nigger." In "Three Problems of Fictional Form: First Person Narration in David Copperfield and Huck Finn," J. Hillis Miller suggests: "Huck's real choice in the book is not between the true speech of the raft and the false speech of the shore, but between speech and silence."¹⁴ This is because, like Jim, the moment Huck opens his mouth he is forced to use a language system that is not his own. Silence will allow him to escape language, civilization's most subtle and complete means of control.¹⁵ Although the truth about race becomes blatantly obvious to the reader through ironic situations and the language, Huck is never
fully aware or willfully a champion for the Black cause. He constantly chides himself for deviating from the norm, and he is always surprised about his revelations about "niggers." He speaks in praise of Jim in chapter fourteen: "Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head for a nigger" (p. 64). In another excellent example of Huck's growing awareness of Jim's humanity, Huck humbles himself to apologize to Jim:

> It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way. (p. 72).

Huck is surprised that Jim has feelings and can be hurt by a cruel joke. He learns that this Black man is no "nigger" but a wise and caring human being and a friend; Pap Finn acts more like a "nigger" than Jim, but the color of Pap's skin frees him from the label. With strong irony Twain calls attention to Pap's stark white face and to Colonel Grangerford's white suit. Jim is, as Nick Carraway says about Jay Gatsby, "worth the whole damn bunch" of Whites that Huck has encountered and Huck comes to discover this. The novel has been called a bildungsroman and indeed it is. The innocent Huck learns a great deal. Although he sees the inconsistencies of his society, he, like Jim, can do very little about them. Both are forced to use society's communicative tools which in themselves are laced with
misconceptions and prejudices. Twain presents a dismal picture of man's inescapability from societal constraints transmitted through language.

Although Twain conforms to nineteenth century American racial discourse in his use of the Southern vernacular, his overall depiction of Jim as a character is completely opposite to the nineteenth century stereotype of Blacks. The reality that Twain depicts contradicts the dictates of language. Subconsciously, Huck becomes more and more aware of the fallacies in his earlier conception of Nigger Jim. He sums up some of the positive characteristics that Jim possesses in chapter thirty-one:

But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world. . . . (p. 169)

Because of societal limitations, Jim is subordinate to Huck. However, he is symbolically the father-figure that Huck never had. Jim takes care of him and is kind to him; in a sense, Jim gives him companionship and love that he had never experienced with another human being. In "Yours Truly, Huck Finn," Roy Harvey Pearce contends:
Still, [Huck and Jim's relationship] is an appropriately primitive, even precivilized relationship; for Huck sees Jim not as a man with the responsibilities of a man but as one essentially like himself. This is his fundamental limitation, and yet the source of his strength.

In another deviation from the prevailing stereotypes of Blacks, Twain portrays Jim as having a great love for his own family. Huck wakes up before daybreak one morning to witness Jim's "moaning and mourning" about his family:

... He was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so. ... He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was. (p. 125)

Jim is presented as having a conscience and having misgivings about mistreating Lizabeth, his deaf daughter. Not knowing that she had lost her hearing after a bout with scarlet fever, Jim slaps his little daughter and is haunted by it.

... Oh, Huck, I bust out a-cryin' en grab her up in my arms, en say, 'Oh, de po' little thing! de Lord God Almighty forgive po' ole Jim koze he never gwynn to forgive himself as 'long's he live.' Oh, she was plumb deef en dumb, Huck ... en I'd ben a'treat'n her so!' (p. 126)

Another example of his love for his family is his desire to save money to buy his family out of slavery. Jim immediately thinks of them when he thinks that he and Huck have almost reached Cairo and his freedom, he joyfully
confesses to Huck:

He (Jim) was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free State he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife . . . and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'licationist to go and steal them. (p. 74)

Jim seems almost desperate to obtain his entire family's freedom. Again Huck is faced with problems of conscience because after all he would be participating in several crimes against society if Jim really did carry his wish for freedom this far. Huck is bound by society's codes and is engaged in a constant struggle with his heart and conscience. Clearly, Twain's portrayal of Jim is contrary to the predominant myths about unfeeling, animalistic Black people. However, some critics feel that the ending of the novel indicates a reversion to the prevailing conception of the inhumanity of Blacks. Jim becomes the hollow unfeeling victim of cruelties inflicted upon him by Tom and Huck; he is the object of the ludicrous and painful setting of a freedman free. Since Twain had successfully destroyed the negative stereotype of Blacks earlier in the novel, this reversion could perhaps suggest the futility or impossibility of escape from enslavement, particularly as it relates to Blacks. Because the reader, like Huck, has seen and can see Jim's humanity, few can overlook the racial injustices perpetrated on Blacks. The
last chapters of the novel emphasize the baseless
cruelties inflicted upon Blacks and is another dimension
of Twain's anti-racist theme in the novel. However, this
does not suggest that Huck is morally blind. In Structural
Anthropology, Levi-Strauss contends: "... the observer
cannot modify the phenomenon merely by becoming conscious
of it."^7 No one person, particularly an outcast, could
hope to alter these deeply-ingrained problems of race. In
much the same way, Twain, the literary artist, did not con-
front the racial issue in a straightforward manner. His
techniques affected the consciences of his audience and in-
deed had a tremendous impact. In "We Ain't All Trying to
Talk Alike: Varieties of Language in Huckleberry Finn,"
David Sewell discusses the limitations of language and the
process by which language may be changed:

Huck's speech serves to remind us that
language, like any social institution,
progresses only through the dialectic
interplay between the fixed standards that
crystallizes old visions and old voices,
and the grammarless voices, undergoing
constant growth and flux, of the present
historical moment.^8

The repetitious use of "nigger" is not a mere
tautology or simply reflective of nineteenth century
American discourse; it is an indictment of the whole of
society. David L. Smith points out that Twain uses
"nigger" throughout the book as a synonym for slave.^9 The
notion of slavery, called the "great unmentionable" by
Harriet Beecher Stowe and other well-known abolitionists, receives a bitter "flogging" in *Huckleberry Finn*. Although "nigger" is used by Cable, Page, Stowe, and others in their writings, it does not have the same effect. Twain captures the language and the spirit of the American South in *Huckleberry Finn*. If "nigger" is a synonym for slavery, it resounds throughout the novel. Repeated over one hundred and fifty times, "nigger" symbolizes the "screaming out" of the once restricted subject of slavery. The repetitious use of "nigger" becomes the heartbeat of a guilty nation, and the "great unmentionable" becomes the spoken conscience negating a cruel tradition. In *The Colloquial Style in America*, Robert Bridgman makes several interesting statements about the nature of repetition in colloquial literature:

> Any word used with sufficient frequency as to become generally familiar gains access to the vernacular insofar as the vernacular is defined as a nation's common fund of language. 20

The effect of this repetition on the reader is subtle at best. Bridgman adds:

> The level at which such associations are created may often be below what we would deem conscious; so in fact may be their reception. But the point is that all of these various repetitions and associations go to make up the unity of form in colloquial prose. 21

Slavery had enveloped the minds of the whole of nineteenth century America and had become a formidable opponent for
Blacks and Whites. Ignoring or denying the problem of race only allowed the situation to fester. Facing the problems generated by the South's oppressive racial policies, which continued to persist after Reconstruction and the publication of Huckleberry Finn, could eventually contribute to the resolution of the problem. The perhaps inadvertently didactic nature of the text indicates a faith in man's ability to alter these discrepancies since indeed man is collectively responsible for them. Twain's repeated use of "nigger" calls attention to the deeply-rooted problem of racial prejudice inherent in language.

Twain's strategy in Huckleberry Finn is to frequently use this degrading term "nigger" (along with other racist misnomers or conventions that he criticizes) in order to undermine them. An excellent example of Twain's utilization of language in this way (particularly the word "nigger") is the conversation between Tom's Aunt Sally and Huck about a steamboat accident. Huck fabricates a steamboat accident to explain why he is late getting to the Phelps Farm:

'It warn't the grounding - that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder head.'
'Good gracious! anybody hurt?'
'No'm. Killed a nigger.'
'Well, it's luck; because sometimes people do get hurt.' (p. 175)

To imply, as the conversation does, that a "nigger" is not a person is the racist fiction of the times. Huck's
negative comment about the dead "nigger" is an attempt to mollify Tom's aunt. It shows that he is a functioning member of society. After all, Huck is pretending to be Tom, and Huck knows that this is something that his hero, Tom Sawyer, would say. Huck is, like the majority of society, trying to fit into the existing order. In "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," Smith comments on this issue:

Huck has never met Aunt Sally prior to this scene, and in spinning a lie which this stranger will find unobjectionable, he correctly assumes that the common notion of Negro subhumanity will be appropriate. Huck's off-hand remark is intended to exploit Aunt Sally's attitudes, not to express Huck's own.  

This incident has been scrutinized by numerous critics, and some believe that Huck has slipped back into the racist patterns of the whole of society. The possibility of Huck's backsliding is quite unlikely at this point. After all, his sole purpose for being at the Phelps farm is to rescue Jim. He is trying to redirect the heat of Aunt Sally's questionings, and he knows that the way to eliminate this pressure is to start his common practice of lying. In this redirection, he exposes the cruelty of Tom's Aunt Sally, who stands for the status quo of the society. Huck feigns conformity and pretends to be the epitome of a good old boy. In Mark Twain: Social Critic, Philip S. Foner quotes an 1869 editorial written by Twain for the
Buffalo Express entitled "Only a Nigger." Written sixteen years before Huckleberry Finn, this article condemns the lynching of Blacks and observes that in more than half the cases, the lynchers put to death an innocent man. Twain forcefully writes in this article:

Ah, well! Too bad, to be sure! A little blunder in the administration of justice by Southern mob-law; but nothing to speak of. Only a 'nigger' killed by mistake - that is all.23

The discussion that Huck had with Aunt Sally is strongly reminiscent of Twain's condemnation of racism in the Buffalo Express editorial. The caustic phrase "only a nigger" communicates the essence of nineteenth century America's opinions about Blacks, and although Twain's condemnations are subtle, they are nevertheless forceful.

Inasmuch as any language can be said to reflect a culture, Twain's use of the vernacular reveals the authenticity and spontaneity of common folk Americans of the nineteenth century. Unlike their genteel counterparts, yet still recipients of traditional language, the common folk wrestled with the inconsistencies they faced. Finally, however, these "cowards and vigilantes" follow ignorantly the traditions they don't even understand. Using the language as he does, Twain exhibits the lack of freedom everyone had, for all were forced to speak in terms dictated by society's norms. Consequently, racism was inherent in everyone's speech. J. Hillis Miller
examines the paradox of Huck's language:

He uses a rich vernacular idiom, couched in indigenous American rhythms, vocabulary, and syntax. His speech grows out of the way of life of a people in a place, and therefore is rooted in a reality in a way no abstract language can be. At the same time the novel is full of demonstrations of the hollowness of the language spoken by people around Huck. . . . To belong to Mississippi Valley society is to be unable to speak the truth, to use one form or another of a fantasy language which justifies the greatest cruelties and injustices — slavery, economic exploitation, and the arrogant self-righteousness and psychological cruelties practiced, in Twain's view, in the name of Protestant Christianity.24

Examining Huck's intuitive self (realm of the ideal) juxtaposed to his programmed conscience (conflicting internalized mores of society), one can conclude that the existing cultural dictates transmitted through language are inappropriate. Huck and Jim embody a basic naivete and a goodness found in these new Americans. If the collective society determines the language, then naturally they can change it. This is the aspect of optimism that the novel manifests. Individually Huck and Jim cannot experience the level of freedom each of them experienced on the Mississippi. An outcast like Jim, Huck must "light out for new territory," territory not corrupted by society's dictates. Even there the individual cannot be truly free, because he must utilize the tools of communication generated by the collective will of society; he is forever imprisoned by society's dictates. The idea
of stepping out of history as advanced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" is impossible according to the numerous societal constraints that man faces as portrayed in Huckleberry Finn.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and, more recently, Jacques Lacan, make interesting assertions regarding the imprisoning power of language which one inherits as a set of cultural assumptions. Language is conceived as the law that governs all human interchange and any sense of self.
NOTES


3. Samuel L. Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, eds. Sculley Bradley et al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977) 20 (Subsequent references will be cited by page number in the manuscript.)


7. Clemens, Pudd'nhead Wilson, 75.


15. Miller, 27.


22. David Smith, 5.


24. Miller, 28.
Chapter Four

POINT OF VIEW AS IRONIC TOOL FOR TRUTH

In *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*, Henry Nash Smith makes an important analysis of Twain's use of Huck as a narrative persona in *Huckleberry Finn*:

... turning the story over to Huck brought into view previous unsuspected potentialities in the vernacular perspective, particularly the possibility of using vernacular speech for serious purposes and of transforming the vernacular narrator from a mere persona into a character with human depth... what had begun as a comic story developed incipiently tragic implications contradicting the premises of comedy.

Twain's conception of Huck and the possibilities Huck had as a narrator were not static. What began as a simple adventure story evolved into a powerful message about the basic condition of man. Huck's point of view is the tool for discovering truth in the novel. Mark Twain speaks to the reader on numerous levels and Huck's narration becomes a kind of moral reflector. In the *Teller and the Tale*, Louis Rubin describes Huck's role as narrator:

He has been a character, undergoing various adventures, and with a recurrently deepening insight and perspective. He has also, however, been serving as a vehicle through which Mark Twain can speak to the reader. He has been a narrative persona, and behind and through the persona stands the authorial personality of Mark Twain.2

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Through Huck's point of view, Twain can manipulate his audience in varying degrees according to their individual sensibilities.

Twain's use of narrative point of view originates from his background as a humorist and the tradition of deadpan storytelling. He rather accidentally becomes a deadpan storyteller and quite early gained the reputation as a humorist. In 1863, at twenty-eight, he met Artemus Ward on Ward's Lecture Tour. Twain had already begun to imitate contemporary humorists such as Ward, Orpheus Kerr, and Josh Billings, and he was greatly influenced by this meeting. One of the major literary tools of these humorists was the deadpan presentation in which the storyteller tells an enormously funny story with a straight face. Huck, his vernacular hero narrator, represents the deadpan narrator who solemnly tells his story concealing that he recognizes anything funny about it. Unlike the deadpan storyteller, the naive Huck does not see the humor in the numerous situations in the novel. Twain is also influenced by the use of child narrators in early nineteenth century literature. In *The Colloquial Style in America*, Bridgman suggests:

Huck Finn gains a good part of its power by using the language of a boy to describe the actions of adults. This establishes an ironic distance between the adult intention and its immature verbalization.
Because Huck is a social outcast, he has not been fully conditioned by his society to accept its norms and values. He perceives things completely on his own. Henry Nash Smith describes Huck as a moral man viewing an immoral society:

... an observer who is himself free of the vices and even the weaknesses he describes. Mark Twain's satiric method requires that Huck be a mask for the writer, not a fully developed character. The method has great ironic force, and is in itself a technical landmark in the history of American fiction. ...

Huck reports his numerous experiences with a kind of naive objectivity that makes him a credible narrator. As Janet McKay notes, "... in Huck Finn Twain created a narrator with a boy's naivete and a social outcast's honesty." Huck is involved in the business of living, and the novel is about his learning experience. Through Huck, Twain wears the mask of innocence and is able to criticize numerous sacred traditions of nineteenth century America. Hence, the novel can be interpreted as a universal learning experience for all Americans.

Twain advances the anti-racist theme of the novel most forcefully through the irony of Huck's point of view and his verbatim (vernacular) reporting of his relationships with Jim and other members of the Southern river town society. Huck's relationship with Jim and his narrative about their interactions on Jackson Island and the
Mississippi River were a quantum leap towards the depiction of Blacks as human beings in American literature. Huck's inner consciousness is constantly in conflict with the social mores of the South:

The more he (Huck) chastises himself for doing the 'bad' things that will land him in hell, the more the reader is convinced that they are the same 'good' things that will send him in the opposite direction. This is one of the most important aspects of the mask which is Huck Finn's narration - the ever-present sense of denunciation with which he confronts himself. . . .

Twain's use of ironic point of view works quite effectively for his anti-racist theme. Using the vernacular, Huck narrates the racist fictions about Blacks and juxtaposes these fictions to the realities of his own experiences with Jim. The figure of Huck and his conflict, that is seeing Jim as a human and then as a "nigger," represents the White double-consciousness that dominated the mind of the South in the nineteenth century. Although Huck sees inconsistencies between the fictions and truth, he tries to conform to society's immoral dictates. Huck flounders in his conformity, castigates himself for hesitating to accept the norms, but eventually conforms to the dictates of his own heart. The reader sees the antithetical truths and can himself be transformed by them.

However, the problem and unquestionably the power of Twain's anti-racist theme is that it is communicated through irony. Because of the inability of language to
duplicate experience and because of the nature of irony. Twain's anti-racist theme is not as straightforward and as obvious as some would like. Although blatantly obvious to many, his intent towards Blacks in *Huckleberry Finn* has been open for infinite discussion. The impact of language in *Huckleberry Finn* is indeed compelling, and the outspoken young narrator has a knack for "calling a spade a spade." His precise and graphic depiction of the racial climate and life in the Southern river towns is, as reception studies indicate, offensive to many Americans. Nonetheless, a person cannot fully comprehend an experience unless he has an active part in it, and a reader of *Huckleberry Finn* cannot be a passive reader but must take an active part in discovering the truth in the novel. *Princeton's Poetry and Poetics* defines verbal irony as: "A form of speech in which one meaning is stated and a different, usually antithetical meaning is intended."7 Certainly, the question of author's intent figures heavily in understanding ironic intent, and because in his later writings Twain characterizes himself as an unconscious artist, his audience has numerous theories about his intent and meaning in *Huckleberry Finn*. However, in "Twain's Method and Theory of Composition," Sydney J. Krause points out that Twain's claim of being an unconscious creator of literature is:

... consistent with his late pessimism, which thoroughly mechanized the human spirit
and denied that men did anything by reason. Not only do writers write unconsciously but men in general are automatic machines which act unconsciously.  

Clearly, Huckleberry Finn, with its numerous so-called inconsistencies, lack of unity, and loose ends, is the work of a complex artist, and his use of irony serves an important purpose. In chapter three of The Colloquial Style in America, Robert Bridgman points out that "Twain admitted that the literary experience was not essentially a constructive one for him, but re-constructive."  

'Words realize nothing, vivify nothing to you,' he wrote in Connecticut Yankee, 'unless you have suffered in your own person the thing which the words try to describe.'  

In "That Day in Eden," Twain attempts to define "pain" to a prelapsarian Eve:

Things which are outside of our orbit - our own particular world - things which by our constitution and equipment we are unable to see, or feel, or otherwise experience - cannot be made comprehensive to us in words.

Being Black is an experience outside of the "orbit" of White Americans, and because Twain believed in the experiential foundation of literary communication, he had to create an additional avenue, or "an art so high and fine," to communicate truth. Because words only aim to communicate, any literal interpretation of a work is erroneous. No doubt, if interpreted literally, Huckleberry Finn could be read as a racist text, but Twain takes great care in
establishing the fallibility of the written word and in citing the negative effects of Romanticism on the society at large. Tom Sawyer, the romantic and believer in books, falls short of Huck, the common sense logician and follower of his own heart. Twain argued vociferously and consistently about the shortcomings in literal interpretations. According to Twain, the verbatim reproduction of a lecture in print: "... leaves the soul out of it, and no more presents that lecture to the reader than a person presents a man to you when he ships you a corpse."\(^{12}\)

In "Twain In '85," Shelly Fishkin pinpoints misunderstanding as one of the problems that an ironist faces:

First, his reader may miss the point: Huck Finn was for years considered a 'boy's book.' Second, the reader may get the wrong point. ... Unfortunately, the same techniques of irony that give the book its power make it vulnerable to being misread.\(^{13}\)

Twain knew that most of the straightforward attacks on racism were either ignored, censored, and ineffective at best. Fishkin believes that an incident in San Francisco in the 1860's triggered Twain's ironic technique in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain wrote an article criticizing the San Francisco policemen's mishandling of an altercation between Whites and a Chinese businessman. Twain's straightforward reporting of the incident was not printed; thus he realized that racism was a subject that had to be handled in a different way. Coupled with the fact that Twain was
born and raised in the South, there is no question of his awareness that a straightforward assault on racism would not be well received by American audiences. Consequently, Huck's point of view became the likely tool for Twain's irony because he could distance himself from the situations and allow the reader to become actively involved in the reading experience.

Irony, a product of a tightly controlled point of view, is everywhere enforced for us by the fact that Huck, all unknowing, is its agent. He does not understand much of what he sees. Mark Twain's irony, however, lets us (the reader) understand. What Huck is to witness again and again are doing of people who have contrived a world that distorts the public and private institutions - ranging forms of government to forms of play - that might make his sort of joy possible for all. His relation with Jim... stands as a kind of utopian pattern for all human relationships. And we judge those in the book accordingly.

Because Twain was fully aware of the complexity of human beings and language, he spent considerable time and effort, from 1876-1884, on this craft of language. In Mark Twain's Languages, David Sewell uses a quote by Goethe on the ambiguity of language:

That no one understands another, that the same words do not arouse the same thought in one man as in another, that a dialogue or a text causes different trains of thought in different individuals, was something I had long realized all too clearly.  

Understanding a person's language and point of view is essential to meaningful communication. The inadequacy of language in relating exactly what the speaker intends is
enough of a hindrance to effective communication; however, knowing the influences or lack of influences that alter a person's point of view is also quite important. Myriad experiential factors shape an individual's point of view. Consequently, Twain finds a consciousness that is devoid of experience, a youth, and gives the reader a pure unbiased perspective. Using Huck as a mouthpiece, Twain objectively presents a portrait of the racial situation in nineteenth century America. Huck's mind has not been cluttered by preconceived notions nor the sham and pretension generated by books. Henry James labels Huck as the "reflector" or the "center of consciousness." Through Huck's naive observations, Twain lets his readers see the truth about their cruelty towards each other and Blacks. This truth is much like the "horror" that Kurtz sees in Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. Huck is far less sophisticated than the reader and Twain, however, and is not privy to the reader's ironic revelations. In "Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn and the Whole Truth," A. E. Dyson notes:

Mark Twain's irony . . . is a direct communication between the writer and the reader. No one at all in the novel, including Huck, knows that the raft is a place of virtue; it is the secret communication of the irony. Mark Twain's greatness as a writer can be demonstrated from the skill with which he uses Huck's obtuseness about his own worth as part of his own technique, yet enhances rather than damages him as a person in so doing. . . . The reader is challenged wholly at the level of
moral response; failure to perceive the
direction of the irony is indistinguishable
from failure to perceive Huck's virtue.
The irony is, indeed, a forcing into the
consciousness of readers more educated than
Huck himself the reality, as he embodies
them, of their own ideals.16

Twain utilizes two common literary themes in his
characterization of Huck—the search for identity and the
tension between the individual and society. The youthful
Huck has to choose between conscience and morality in
_Huckleberry Finn_ and most believe that Huck's choice is
synonymous with Twain's.

In order to discuss point of view as ironic tool for
truth, we must put into place, as accurately as possible,
some of Twain's truths about morality and particularly about
race. In Chapter Two of this dissertation, it was
established that by the 1860's Twain's moral stance on the
issues of slavery and race had drastically changed from his
being a racist to being an advocate for the oppressed. Al-
though some critics, notably Arthur G. Pettit, say he
waivered in his support for Blacks, history supports his
complete conversion. In much the same way that George
Wallace, the former governor of Alabama and well known
opponent of civil rights for Blacks, renounced his racist
politics and became an advocate for Blacks, Mark Twain
refrained from his racist remarks and jokes about Blacks
and wrote numerous articles criticizing the bigotry in the
South. He even went as far as believing that Whites owed
Blacks a debt. This coincides with post-Civil War liberal thinkers who believed that slaves should be given forty acres and a mule as reparation for slavery. These notions foreshadow the affirmative action policies instituted in the twentieth century and support Twain's label as "prophet" and liberal. These liberal notions also validate his anti-racist theme in Huckleberry Finn. Twain's later speeches and writings are heavily laden with a unique sarcasm and irony about the strengths, weaknesses, and future of his beloved but "damned human race," Black and White.

Because of the political climate of the 1880's, it is logical that the subversiveness in Huckleberry Finn should, of necessity, be presented through irony. Hence, the criticisms that the language is too coarse or that the irony is too subtle have consistently plagued the novel. Is Huckleberry Finn a simple adventure story about the South, or is it a major work of social criticism? The enigmatic Twain leaves the question to his individual readers. However, readers must remember that Twain read excerpts from Huckleberry Finn on his 1885 lecture-circuit tour with George Washington Cable. In "The Freedman's Case in Equity," Cable initiated a direct assault on the then ignored racial situation in the South. Although Twain's assault is not as direct as Cable's, it is certainly as powerful. More importantly, Twain's ingenious approach to
the sensitive and volatile racial situation of the Post Reconstruction era won people over to his way of thinking and had them laughing at the ludicrousness of the White supremacist doctrines before they realized what had happened. In "Reading Huck Finn: The Rhetoric of Performed Ideology," Steven Mailloux analyzes the effects of Twain's excerpts from Huckleberry Finn on his lecture-circuit audiences:

Indeed, the passages Twain chose to read were often those that most directly involved his humorous critique of white supremacist ideology, a critique carried out through Twain's rhetorical manipulation of his readers. To investigate the novel's rhetoric is to unfold its complicated nature as ideological performance. By staging rhetorical exchanges—in the story and with its readers—Twain maneuvered his audience to cooperate with him in this performance.17

The reader or listener was forced to take a position on the rhetorical authorities invoked and, according to Mailloux, on the society's ideological policies. Here we see Twain as a humorous and powerful manipulator attacking a society's sacred ideological positions. He does not do this overtly as some of the brave and outspoken orators of his day, but in a covert and nonetheless effective way. After reading Huckleberry Finn, both nineteenth and twentieth century readers are forced to at least examine their ideological positions on race.

Using Huck's unbiased observations, Twain presents a number of racial contradictions that prevail in the
river-town society. Although Pap Finn is given opportunities to reform and abandon his animalistic behavior, he continues to act in a wild and subhuman manner. Neither Huck nor Twain is judgmental; Twain does not intrude into the narrative. Because of Huck's innocence, he cannot see anything wrong with the racial injustices that Pap relates, and Pap is too ignorant, too bigoted, and too intoxicated, to see anything wrong with treating Blacks as property. Pap tries his hand at a bit of sarcasm, and Huck's reporting of Pap's diatribe on the "govment" and Blacks is one of the most poignant treatments of race in nineteenth century literature. In "The Significance of Pap's Drunken Diatribe Against the Government in Huckleberry Finn," Edward Piacentino identifies Pap's tirade as the introduction to the basic ironic method that Twain employs throughout the rest of the novel. 18 Twain reveals the mind of the ignorant "poor White" segment of the South in all of its irrationality:

Oh, yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why looky here. There was a free nigger there, from Ohio; a mulatter, most as white as a white man ... they said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could vote, when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too drunk to get there; wut when they told me there was a State in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drawed out. I says I'll never vote agin ... I says to the
people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold? 19

The pathetic Pap Finn spews his prejudices about the "govment" and Blacks, and few can find him less than contemptible. Immediately following Pap's tirade, Huck rather unemotionally gives a humorous narrative about the ensuing events:

Pap was going on so, he never noticed where his old limber legs was taking him to, so he went head over heels over the tub of salt pork, and barked both shins, and the rest of his speech was all the hottest kind of language--mostley how at the nigger and the govment, though he give the tub some, too, all along, here and there . . . and down he went in the dirt, and rolled there, and held his toes; and the cussing he done then laid over anything he had ever done previous. (p. 27)

It is very difficult to miss the deadpan humor in this excerpt, but along with this humor is a trace of sadness. Twain believed that 'everything human is pathetic' and that the source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. Pap Finn is ludicrous yet there is a pervasive sadness about him that is coupled with fear. He is a personification of the negatives of humanity, and his contempt for Blacks is kindled by a fear of them, by the threat that maybe Blacks are better than he.

Via Huck's narrative, Twain focuses on the cruelty and inhumanity of some of the Whites in the river towns. In this way, Twain establishes Jim's humanity. In chapter twenty-one, Huck describes the cruel pastimes of the
Arkansas loafers:

And pretty soon you'd hear a loafer sing out, 'Hi! so boy! sick him, Tige!' and away the sow would go, squealing most horrible, with a dog or two swinging to each ear, and three or four dozen more a-coming; and then you would see all the loafers get up and watch the thing out of sight, and laugh at the fun and look grateful for the noise. Then they'd settle back again till there was a dog-fight --unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death. (p. 114)

Huck innocently reports the obvious cruelty of this potentially dangerous group of people. They were certainly dangerous to Black people who were no more than animals to them anyway.

In the Colonel Sherburn section, the river town inhabitants are characterized as ignorant, cowardly, and animalistic. This interesting and sometimes problematic section further addresses the mindlessness of society at large, and the tendency of mobs to pursue ill-defined and barbarous objectives. The mob's action also illustrates another tendency in man, imitation. In "The United States of Lyncherdom," Twain says that imitation is an inborn human instinct. He believes that no one wants to be "unpleasantly conspicuous, pointed out, shunned; as being on the unpopular side." Twain connects these characteristics of man to the racial issue and refers to them collectively as "moral cowardice." This indictment of society illuminates the anti-racist theme, for few individuals
were brave enough to take on the status quo about the issue of slavery or any other issue:

The abolitionists remember. Privately the public feeling was with them early, but each man was afraid to speak out until he got some hint that his neighbor was privately feeling as he privately felt himself.21

Perhaps the most telling racial indictment of society is the puzzling exchange between Aunt Sally and Huck about the phoney steamboat accident. When asked if anybody got hurt, Huck answered, 'Killed a nigger,' and Aunt Sally replied that 'it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt.' (p. 280) Tom Sawyer's aunt represents normative behavior for a more respected group in nineteenth century America; she is not poor White trash, a member of a mob, or a member of a feuding family. She is as hypocritical as Widow Douglas and other members of the White establishment. Aunt Sally has been brainwashed by the negative racist fictions about Blacks, and like others she is imprisoned and must use the language of the times. The problem with the exchange is that some critics point to it literally and feel that Huck has changed his opinion about Jim. In "A Hard Book to Take," James M. Cox speaks to the issue of uncertainty about Huck and Aunt Sally's intentions:

Moreover, the satiric irony of the passage, no matter how manifest, cannot really make up for the matter of the passage - the fatal word - to a black audience.22

Huck innocently narrates the ugly truth about his world.
Since Huck's world is a world of lies, he uses a lie to cover another one; Huck needs an alibi so he finds one. At this point in the novel, Huck is pretending to be Tom, and certainly this is something that Tom would say to his aunt. Huck and Aunt Sally's exchange is another example of the cruelty and coarseness of nineteenth century morality. In comparison to the other characters in the novel, Jim and Huck's morality is of a much higher order. Both are creatures of circumstance and must try to conform to the established traditions just as other members of society.

Another important facet to Twain's use of point of view in *Huckleberry Finn* is the idea of "White double-consciousness." Huck's denunciation of himself is important in understanding what double-consciousness means, and his self-denunciation is itself a tool against racism. Huck reluctantly acts out the traditions of his society and internally balks because he cannot do what he feels is right. Because Huck is presented as being far less sophisticated than the author and the reader, Twain presents a double perspective. According to Henry Nash Smith, this vision of Twain's came as a result of looking at the world through Huck's eyes and analyzing Huck's relationship to his world.

The vernacular persona is an essentially comic figure; the character we glimpse in Huck's
meditation is potentially tragic. Mark Twain's discoveries in the buried strata of Huck's mind point in the same direction as does his intuitive recognition that Huck's and Jim's quest for freedom must end in failure.  

Twain's vision may be summarized as a laughing on the outside and crying on the inside. His sensitivity to his own reality and the world's is astonishing. Twain epitomizes in his art the duplicity which characterizes the psyches of most nineteenth century Southern white Americans. By deliberately negating the Black man's humanity, the White man has undermined his own. Although Huck does not create the oppressive fictions, he, like Jim, is enslaved by them. The creation of the negative social fictions that de-humanized Blacks is accompanied by social fictions that created White supremacy. These fictions created a society based on lies that oppressed Black and White individuals and forced them into various roles that oftentimes they had a hard time playing.

Jay Martin addresses the issue of the divided self in his essay, "The Genie in the Bottle." Martin, along with numerous other critics, maintains that Twain himself had the tendency to divide himself into two. On one hand Twain was the humorist/buffoon, and on the other hand a serious creative artist. The fact that Twain used a pseudonym indicates a divided self or at one time a need for anonymity. Martin also contends that:
He (Twain) could certainly blame his culture for . . . the highly covert character of his confessions. What nineteenth-century American could openly confess the revelation that Twain indirectly made: . . . 'Lincoln's proclamation,' he once hopefully remarked, 'not only set the black slaves free, but set the white man free also.' But Twain was still chained.24

The racist climate in America in the 1880's was quite tenuous, and while it would be an overstatement to claim that the novel's sole purpose was to relieve racist tensions, it is impossible to overlook the impact that the novel had on the nineteenth century conception of Blacks and the racial situation in America.

Yet, in describing his creative intentions and the view of slavery in the 1840's as well as the late nineteenth century, Twain describes Huck's situation in his world:

In those slave-holding days the whole community was agreed as to one thing--the awful sacredness of slave property. To help steal a horse or a cow was a low crime, but to help a hunted slave . . . carried with it a stain, a moral smirch which nothing could wipe away. That this sentiment should exist among slave-holders is comprehensible--there were good commercial reasons for it--but that it should exist and did exist among paupers . . . and in a passionate and uncompromising form, is not in our remote day realizable. . . . It shows that that strange thing, the conscience--that unerring monitor--can be trained to approve any wild thing you want it to approve if you begin its education early and stick to it.25

This view of Huck's programming represents the typical nineteenth century White American but, like Huck, Mark Twain's heart prevailed. This did not, however, eliminate
double-consciousness or the division between heart and conscience that remained. Robert Schulman addresses the issue of double-consciousness as portrayed in *Huckleberry Finn*:

Huck, not Jim, is divided because of the dominant society's views about property. Huck is torn between the human claims of friendship and the impersonal but compelling values of property and social convention. His consciousness is polarized. Huck's conflict and divided consciousness are ones most people experience... What is equally important, Twain has the genius to expose not only the social sources but also the personal, human consequences of this conflict. It is no accident, then, that Huck 'just felt sick' (p. 125) The sickness he feels is the alienated consciousness that results from a split that dominates his culture. Huck has taken inside himself the central division of his market society. This division within the self, its social, economic, and racial causes, and its disturbing human results constitute... the most damaging illness in the world of the 'diseased.'

In "Nigger and Knowledge: White Double-Consciousness in the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,*" Rhett Jones takes the double-consciousness issue even further in that it also applied to Blacks and their conceptions of themselves. Jones begins his discussion with W. E. B. DuBois's description of Blacks and their consciousness:

The Negro is a sort of 7th son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the
tape of a world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.27

The idea of double-consciousness is equally important in understanding Whites' perceptions of themselves as well as Blacks' perceptions of themselves. Blacks were, of course, programmed to believe that they were inferior and were systematically deprived of educational opportunities so that they would remain deficient. However, the double consciousness existing in Blacks would eventually work in their favor. No matter how broken and dehumanized Blacks appeared to be, they seemed to hold on to the knowledge and believe in their own humanity. They essentially played a game for survival. However, the double-consciousness in Whites worked differently. As Rhett Jones points out:

The essence of white double-consciousness is therefore to be found in the different, contradictory viewpoints Euro-Americans hold of Afro-Americans. Despite the resources invested by whites in proving to one another that black folk were not human, they never fully convinced one another. . . . Whites have never been able to escape knowledge of black humanity but, given their hegemony, have been able to create a corpus of racist thought which defines blacks as inferior. Euro-Americans have moved back and forth between their two perspectives on Africanity, now seeing blacks as less than human, now recognizing their membership in the family of man.28

In a letter to Howells, Twain says that there is "the nameless something . . . the subtle something" that
accounts for the nature and the life of a true work of literary art. A non-literal interpretation of Huckleberry Finn is a must in understanding the complexity of the work. As Huck says in the first paragraph in chapter one of Huckleberry Finn: "I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another. . . ." (p. 7) Once the reader sorts through the multiple levels of lies and deceit, he is forced to look at his own reality. Through Twain's use of ironic point of view, the reader, if not Huck, can make a moral choice about his life and the treatment of Blacks in America. It must be a single choice, inner and outer, so that the duality that haunted the typical nineteenth century White America will cease to exist. Then the wisdom of Twain's anti-racist motif will be clearly understood.
NOTES


19 Samuel Clemens, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, eds. Sculley Bradley et al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977) 27. (Subsequent references will be cited by page number in the text.)

20 Clemens, Europe and Elsewhere, p. 243.

21 Clemens, Europe and Elsewhere, p. 243.


23 Smith, 124.

(Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1985) 73.

25 Walter Blair, Mark Twain and Huck Finn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) 143-144.


Chapter Five

THE ISSUE OF RACE IN PUDD'NHEAD WILSON, HUCKLEBERRY FINN, AND STEPHEN CRANE'S "THE MONSTER"

The issue of race is not a common theme in nineteenth century American fiction. However, with the advent of American literary realism in the latter part of the nineteenth century, an increased number of artists experimented with various techniques in an attempt to duplicate the "realities" of life as they perceived them. Any realistic portrayal of the nineteenth century American South must include some discussion of race because of its prominence in American history. Heretofore, the few literary artists who treated racial issues had little or no insight into the complexity of race and gave stereotyped versions of Blacks and race relations. Mark Twain and Stephen Crane are in the vanguard of realist writers who opposed the tenets of Romanticism and opted to treat ordinary people and events concretely and objectively rather than symbolically and allegorically. Both artists depict situations in which characters have to choose the right morality for their particular circumstances. There are striking similarities and recurring themes about race in Huckleberry Finn, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and "The Monster." Both Crane and Twain deal with the subject of race with great sensitivity.
and objectivity, and both use irony as the chief tool for addressing the issue. The power of social fictions or image making fictions and the fear of isolation and social ostracism are recurring themes in these three works. The themes illuminate the problem of race and morality, thus revealing the complexity of the racial situation in America. Twain's treatment of Blacks in his works is often challenged as being nebulous because he gives a kind of kaleidoscope vision of race and mankind showing numerous positives and negatives. Twain does not glorify Blacks or raise them to the position of sainthood in his works; he presents their humanity. In doing so, he damns them with the frailties or "moral choice" that he writes about in "The Mysterious Stranger." According to Twain, this gift given to mankind by God after the Fall "damns the entire human race," Blacks included. Similarly, Crane gives a frighteningly negative view of the irrationality and fear that dominate the town of Whilomville in "The Monster." He juxtaposes the appearance of fairness and the reality of racial bigotry as does Mark Twain in Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'nmhead Wilson in an effort to show the immorality and hypocrisy that characterize nineteenth century American society. All of these works strongly suggest that both authors doubted the possibility of personal freedom for anyone, regardless of race, and both call for much in the way of societal reform.
Image-making or the power of social fictions is an important theme in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and "The Monster." This theme is important in its relationship to the racial issue in America because an individual's identity was determined by society's conception of him. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain depicts society's categorization of Blacks as domesticated animals and shows the limitations that are enforced upon them by social fictions. The opening "whisper to the reader" from *Pudd'nhead Wilson's* calendar reflects the power of these social fictions to determine one's reality: "There is no character, howsoever good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless." ¹ This epigram sums up David Wilson's predicament and categorization as a fool in the novel, and it also reflects the systematic categorization of an entire race of Black people. The people of Dawson's Landing labelled David Wilson a "pudd'nhead" and a "fool" because of an unfortunate remark of his; Blacks were labelled inferior because of the unfortunate difference of the color of their skin. The prevailing fictions could "make" or "break" an individual and once defiled, there was very little that one could do to free himself from the stigmas. The flaw in this system of categorization by skin color emerges with the prevalence of miscegenation. Miscegenation caused both a racial ambivalence and a paranoia about the threat of the eventual extinction of
the so-called pure White race. Any amount of black blood in an individual created a Black man by law.

To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a Negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a Negro.

Because Roxy's child is as white in appearance as the Driscoll baby, she is able to create a social fiction of her own. Roxy realizes that only the coarse tow-linen shirt that her child wears signals his identity. All she has to do is switch the children's clothing and she can change her child's destiny. Roxy's myth is the axis on which the novel turns, and, like many of the fictions of the times, it creates immeasurable suffering for all involved:

... by the fiction created by herself, he (Tom) was become her master; the necessity of recognizing this relation outwardly and of perfecting herself in the forms required to express the recognition, had moved her to such diligence and faithfulness in practicing these forms that this exercise soon concreted itself into habit; it became automatic and unconscious; then a natural result followed: deceptions intended solely for others gradually grew practically into self-deceptions as well; the mock reverence became real reverence, the mock obsequiousness real obsequiousness ... the little counterfeit rift of separation between imitation-slave and imitation-master widened and widened and became an abyss ... and on one side of it stood Roxy, the dupe of her own deceptions. ...
This passage summarizes the process whereby fictions become reality; the power of these fictions is almost inconceivable, and the phenomenon of fiction-making gives rise to the double consciousness (inner/knowing vs outer/denying) that was prevalent among southern Whites. Roxy, like the majority of southern White society, becomes the victim of her own lie.

The changelings are shaped by training and social position to assume the identities society creates for them, and no one is the wiser. The vicious and heartless monster that Tom becomes signifies the corrupting morality of the slave-holders; the humble broken shell of a man that the false Chambers becomes reveals the impact of slavery on a human being. In The Development of a Writer, Henry Nash Smith explains the figure of the false Tom Driscoll:

Although Tom Driscoll is evidently the key figure in the imaginative logic of Pudd'nhead Wilson, he is . . . not so much a character as a complex of themes . . . . The brutality inculcated in Tom by the attitudes current in the community is exhibited in his behavior as a boy toward his body servant Chambers (actually, of course, the rightful Thomas a Beckett Driscoll) and reaches a climax in the scene of his wanton cuffing and kicking of Chambers when the slave enters to ask an audience for Roxy.4

Smith goes on to say that Twain deletes a passage from the original manuscript of Pudd'nhead Wilson that carefully explains this incident as an illustration of training rather than native disposition. One cannot overlook Twain's
indictment of the brutality of slavery, nor the impact that social fictions had on the United States' system of slavery. Twain shows the strength as well as the oppressive nature of the social fictions. They were created basically for the justification of slavery, and their impact is so powerful that everyone, including Blacks, was brainwashed by them. Discerning truth from lies about identity is impossible if not for Pudd'nhead Wilson's fingerprinting records. Social order or racial hierarchies could only be maintained through these mechanical means of documentation, and the vital thread of the order created by these hierarchies was being threatened by miscegenation. The whole of society was bound by these myths of position and racial superiority, and Pudd'nhead Wilson shows the powerful impact that environment and training have on the individual. People were subjugated into assuming the social identities doled out to them at birth, and training and environment cemented their various positions in society.

The dehumanizing fictions about Blacks were so powerful and prevalent that Blacks referred to themselves using negative and inhuman terms. Mimicking the decorum of nineteenth century America, Twain makes constant references to Blacks in the novel as "dogs" and "pups." The false Chambers is repeatedly called a "cur" and when Roxy tells the false Tom his true identity, she tells him to "set
down, you pup!" Later, Tom compares himself to a dog and sums up his position in society when imagining the relationship he would have with Percy Driscoll if the truth about his birth were known: "He is white, and I am his chattel, his property, his goods, and he can sell me, just as he could his dog." The idea of race is depicted as a man-made differentiation that serves to reward and oppress various individuals. When the false Tom discovers that he is really Black, he groans: "A nigger! I am a nigger! Oh, I wish I was dead." It is interesting to note the irony that "Black" and "White" have nothing to do with color but with "blood." The real definition of a Black is "slave." Although the false Tom is devastated about his discovery that he is really a "slave," Twain tells us that nothing has essentially changed for him. "In several ways his opinions were totally changed . . . but the main structure of his character was not changed, and could not be changed." Because he is physically as "White" as any White man, he could theoretically continue his life. The fiction of his race has already been established and would have been irreversible were it not for Pudd'nhead Wilson's fingerprint records. Tom's thought of being Black and his despairing exclamations echo a part of Twain's theme of race; being born Black in White society was such a curse that some would prefer death rather than the punishment of the life designated for a "nigger."
In Huckleberry Finn, Twain also uses the power of social fictions to illuminate his theme of race. Since slavery was a moot issue in 1885 and Blacks were legally free, some wonder about the relevance of a novel set in 1840. Twain's theme of race in Huckleberry Finn addresses the relevance of the social fictions that originated in the early 1800's for the late nineteenth century and beyond. After all, Jim, like Roxana in The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, is presented as a human being in the novel, and this is not the traditional view of Blacks. As a matter of fact, the only person who can come close to Roxy's brilliance and cunning is David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson who is brilliant enough to solve the murder in the story and is by no means the "pudd'nhead" that the town labelled him to be. Nothing is as it appears to be in either of these novels. Twain juxtaposes the social fiction (society's view of Jim) and reality (Huck's experiences with Jim). The reader then perceives the discrepancy. This is important because the Black man's humanity had not been accepted as late as the 1880's. In "A 'Raft of Trouble': Huckleberry Finn," Laurence B. Holland discusses an issue that appears in the final episodes of Huckleberry Finn, the ironic relevance of "setting a free man free":

... precisely because it (HF) verges on irrelevance it speaks with all the more pointed relevance across the span of 40 or 50 years in 1885 to define the task and impose the charge
of setting a nation of freedmen free. The flukish fact of Jim's legal freedom, and the failure of his world to flesh it out with the family, the opportunities, and the community that would give it meaning, define with haunting and painful relevance, and with absurd precision, the problem of setting a free Negro free, which is the pressing problem, in all its extensions, in post-Civil War America and more recent decades.8

Unless the negative social fictions about the Black man are destroyed, his legal freedom means very little. Huck's decision not to turn Jim in is an affirmation of the individual's ability to reject the social fictions dictated by hypocritical society. Throughout the novel, Huck learns how easily people accept foolish myths and how easily it is to create them. Huck, Tom, the King, the Duke, and others go through a number of charades manipulating society at will. As long as their fictions conform to the general guidelines that society has set, there is no problem advancing them. Because of all the corruption and hypocrisy surrounding Huck, he finds much to admire in Jim. Jim becomes a father-figure to him. In "Nigger and Knowledge: White Double-Consciousness in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," Rhett Jones believes:

Much of the critical literature assigns too large a role in changing Huck's attitudes towards blacks, although it is true that the intimate association . . . has impact on Huck's ideas. But even before Huck encounters Jim on Jackson's Island, he is already an unconventional lad accustomed to thinking for himself . . . as he moves back and forth between the public position on blackness and his personal conclusions.9
Huck's opportunity to experience life with Jim is an anomaly that most nineteenth century Americans could not or would not experience. Jones's analysis indicates that anyone thinking for himself could probably reach the same conclusion Huck reaches without association with Jim. The information Huck gains from this experiment in living is powerful enough to jar American thinking, but having the information is not enough. One must have the courage to make the necessary changes or the stomach to live in a world of immorality. Huck is the visionary who cannot live in the world of lies.

In "The Monster," Stephen Crane also portrays the inhuman terms and social fictions that color society's views of Blacks. Depicting society's limitations on Henry Johnson because he is a Black man, Crane describes Johnson as being the equal of the young boy, Jimmie Trescott:

He (Henry) grinned fraternally when he saw Jimmie coming. These two were pals. In regards to almost everything in life they seemed to have minds precisely alike.10

Accompanying this negative fiction of permanent boyhood for all Black men is the idea that Blacks possess goodness and innocence that only children can possess. Johnson's innate charity and kindness toward the young boy is also illustrated in the preceding passage. In "Whilomville: The Coherence of Radical Language," Max Westbrook contends that Crane writes about man's own image-making capacity,
showing it in its actual and distorted form. Anyone could author a fiction, but all would not be accepted. In much the same way that Roxy realizes that a person's clothing makes him who he is in Pudd' nhead Wilson, Henry Johnson also believes that he can transcend the limitations placed upon him by changing his clothes.

After Johnson had taken his supper in the kitchen, he went to his loft ... and dressed himself with much care ... As he emerged from his room and sauntered down the carriage drive, no one would have suspected him of ever having washed a buggy ... The change was far in the interior of Henry ... He was simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman of position, wealth, and other necessary achievements out for an evening stroll ... 12

Although Henry's fiction of himself is truly his own, he is at least mentally free of the limitations that society has placed on him. Meanwhile society continues to pile negative stereotypes on him and target him for ridicule. The men in the town barber shop think that Henry is a marvelous source of amusement, and Henry enjoys their attention. Crane uses very subtle but brilliant description to portray the common fictions promoted by the majority society about Blacks. They are referred to as "monkeys" in a description of their imitation of genteel manners:

They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys. 13
Blacks were imprisoned beneath the iron walls of stereotypes and social fictions; no matter how they behaved, dressed, or imitated Whites, Blacks would not be accepted. Henry, Mrs. Farragut, and Bella perform an ironic parody of the acceptable parlor room behavior that would not be ludicrous at all if performed by Whites. In a graphic and very meaningful description of where Blacks live in Whilomville, Crane describes the neighborhood where the Farraguts live:

With a face beaming with happiness Henry turned away from the scene of his victories into a narrow side street, where the electric light still hung high, but only to exhibit a row of tumble-down houses leaning together like paralytics.14

The image of "paralytics" is a strong statement about the condition and limitations of Blacks in American society, and the fact that the bright electric light shines on this injustice is even more ironic. As long as Henry and the other Blacks mimicked the Whites, they were objects of ridicule, but when Henry became disfigured and lost his mind, he was a threat to the order of their society. The insane Henry Johnson no longer aspired to be accepted by them, and he no longer assumed their decorum. This frightened Blacks as well as Whites.

Like Twain, Crane juxtaposes fictions and actualities about his characters to undermine society's programming of the individual's thinking. He makes Henry Johnson the
courageous and self-sacrificing hero in "The Monster." He describes Henry's valiant rescue of Jimmie:

Johnson passed through two rooms and came to the head of the stairs. As he opened the door great billows of smoke poured out, but, gripping Jimmie closer, he plunged down through them.15

Assigning this noble deed to a Black person contradicts the prevailing social fictions about Blacks. The racial fictions within the society are obliterated when the Black man is presented as performing a heroic deed. The community is then faced with the problem of living with a monster that they unwittingly created, one that they wished had died in the fire. The real monster in the story is the immoral society itself, for it imprisons its members and attempts to control their thinking. Roxy, Jim, and Henry Johnson are revolutionary characterizations of Black people who escape many of the established racial stereotypes and represent such characteristics as intellect, loyalty, and bravery. None of these characteristics had heretofore been assigned to Blacks. Each character does much to eliminate the prevailing social fictions that hinder and control Black life.

The themes of fear of social ostracism and isolation are also linked to the anti-racist themes in Twain and Crane's works. The average individual's greatest fear is to be held to ridicule or shunned by his peers. This factor is largely responsible for the slow pace of racist
reform in America. Whites who experience the Black man's humanity are afraid to refute the fallacious laws that have been created by social fictions because they do not wish to be ostracized. Twain and Crane poke fun at the characters who ironically make fools of themselves trying to conform to the wishes of the majority. In Huckleberry Finn, most of the characters make elaborate efforts to conform to the dictates of society. No one, not even Huck, wants to be an outcast. Huck tries to accept his society's dehumanization of Jim, though his experiences indicate that Jim is indeed a person. Huck must relate to Jim as chattel and finds many problems with this. In the "You Can't Pray a Lie" section, Huck is ashamed of his inability to conform to society's dictates:

It would get all around, that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was to ever see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame.16

Huck's inner conflict about this matter of Jim's freedom is one of the basic themes of the novel. Initially, Huck feels that as long as no one knows about it, he is safe in his deviation:

That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling.17
Although Huck is already an outcast, he ponders the rules of civilization trying to decide whether he wants to become an active member. He is already a member of Tom Sawyer's gang and participates in numerous activities that are rather ridiculous to him. It is quite clear that Huck sees through Tom Sawyer's lies early in the novel, yet he still wants to be a member of the gang.

I thought all this over for two or three days and then I reckoned I would see if there was anything in it... So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different.18

Huck, like many others in society, thinks differently but fails to advocate change. At various points in the novel, we can see Huck trying to conform and become a member of society, but in the final chapter he lights out for new territory. The kind of freedom he desires is not yet a part of 'civilization.' Some critics contend that Twain tears down or criticizes existing society yet has nothing to put in its place. Since he does not desire new territory, Twain is forced to remain, and he develops a love/hate relationship with the South. It is also important to note that it is only through the vision of an outcast, Huck Finn, that the realities of the hypocritical society can be exposed; the other members of society are already brain-washed and mindless parts of the total society.
Likewise, in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, David Wilson is the one person who can envision some possible disorder in the social hierarchies that society has created in Dawson's Landing. Like Huck, Wilson is an outsider. He seems to have a distrust of the identity (or appearance) of the entire community. "He is also the one who plants in Roxy's mind the possibility that her son is indistinguishable from the legitimate Driscoll heir."19 Wilson asks Roxy the crucial questions that foreshadow the events that follow:

'How old are they, Roxy?'
'Bofe de same age, sir--in five months.
Bawn de fust o' Feb'uyar.'
'They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too...'
'How do you tell them apart, Roxy, when they haven't any clothes on?'
'Oh, I kin tell 'em 'part, Misto Wilson, but I bet Marse Percy couldn't, not to save his life.'20

In "Pudd'nhead Wilson: The End of Mark Twain's American Dream," James M. Cox contends:

Just as [PW's] casual observation to Roxy reveals his assumption that personal identity in Dawson's Landing is a matter of mere appearance, his reliance upon the use of fingerprints as a means of criminal detection undercuts the whole structure of familial identity which characterizes the community.21 Social ostracism is quite ominous in Dawson's Landing and is another one of the things that separate David Wilson from the rest of the society. The characters mindlessly conform to society's dictates. Early in the novel, they
severely criticize Wilson and label him a fool because he makes a remark that they don't understand; consequently, Wilson cannot practice his trade because of the label he must wear. He spends approximately twenty-three years trying to free himself from the awful label, and only in the final chapter of the novel does he exonerate himself. Ironically, Wilson spends most of the novel trying to become a part of this community only to become a part of the negativism and oppression that characterizes the seemingly innocuous town.

In another vivid example of a person's need to conform, Tom Driscoll dresses in attire that is not suitable to the townspeople. He has been influenced by the Eastern fashion and wears an exquisitely styled suit. A group of men get together and dress a Black butler in clothes that are similar to Tom's:

... when Tom started out on his parade next morning, he found the old deformed Negro bell ringer straddling along in his wake tricked out in a flamboyant calico exaggeration of his finery, and imitating his fancy Eastern graces as well as he could. Tom surrendered, and after that clothed himself in local fashion.22

Clearly, Tom does not want to be an outcast anymore than anyone else in his community does. Thus the threat of social ostracism keeps the inhabitants of Dawson's Landing imprisoned in a kind of mindless conformity of persons who are not viewed as individuals but rather in mass. Twain
caustically refers to members of the society as having little consequence:

... Rowena, who was nineteen, romantic, amiable, and very pretty, but otherwise of no consequence. Rowena had a couple of young brothers also of no consequence.23

The people of the small community are complacent and quite resistant to change. To consider questioning the racial hierarchies would be an outrage, and the sins of the fathers, as Faulkner later depicts in his fiction, are certain to create problems for all of them.

In "The Monster," Stephen Crane also utilizes the theme of social ostracism, but in a totally different manner. He depicts the Tescott family's defiance of society's wishes and Dr. Tescott's courageous stand against the entire society for what he thinks is morally right. Since Henry Johnson has saved his son's life, Dr. Tescott will not abandon him. Because of the horrible disfigurement Henry received while rescuing the boy, society wishes to be rid of him. Tescott stands firm on his moral beliefs and refuses to do away with Henry. The entire Tescott family is ostracized, yet Dr. Tescott refuses to yield to the demands that society places upon him. Some of the leading townspeople try to encourage him to yield to their demands. Interestingly, the townspeople admit that the demands they are making upon Dr. Tescott are foolish and unfair:
You have changed from being the leading doctor in town to about the last one. It is mainly because there are always a large number of people who are very thoughtless fools, of course, but then that doesn't change the condition. . . . Even if there are a lot of fools in the world, we can't see any reason why you should ruin yourself by opposing them. You can't teach them anything, you know.24

Although Dr. Trescott is steadfast in his moral convictions, his young son Jimmie has a tougher time dealing with the pressure that society places upon his family. In a passage that describes Jimmie's insensitivity to the man who saved his life, Jimmie and his friends touch what is left of Henry:

The fear of social ridicule proves stronger than fear of the monster (Henry Johnson), and the two boys are driven to the heroics of touching a faceless man. . . .25

Crane's depiction of Jimmie's "innocent" cruelty to Henry Johnson is reminiscent of Huck's innocent cruelty to Jim in Huckleberry Finn. Clearly, Jimmie and Henry's friendship resembles that of Huck and Jim. It also presents the same double perspective about the Black man's character that the reader gets in Huckleberry Finn. Who can really fault Jimmie for his actions when he is mimicking his fellow townspeople's need to be accepted by their peers. Jimmie is not being consciously cruel to his savior, and he is a child. In another example, Crane presents Dr. Trescott as being the better man in a confrontation he
has with Jake Winter. Winter is the character whose daughter was so frightened by the monster that she lay ill for a long time. Trescott is asked to care for the girl by her physician who is away on an emergency. With dignity and courage, Dr. Trescott leaves the Winter home when he sees that Jake Winter does not want him to attend his daughter. Crane portrays Winter as a yelping "little dog" who cowardly waits for Trescott to leave before he explodes:

Tearing out the leaf, he (Trescott) extended it to Winter as he moved toward the doctor. The latter shrunk against the wall. His head was hanging as he reached for the paper. This caused him to grasp air, and so Trescott simply let the paper flutter to the feet of the other man... Winter stood on the porch, still yelping. 'He was like a little dog.'

Crane positively portrays the strength of Dr. Trescott's stance against social ostracism and dehumanizes the cowardly Jake Winter for his conformity.

Crane and Twain define the concept of race and racial superiority and inferiority as society's own fabrications. The inaccurate set of cultural characteristics assigned to the Black race by the majority society is dismantled in these works. Man, regardless of color, can reach immeasurable heights and depths in his lifetime. The Black race does not have a monopoly on the negative characteristics in the world and progresses despite tremendous odds. The idea of a "nigger" is itself a social fiction that describes
a form of behavior ascribed to Blacks. In "The Fiction of Law and Custom," Evan Carton shows what the term means in Pudd'nhead Wilson. Carton refers to Twain's description of Tom Driscoll's disorientation when he learns of his true parentage. Tom's reaction concerns the signification of "nigger":

If he met a friend, he found that the habit of a lifetime had in some mysterious way vanished--his arm hung limp, instead of involuntarily extending the hand for a shake. It was the 'nigger' in him asserting its humility, and he blushed and was abashed.

. . . The 'nigger' in him went shrinking and skulking here and there and yonder, and fancying it saw suspicion and maybe detection in all faces, tones and gestures.27

Carton analyzes Tom's conception of "nigger":

Tom doubtless understands 'nigger' to be a concrete referent to a biological fact. The reader, however, avails himself of the ironic alternative, an alternative that Twain stresses for us by placing 'nigger' between quotation marks. It is not, of course, Tom's genetic make-up that his attitudes suddenly reveal, nor is it a biological identity that 'nigger' signifies. A mere fabrication of pernicious social convention, 'nigger' does not really refer at all: it constitutes only a sign . . . that wields the symbolic power which it has been invested, an epithet into which white society has poured its hatred and fears.28

Twain's interpretation of "nigger" does not keep the word from referring or "signifying" negatives as Carton later points out. The word itself conveys the infinite or ultimate power of social fictions, and these fictions are like manacles to all of America.
NOTES

2 Clemens, 29.
3 Clemens, 41.
5 Clemens, 76.
6 Clemens, 74.
7 Clemens, 76.
12 Crane, 126.
13 Crane, 130.
14 Crane, 129.

15 Crane, 138.


17 Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 168.

18 Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 17.


20 Clemens, The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, 30.

21 Cox, 358.

22 Clemens, The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, 48.

23 Clemens, The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, 30.

24 Crane, 181.

25 Crane, 90.

26 Crane, 176.

27 Clemens, The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, 75.

CONCLUSION

In The Development of a Writer, Henry Nash Smith addresses the problem that Twain faces in depicting the unpleasant realities of the American situation in the nineteenth century. He illustrates this problem in the context of George Santayana's thesis that nineteenth century America was a country of two mentalities:

Many of Twain's comic devices presuppose a conflict between an established culture having for its focus the notion of everyday experience, the vulgar world of the natural man. . . . Although the vernacular impulse was potentially subversive of the traditional culture, Mark Twain did not perceive the issue abstractly. His mind was that of an artist; he thought in presentational rather than discursive terms. . . . He was feeling his way toward the recognition that the traditional culture was decadent because it had lost the power to relate its values to actual experience.¹

The idea of the two world views in conflict reflects an American culture of contradictions. The traditions and order of the old world were being replaced by a new world full of wonderful ideals but these ideals were accompanied by chaos and disorder. By 1885, the original notions of freedom and democracy, upon which the United States had been founded, were unfulfilled for many Americans, particularly Blacks. The new industrialism had ushered in many evils. Few were aware of the extent of the controls that society exerted on its citizenry; the challenge of
dealing with a race of Black Americans recently freed from a harsh system of slavery proved to be almost insurmountable. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville observes:

> Oppression has, at one stroke, deprived the descendents of the Africans of almost all the privileges of humanity. The Negro of the United States has lost even the remembrance of his country; the language which his forefathers spoke is never heard around him; he abjured their religion and forgot their customs when he ceased to belong to Africa, without acquiring any claim to European privileges.²

Black Americans were a displaced people whose destiny was greatly intertwined with the destiny of their oppressors. The Black/White dichotomy plagued the South and seemed irreconcilable. The negative stereotypes created by racist propaganda had confused and retarded the hope for the "actual" emancipation of Black people. In *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, Samuel Ringgold Ward writes:

> The enemies of the Negro deny his capacity for improvement or progress; they say he is deficient in morals, manners, intellect, and character. Upon that assertion they base the American doctrine, proclaimed with all effrontery, that the Negro is neither fit nor entitled to the rights, immunities, and privileges which the same parties say belong naturally to all men; indeed, some of them go so far as to deny that the Negro belongs to the human family.³

_Huckleberry Finn_ was born in an atmosphere of racial hatred and misunderstanding. Mark Twain's insight into the plight of Blacks and Whites in the United States, particularly in the South, foreshadows the works of William Faulkner,
Robert Penn Waren, and other well-known writers who wrote on the theme of race in the South. Twain's Black characters do not conform to the commonly-accepted stereotypes of Blacks. In addition, Twain addresses the problem and consequences of miscegenation. Like Faulkner's characters, Twain's Black characters share a bond with the White characters, and all humanity has the "gift" of moral choice.

Mark Twain was his own greatest censor. In the Preface to his *Autobiography* published posthumously and edited by Charles Neider, Twain speaks to his readers:

> I speak from the grave rather than with my living tongue for a good reason: I can speak thence freely. When a man is writing a book dealing with the privacies of his life . . . he shrinks from speaking his whole frank mind; all his attempts to do it fail; he recognizes that he is trying to do a thing which is wholly impossible to a human being.

This reluctance to speak freely about himself in his autobiography parallels the unwillingness he showed in speaking freely about the numerous problems he sees in nineteenth century America. He does not use straightforward criticism in *Huckleberry Finn*. Thomas Perry, one of Twain's earliest critics who wrote favorably about the novel, points out its autobiographical nature. *Huckleberry Finn* chronicles Twain's experiences in the American South. In addition, it is about the country that Twain fiercely loves and defends. Any criticism that he makes must be subtle yet effective.
The outer simplicity yet inner complexity of Mark Twain, the man and literary figure, parallels the complexity of Huckleberry Finn. The novel itself as well as Twain's treatment of race is revolutionary for nineteenth century literature. Twain disarms his readers with a double vision of race; this double vision, the oppressive and negative fictions about Blacks juxtaposed to Huck's enlightening experiences with Jim, communicates double meanings, and the novel receives a great deal of misinterpretation. Charges of racism have been made against the novel as a result of this kind of misinterpretation. Most of the twentieth century charges that Huckleberry Finn is a racist text come from Black educators, not critics or artists. They are opposed to the presentation of such an ironically complex novel to school children in the United States. Since all of the subversiveness of the novel is presented through irony, it is quite possible that many readers could "miss the point." Reading and interpreting the novel literally could be detrimental to the struggle for racial equality in America. After all, Twain presents the racist society quite graphically. Few contemporary critics argue that Twain's depiction of the South in the 1840's or its racial situation is unrealistic; depicting the reality of the deplorable racial situation in the South does not make the novel racist. However, the multi-faceted nature of the issue of race and Twain's literary technique necessitate
the readers' full awareness of Twain's use of irony, language, and point of view in *Huckleberry Finn*.

The charge that critics make about Twain's reversal at the end of the novel, that is Jim's being reduced to a minstrel figure, does not erase the fact that Jim's humanity is stressed in the earlier chapters of the novel. The fault is not Mark Twain's, but that Huck and Jim must return to the real world of nineteenth century America. Jim must assume his minstrel image and Huck, because he is White, will either accept living in the "world of lies" or "light out" for new territory. As some critics have concluded, "it shows the inescapability that Blacks and Whites have in the situation that society has created." To suggest that Twain has changed his mind about Jim is not well-founded. Huck is relatively young and can do very little to change these conditions, and perhaps more importantly, Huck is, at the end of the novel, "lighting out for new territory." Huck (Twain) has decided that he cannot live in the 'sivilized' world of the United States; he cannot live with the hypocrisy, selfishness, and evil that permeate society. An added dimension here is that although Twain criticizes nineteenth century American society in *Huckleberry Finn*, he does not want to destroy the order that society has created. Huck decides to "go to hell" rather than to betray Jim, and Twain extricates him from the situation. We later see a different Huck again conforming
to the dictates of Tom Sawyer and the rest of White society. Although there was great emphasis on individualism in America, conformity was an important part of the American community. With regards to the race issue and the treatment of Blacks, few Southerners were courageous enough to argue vociferously for the equality of Blacks. After 1867, Mark Twain became more and more outspoken about the oppression of Blacks, yet his criticism was almost always presented with bitter and even sarcastic irony.

One cannot overestimate the importance of Twain's use of the power of social fictions in addressing the race issue in the United States. The impact of social fictions on race is phenomenal, and Twain was quite aware of it. In a very insightful analysis of Twain's position on the social fictions governing racial identity in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Henry Nash Smith contends:

> When Mark Twain has conceived of Tom Driscoll he is launched upon a fable involving the tragic theme of slavery, with all it implies of hereditary but constantly renewed guilt and of perverted social conventions distorting human fact. For what but a morass of arbitrary assumptions makes Tom originally "black" and enslaved, later "white" and free, then converts him back into a Negro and a slave when the 'truth' is revealed? The society of Dawson's Landing imposes upon slaves and masters alike the fictions which sustain the institution of slavery.  

*Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which addresses the racial issue in the American South more directly than *Huckleberry Finn*, stresses the fact that social fictions create society's sense of
order, however wrongfully. In *American Literary Realism*, Eric Sundquist elaborates the twentieth century's views of these fictions:

We live in a critical age that has grown remarkably attentive to . . . the ways in which literary texts . . . subvert the 'real' social structures they claim to represent, and in doing so call attention to the fictions that the fabric of reality contains and depends on for its apparent order.6

Social fictions are tools for creating order in society. Huck Finn, like Twain, wanted the sense of order in his life. The conflict concerned the fact that the order was based on lies. Huck announces his skepticism of this society of "lies" in the first paragraph of *Huckleberry Finn*:

I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly--Tom's Aunt Polly, she is--and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book--which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, as I said before.7

The distinction between truth and lies is indiscernible and adds much credence to the tremendous power of social fictions and their ability to "create" a person's identity.

Another charge of racism against the novel is based on Twain's use of the word "nigger." The word becomes a tautology as Twain uses "nigger" to undermine itself and gives the reader a sense of the racist indoctrination. In "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," D. Smith
contends that the conception of the "nigger" is a socially constituted and sanctioned fiction, and, as Aunt Sally confirms, "A 'nigger' is not a person." Huck's experiences with Jim on the raft indicate that Jim is not the "nigger" that he has been labelled as being. The real "niggers," if I may use such an offensive label, are the King, the Duke, Pap Finn, Tom Sawyer, and some of the other characters who behave offensively. In Chapter 31, Twain illustrates the power of the word "nigger" and depicts Huck's play on its meaning. The King and the Duke sold Jim and Huck is trying to save him. Huck refers to Jim as the only thing of value that he has and uses the word "nigger" repeatedly:

... and they've took my nigger, which is the only nigger I've got in the world, and now I'm in a strange country, and ain't got no property no more, nor nothing, and no way to make my living. ... 'why, he was my nigger' and that was my money. Where is he?--I want my nigger."

Huck's repetition of "nigger" borders on the ridiculous, and he presents himself as a "child throwing a tantrum." Ironically, we see the worth of the Black man and the implication that the White Southerner is worth very little without him. A "nigger" is a thing, a commodity that one is privileged to possess. Although he is subhuman and unworthy of manhood, he is at the same time quite valuable. In *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* written eight years after *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain clearly suggests that "nigger"
has no reference to color and is a fiction of custom and law. "Nigger" is a disembodied term that refers to the lowest of the low. In *Faulkner's Negro*, Thadious Davis aptly suggests:

... yesterday's racial designations may elicit painful memories in today's world, yet they represent a reality which, though wanting, existed in incontrovertible fact.10

In response to a twentieth century censor who edited "nigger" from *Huckleberry Finn* and replaced it with "Black," another of Davis's comments applies:

Bringing contemporary knowledge and awareness to bear on historical situations ... can provoke fresh insights regarding both that past and our present; however, modifying the conditions or updating not just the terminology but the informing conceptions of the past can distort its meaning and substance for the present day.11

The recurrent use of "nigger" is an integral part of the success of Twain's anti-racism theme in *Huckleberry Finn*. The repetitive use of the term signals society's injustice to Blacks and compels the reader to examine his own morality.

Twain juxtaposes appearance and reality in *Huckleberry Finn* which is a technique that is especially noteworthy in the works of Stephen Crane. In *Huck Finn*'s world, Twain suggests that one should not trust appearances. He uses a great deal of disguise (*Huck's dressing up like a girl, Jim's disguise as a sick Arab, the King and the Duke's*
numerous disguises, and others) to show that appearances are not to be trusted. Twain also shows how easily people are duped by appearance; Aunt Sally is "blind" enough to believe that Huck is her own nephew Tom. Although the appearance/reality juxtaposition is more striking in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, it is nonetheless present in *Huckleberry Finn*. In "The Ironic Mark Twain: Appearance and Reality in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," Richard Cracroft discusses the importance of the juxtaposition of appearance and reality with regards to Twain's theme of race:

The consistent tension through ironically juxtaposed appearance and reality . . . enables Twain not only to achieve his richest exploration of the race question, but also to probe the ironic gap between the real and the ideal in the American (and human) way of life. Indeed the novel (PW) recalls Bernard DeVoto's statement in the introduction to the Portable Mark Twain, that Twain's fiction is historically "the first realization in our literature of a conflict between the assumption of democracy and the limitations of democracy. Between the ideals of freedom and the nature of man."

Like *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain did not write *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, set in the 1830's, to expose slavery but to combat the attitude of White supremacy. The pleasant outward appearance of Aunt Sally is undercut by the reality of her beliefs about slavery and her racist comment about the "nigger's" inhumanity. Twain's ironic double vision enables the reader to observe and distrust mere appearance. These dualities typify the American experience and, as many
scholars have noted, characterize the fiction.

Twain was born and raised in the South. Society dictated his relationship with Blacks. As Twain speaks retrospectively about Blacks in his *Autobiography*:

All the negroes were friends of ours, and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades. I say in effect, using the phrase as a modification. We were comrades and yet not comrades; color and condition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of and which rendered complete fusion impossible.  

Just as Blacks assume their social identities at birth, so must Twain assume his. He should not, however, be stigmatized because he is a nineteenth century Southerner nor should unfair and inescapable stereotypes be assigned to him. The Southern past has emasculated Blacks and Whites alike, and studying this past through its literature is vital to understanding this period. To ban *Huckleberry Finn* from the schools would be a tremendous loss to our American past and a valuable lesson for our future.
NOTES


5Smith, 174.


8David L. Smith, "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," Mark Twain Journal 22 (Fall 1984) 2: 5.

9Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 171.


11Davis, 2.


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